Liberté, Egalité, Fraternity

by callervera

Summary

A Fraternity House AU
When faced with the choice between living in an overpriced fleabag motel and a free fraternity house, Enjolras would absolutely choose the motel. In his opinion, frats are filled with boorish, sexist, drunken idiots. Unfortunately, the rest of his friends feel differently and les Amis take over a fraternity, Alpha Beta Chi, in order to help Marius Pontmercy make it through his pledge year. Enjolras is distracted from his intense hatred of the Greek system by a certain dark-haired artist who kinda comes along with the house.

Notes

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A Group Which Barely Missed Becoming Homeless

Chapter Summary

In which Enjolras underestimates Combeferre's skill with PowerPoint, Courfeyrac coins a brilliant new word for hotel/motel, Marius Pontmercy proves himself useful, early morning painting does not agree with Grantaire and the Amis become reluctant fraternity brothers

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Enjolras always thought that the big, defining moment in his life would come when he was standing on a platform in front of a screaming crowd at a rally, or testifying in front of the Supreme Court or possibly while doing volunteer work in a third world country. He was positive that it would be a huge earth-shattering moment that would change the world and the course of history. He thought there might be poems written and murals painted about that moment, although he didn't tell anyone that part.

He never, not in a million years, thought that his life-changing moment would happen one early fall morning on the lawn of a fraternity house while Enjolras was dressed only in bright red cotton briefs, leaning over a dark haired stranger sprawled out on grass and hoping, desperately, that the stranger wasn't dead. This wasn't supposed to be a life-defining moment for him. But it was.

It was also totally Courfeyrac's fault and it started less than twenty-four hours earlier...

E

“Enjolras! I have the best idea ever!”

Courfeyrac bursts into the dingy room, nearly tearing the door off its hinges in his excitement. This level of exuberance from Courfeyrac is barely enough to warrant an upward glance from Enjolras, who lies on his stomach on one of the two drab full-sized motel beds, bright blue eyes locked to the laptop in front of him. Courfeyrac has had a lot of “best” ideas in the last couple of weeks, ranging from pitching a tent in the public park and declaring squatters rights to purchasing a used RV and living Walter White-style. Frankly, an alarming amount of Courfeyrac’s plans lately have involved various elements of Breaking Bad. Enjolras makes a mental note to keep an eye on him for signs of meth use.

Despite the enthusiasm behind all of Courfeyrac’s ideas, none have proven helpful in solving their current housing crisis.

Enjolras flicks his gaze up from the Craigslist rental ads open in his browser window and gives his friend a cursory nod. “I’m sure you do, Courf.”

“You know, this one’s actually not half bad,” Combeferre appears in the doorway with Courfeyrac, less visibly excited but his soft blue eyes are shining behind his dark, square glasses frames, a small hopeful smile forcing its way into the edges of his usually taciturn mouth. “I’d even venture to call it ‘viable.’”
This is slightly more promising, then, if Combeferre thinks that this “best idea ever” has merit. More promising, and probably less meth-y.

Enjolras sits up on the bed, pushing the tumble of blonde curls out of his eyes. God knows they need a solution to this distressing housing situation and they need one fast. Fast, like, yesterday fast. He isn’t sure how much longer he could share a cheap motel room with his two best friends, no matter how much he loves them. It’s cute how they pretend that they generously let Enjolras have one of the beds all to himself out of the goodness of their hearts, when it is obvious they are spooning the crap out of each other when they think he’s asleep. Enjolras lets them have their non-secret secret. At least they keep things discreet. If they knew that he knew they were dating (Sleeping together? Hooking up? Aggressively snuggling?) any and all attempts at decency would come to an end and Courfeyrac would probably end up jumping naked from bed to bed. Or worse.

Nude, jumping Courfeyrac might be the only thing that could make this housing situation fiasco worse than it already is, and it’s already pretty damn awful. Everything for their second year of college was supposed to be perfect. It was all planned and ready to go. Apartments in their small college town are notoriously hard to come by and in high demand, but the three of them had planned early and found a place the previous winter. Combeferre’s responsibility, Courfeyrac’s creativity and Enjolras’ power of persuasion had discovered and secured the perfect off-campus house: a snug bungalow with three bedrooms, a wrap-around porch and a roomy basement that would be perfect for hosting les Amis meetings.

Unfortunately, it had also included an enormous crack in the foundation, discovered by a random city inspector just a week before classes were scheduled to begin.

The landlord had apologized profusely, refunded their first-and-last month’s rent and security deposit and, after a steely glare from Enjolras that made the frown-line between his eyebrows reach to new depths of stern, agreed to put them up for a month in the only available housing in town- the Thenardier Hotel Suites and Motor Lodge, a hotel-motel just off the interstate. 

(“I don’t understand how something can something be a hotel and a motel at the same time?” Enjolras had griped when they’d checked in.

“I think it has something to do with layout and amenities?” Combeferre offered.

“But those are different! A hotel and a motel are two totally different things.” Enjolras needed to argue this.

“I’m going to call it a ‘homo-tel’,” Courfeyrac declared, swatting Combeferre on the ass.

How those two thought they were being discreet, Enjolras would never know.)

They had already been in residence at the homo-tel for two weeks and things were looking bleak.

Houses and apartments, let alone perfect houses like their little bungalow, were hard enough to find with plenty of notice, but they were virtually impossible at the last minute. The three friends had even considered a last-ditch effort to move back into on-campus housing but the dorms were all full. Joly and Bossuet had a room in Gorbeau Hall that they offered to share with Enjolras and the two C’s, but the offer had been politely declined. Dorms were barely big enough for two people as it was and it was probably against every rule in the book to let three friends permanently crash on your floor. Also, Gorbeau Hall smelled like feet.

Courfeyrac’s meth-RV is slowly turning into a much more real possibility.
And that’s troubling.

Courfeyrac bounds onto bed next to Enjolras, jostling his Macbook and mussing the hideous rust and gold floral print bedspread.

“Say goodbye to this lovely comforter from the seventies, oh captain, my captain,” Courfeyrac orders as he nuzzles his face into the rough blanket covering the lumpy mattress, “And bid farewell to these sand-paper sheets, because we are movin’ on up.”

“Courfeyrac, don’t stick your face into that bedding,” Enjolras swats his friend’s dark brown curls, “you don’t know where that’s been.”

Courf lifts his head and shoot Enjolras a lopsided grin. “Actually, this is your bed so… I do know where it’s been. It’s been nowhere. Done nothing. It has merely been used as a vehicle to Sleepytown. ‘No-Sex-Ville, population: You.’”

It was true. Enjolras has not engaged in any sex, makeouts or even aggressive snuggling on his motel bed. But this was common practice for him. It wasn’t that he didn’t care about sex, it was just that he… didn’t really care about sex. It was hard for him to find a person interesting enough to warrant that amount of prolonged contact, either emotional or physical. He wasn’t a nun or a virgin by any means, but the sex dots on his personal timeline were few and far between. And he certainly hadn’t been responsible for dirtying the bedspread into which Courfeyrac was currently burrowing his face.

“Before that, Courf. You don’t seriously think they sanitize these things between “guests,” do you? And I’m using the word “guests” as loosely as possible in this situation.”

Courfeyrac sits bolt upright. “Seriously? Ew, no. That can’t be allowed, can it? Aren’t there cleanliness rules and regulations that apply to the ho-motel industry?”

Combeferre ambles inside the room and shuts the door behind him, the loss of light making the bedding look even more suspicious. “I doubt the Thenardier Hotel Suites and Motor Lodge pays much attention to health code. Why do you think Joly keeps threatening to come over here with a blacklight?”

“Why?” Courfeyrac’s eyes go round with horror. “I thought it was because he wanted to put up a sweet blacklight poster. Why, Combeferre, why?!”

Combeferre just smiles grimly and pushes his glasses up his nose, shaking his head. “I’ll explain it when we’re out of here. And when we’ve taken the longest shower the world has ever seen. But not together--” he looks pointedly away from Courfeyrac “—because that would weird. Anyway…”

Enjolras sighs. They don’t notice.

Combeferre pulls his laptop out of his messenger bag and pops it open. “That brings us to the brilliant plan, Enjolras. Bear in mind the conversation we just had, like thirty seconds ago, about the squalor of our present living conditions before you say no.”

Enjolras sits up and perches on the edge of the bed, visions of bed bugs (and worse) playing havoc with his imagination. “I want to get out of here as much as you do. Why do you just assume I’m going to immediately say no?”

“You tend to argue on the side of the negative,” Combeferre mutters, opening up a PowerPoint file.
“Because you’re a naysayer, E.” Courfeyrac adds, “A sayer of nay. ‘No’ should be your middle name. Or maybe ‘Courfeyrac Stop It.’ That could also be your middle name. You could have two middle names?”

“Just listen to the whole idea, okay?” Combeferre pleads.

Enjolras nods his head. “Seriously, I’m open to suggestions. As long as this new idea has more merit than a meth-RV—“

Courfeyrac brightens and Combeferre shushes him with a soft hand on his shoulders.

“—I will give it my full consideration and open mind.”

“We found a frat house!” Courfeyrac bursts.

Enjolras’ reaction is immediate and visceral. “No.”

It takes the full strength of both Courfeyrac and Combeferre to keep Enjolras from bolting out the door, and Combeferre some how manages to place a one-handed 911 text to Bahorel during the fray. The large man comes dashing in the door mere moments later with Jehan, Bossuet, Joly (and his aforementioned blacklight) in tow. Bahorel pounces on Enjolras and pins him to the bed, relieving Combeferre and Courfeyrac, who were starting to lose their two-against-one struggle. Their combined strength was nothing compared to Enjolras’ hatred of the Greek system.

“You had reinforcements waiting in the parking lot?!” Enjolras glares at Combeferre and Courfeyrac, his angry face reaching near that of an enraged puma.

They shrug and Combeferre confesses, “We thought you might be… difficult.”

“And we were right, as usual.” Courfeyrac adds. “But you really need to listen, just listen, to this idea, Enjolras. It’s not as bad as you might think.”

“Absolutely not.” Enjolras is adamant. “We are not joining a group of sexist, boorish, imbecilic—“

Combeferre nods toward Jehan, who has already begun unwinding the pretty pastel, knit infinity scarf from around his lithe neck.

“Please don’t tear this, Enjolras,” Jehan asks softly as he jams the scarf into Enjolras’ mouth. “I just finished it yesterday and I’m really quite fond of it.”

Enjolras has effectively been pinned and silenced. For a moment he considers closing his eyes just to spite his attackers, but that seems to be too much in the vein of a petulant toddler and he would like to maintain a shred of dignity at the end of this ordeal. He shrugs his shoulders in reluctant acquiescence and changes the setting of his frown from “angry glare” to “pout.”

Courfeyrac begins speaking as Combeferre fires up the PowerPoint presentation. The rest of the Amis settle against walls and on various pieces of furniture, except for Joly, who stands in the middle of the room trying to touch as little of it as possible.

“We wouldn’t be joining the frat, Enjolras. We would be the frat.”

Enjolras raises one eyebrow as the Greek letters A B X appear on the laptop screen.

“The entire membership of Alpha Beta Chi was kicked off campus last week and expelled from the university after an incident involving a handle of Everclear…”
A photo of a liquor bottle pops up on the screen, soon to be joined by—

“… A couple of goats, their entire freshmen pledge class dressed in nothing but women’s lingerie and then…”

The entire PowerPoint slide is suddenly engulfed by digital flames.

“And then they managed to catch part of their house on fire.”

Enjolras’ eyes widen in horror.

Combeferre quickly flips to the next slide, which shows a large, ivy-covered brick mansion with an expansive front porch and rows of wide windows… only two of which are blown out and show obvious fire-damage.

“The house isn’t hurt too badly,” he says, “and they estimate that they can have a repair crew out before the end of the week to replace those windows and one internal wall.”

Enjolras furrows his brows as if to ask, *Why are they repairing it at all if no one is left to live there?*

“You may be wondering why they would be bothering to repair it all if there are no fraternity brothers to live there?” Combeferre is either a mind-reader or a really good best friend. “Bossuet? If you will?”

Bossuet pipes up for the first time, cringing at the idea of incurring Enjolras’ muzzled wrath. “Um, that’s where I come in. Do you remember Marius Pontmercy? He’s that freshmen from my Criminal Law class that I brought to the meeting at the Musain last week?”

*Pontmercy?* Enjolras shrugs. It usually takes him more than one meeting to remember the names of newcomers. Combeferre helpfully flips to the next slide and a freckly-faced boy with messy ginger hair fills the screen, his green eyes a bit wide in surprise at having his picture snapped.

Oh, Pontmercy. He was a bit… Enjolras squishes his face around the scarf-gag and Courfeyrac finishes his thought for him this time--

“Awkward. Yeah, he’s a kind of an awkward turtle. But he’s also a lucky little shit who had the good fortune of being the only ABX pledge to be absent from the house that night. He was out of town visiting his sick grandfather, so he escaped with both his dignity and student-enrollment status intact. Pontmercy is now the only remaining member of Alpha Beta Chi, and is still technically a pledge.”

Combeferre speeds through the remaining slides, as it is obvious that Enjolras has stopped struggling and started listening (and is maybe getting uncomfortable with Bahorel sitting on him). The next slides are simply a picture of an elderly gentleman, a couple internal photos of the house, and, finally, three large dollar signs. The meaning of those becomes clear as Bossuet explains.

“Pontmercy told me that his grandfather is an alumnus of ABX and is determined that Marius’ spend his college years as part of the same fraternity. He just needs some willing young college men to join as members and to help his grandson through his pledge year.

“That’s us!” Courfeyrac crowls. “And I’m pretty sure that ‘put him through his pledge year’ just means we hit him on the ass with a wooden paddle, like in the movies.” He sighs happily. “This is probably going to be the best year ever.”
“Mr. Gillenormand is going to completely finance the repairs to the house,” Combeferre continues, putting the icing on the cake. “Pull some strings to get us all membership in the fraternity immediately and--this is the best part—he is willing to pay for all the expenses of this year. That means we get a place to live. Rent free. For the entire school year.”

“A mansion, E! A free fucking mansion, dude.” Courfeyrac jumps in.

And suddenly all of Enjolras’ friends are throwing their two cents in.

“They’ve got a pool. And a hot tub.” There’s Bossuet.

“A gym in the basement.” Bahorel adds his agreement, finally freeing Enjolras and sitting back cross-legged on the bed.

“The house is really clean,” Joly is in. “Once you replace the burned out wall, I mean.”

Enjolras looks to Jehan, his last bastion of sanity in this crazy mess. The little poet sighs, shakes his head and removes the scarf from Enjolras’ mouth, running his slender fingers through his friend’s golden curls. “It’ll be okay, love. We wouldn’t let a house turn us into something we’re not,” he says, trying to kiss the furrows off of Enjolras’ brow. “Also, they have a room that is in a tower, an honest-to-god-fairy-tale-tower. And I call dibs on that one.”

They all fall silent and stare expectantly at Enjolras, who has full use of his vocal facilities again and is biting his lip, obviously trying to come up with a counter-argument.

“Guys,” he begs. “We’re not desperate.”

“We are, though,” Combeferre moves in for the kill, “It is literally this or start shopping for RVs.”

“RVs, bitch!” Courfeyrac adds, simply because he is unable to go that long without hearing is own voice.

Enjolras isn’t done yet. He still has some straws at which to grasp. “What about here? I mean, it isn’t the nicest place, but it’s not expensive. And we wouldn’t be selling our souls to the doucebaggerie in exchange for a fancy mansion. You guys—“ he gestures to Bahorel, Joly and Bossuet—“can stay in your dorms this semester and we’ll stick it out here. Stay in this hotel-motel...”

“Homo-tel.”

“Courf, stop.”

“Sorry.”

“... as I was saying, we can hunker down in this um, rustic and authentic hotel-motel until we find something else. I’m positive that a viable option will come on the market by the spring semester. Positive thinking is key here--”

“Enjolras, I didn’t want to have to resort to this, but you’ve forced my hand.” Joly steps forward, his portable blacklight in his hand. “Bahorel, if you will kindly shut off the lights?”

Bahorel does and the room is plunged into darkness. Joly clicks on the blacklight and the room is illuminated by eerily glowing white patches; some are large, some are small, but they cover most of the surfaces of the small room. The entire collected company lets out a small gag.
“I really hope most of that is blood,” Courfeyrac whispers as Bahorel quickly switches back on the lights.

They all turn to Enjolras for the final word and he finally nods his head.

“Well, gentlemen, I suppose we are now… frat boys.”

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Once Enjolras has made up his mind about something, he is an unstoppable force of nature. Now that he’s agreed to become a resident of the ABX house, he is determined to take the initial plunge as quickly as humanly possible.

“Well I guess technically you can be in there tonight, if you really wanted to,” Combeferre tells him, over the excited chatter of their friends who are still packed into the motel room. Courfeyrac has broken out a case of warm Pabst Blue Ribbon that he’d had stashed under his bed and everyone is loudly toasting to their new home. “We were all thinking of heading over tomorrow or the following night after, you know, the repairs are done.”

Enjolras shakes his head. “I can handle a little bit of construction noise, ‘Ferre. I’m ready to get the hell out of this place. And I’m sure you and Courf wouldn’t mind a night or two alone.”

Combeferre chokes on his PBR. “What? Wha-why? No. Whatareyoutalkingabout?”

Oops. Enjolras tries to cover up his error. Today has been fraught enough without forcing his two best friends to out their budding relationship. “Nothing. Just that, you know, you guys will be glad to be free of me in the room. I know I’m not the easiest person to live with.”

“You can say that again,” Courfeyrac joins them, popping open another beer. “You are the worst. Just ask Squeak Pig.”

“No!” Enjolras objects, “the Squeak Pig thing was not one hundred percent my fault.”

“Fair enough. It was just ninety-nine point nine nine percent your fault.”

Squeak Pig had been Enjolras’ roommate in the dorms the previous year. He hadn’t lasted long enough for anyone to remember his actual name, so Courfeyrac had dubbed him “Squeak Pig” based on his resemblance to a guinea pig combined with the frightened noise that he’d made every time Enjolras had spoken to him. After only three days, twelve hours and nineteen minutes of sharing a room with Enjolras, Squeak Pig had moved out, filing a complaint with the housing office citing a “hostile living situation” and that Enjolras was “terrible.”

“What can I say?” Enjolras had countered, when informed of Squeak Pig’s complaint, “he was a Republican.”

That was all he would say about it. No one was ever positive about what went down between him and Squeak Pig during those three and a half days, but Enjolras was never assigned another roommate and lived out his freshman year alone and comfortable in a double room. He called that one a win.

“Anyway,” Enjolras continues defending himself, “Squeak Pig and I were total opposites. I can’t live with my total opposite.”

“No, E, no no.” Combeferre says, “He wasn’t your opposite. He was just a lot, lot, lot weaker and stupider than you. Your opposite will actually be able to stand up to you. He’ll be like the yin
““The Mercutio to your Tybalt,” Courfeyrac, the ever helpful theater major, jumps in, “the Galinda to your Elphaba, the Winter Soldier to your Captain America…”

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“When you actually meet the opposite of you, E,” Combeferre continues, “you’ll know it. It’ll be big. The walls will probably come crumbling down or something.”

“When you actually meet the opposite of you, E,” Combeferre continues, “you’ll know it. It’ll be big. The walls will probably come crumbling down or something.”

Enjolras shakes his head at this. “Nothing’s going to come crumbling down, you guys. Don’t be ridiculous.”

Courfeyrac drains his second beer, “It’d better not, dude. Especially if it happens here. Who knows what crap we’d find behind these old walls. There is definitely a body or two in there. Maybe a stash of meth—oooh…”

Combeferre smacks the back of his head. “No,” and then continues his train of thought to Enjolras, “Well, at least you won’t have to deal with roommate stuff at the frat, E. The president gets his own suite.”

Enjolras stares at him.

“Um, ‘Ferre? I’m not going to be president.”

“What?” It’s Courfeyrac who answers, yelping like a puppy that just got his tail stepped on. The whole room falls silent and all eyes are on Enjolras.

“Guys. I’m not going to be the president of a fraternity.”

Everyone looks confused.


“Well, not this time, Jehan. I’m going to live there, I’m going to be grateful for the free roof over my head, but I refuse, refuse, to take any sort of active role in this thing. And I’m sure as hell not going to be in charge of it. If you guys want to do frat-y things, you are more than welcome to, but count me out.”

Voices of dissent press in on Enjolras from all sides and he waves them off. “I’m not the fraternity president type. You guys need a beer-drinking, gym-going, ironic t-shirt wearing, over-enthusiastic ___”

Enjolras’ eyes fall on Courfeyrac, who’s head is tilted back as he polishes off his third can of shitty beer. Courf’s tone biceps and chest are displayed under his tight baby-blue t-shirt, which features a large graphic of a bear-dear combination and the word “BEER.” Courfeyrac, who was the most excited of them all about the pool and the beer pong and the kegerator.

The man in question finishes his beer and looks up, suddenly aware that every eye on the room. “What?”

“Future gentleman of Alpha Beta Chi, I nominate Mssr. Courfeyrac as the only viable candidate for your president!” Enjolras begins a slow clap as he backs toward the door, snatching his car keys, messenger bag and wallet from the table on his way out. He winks at Courfeyrac, “Have fun, Mr. President.”
Enjolras is out the door and gone, everyone staring after him.

“I don’t accept your nomination, E!” Courfeyrac shouts, hurling his empty beer through the door through which Enjolras just left. The beer can clatters on the cement floor of the hallway. “I do not accept!”

But Enjolras is long gone.

“Fuck,” Courfeyrac mutters and grabs another PBR.

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Enjolras is standing on the porch of the ABX mansion just two short hours later, his laptop bag over one shoulder and a couple of large department store bags resting near the polished toes of his black leather combat boots. The messenger bag contains his laptop and a change of clothes from the motel and the department store bags are full of new bed linens that were purchased on the way to the house. A quick text message to the “house brother,” Feuilly, had clarified the size of the beds in the house and Enjolras had bought the requisite sheets, dark grey with red pinstripes, and a red comforter.

Dusk is falling around him, but the street is alive with the joyous shouts of guys from the neighboring houses gearing up for their nightly rituals of drinking and yelling. The ABX house is the largest on the block and, despite the two blown-out windows, it’s also the cleanest. The lawns of the houses on either side are littered with bottles and red plastic Solo cups, cashed out kegs and grease-stained pizza boxes. Their neighbors across the street, the Psi Mu fraternity, have a large ping-pong table overturned on their lawn. The net is ripped and lies alongside the table like a fallen flag.

Enjolras thinks that the relative neatness of ABX has something to do with the absence of its most recent residents. Someone has cleaned up after the evicted brothers and, without the presence of frat boys to toss beer cans and generate debris, the house has stayed fairly neat. He wonders how long it will take Courfeyrac to properly dirty the lawn.

His phone buzzes in his pocket. It’s Combeferre.

From Combeferre: Please take President’s room?

It buzzes again.

From Courfeyrac: Plz b prez? Don’t be a 8===>

Enjolras quickly taps out a reply to both of them.

To Combeferre and Courfeyrac: NO.

He takes a deep breath and presses the buzzer. Heavy footsteps grow closer and the door is yanked open by a large guy in a snug fitting blue tank top. Both the shirt and the man are splattered with white flecks of paint. Even his wiry auburn curls, held back in a short, messy ponytail have flecks of white. This must be Feuilly.

Before he knows what hit him, Enjolras is pulled into a big bearlike hug.

“Hey, man! Welcome!” Feuilly’s wide grin is infectious and Enjolras can’t help but return it.

Enjolras isn’t sure what he was expecting in a “house brother,” but it certainly wasn’t this burly,
red-haired dude, dressed like a combination of a yoga instructor and construction worker in his skinny denim shorts and steel toed boots. Upon closer inspection his tank top says “Spiritual Gangster” and he has a strand of jade Mala beads wrapped around one wrist and some sort of black elastic wrist support on the other. A brown leather tool belt rides low on his hips, laden with hammers, screwdrivers and tools Enjolras couldn’t even begin to name.

Feuilly’s face is freckled, the ginger’s version of a tan, but it is young and unlined. He can’t be much older than Enjolras and his friends. “How exactly did you end up being a ‘house brother?’” Enjolras asks him as Feuilly grabs the department store bag and starts to lead Enjolras inside.

Feuilly starts giving Enjolras the grand tour of the house along with an abridged version of his story.

“I started the graduate program in the Art Department last year,” Feuilly tells Enjolras as he shows off the front room, which has hard wood floors, a large fireplace and several over-sized sofa. An enormous flat screen TV dominates one wall and it is connected to what appears to be every video game system currently on the market. The cabinet under the TV is stuffed with consoles, boxes of games, controllers and remote controls. “And I realized that I needed a job and a place to live. Preferably a job that paid well and a place where rent was cheap. I answered this ad in the college paper. It paid decently and covered my room and board… all I had to do was babysit a bunch of fraternity boys and keep the house from burning down.

The wall opposite the television is a wreck of scorched drywall and exposed, charred wooden beams.

“How’d that work for you?” Enjolras asks, raising one eyebrow.

Feuilly shrugs and grins. “Not so well, as you can see. Actually, I was driving Pontmercy up to see his grandfather in the hospital on the night of the, um, ‘incident.’ Marius swore up and down to his grandfather and the alumni board that I had nothing to do with the whole thing, so I was off the hook and got to keep my job. Luckily.”

Enjolras lightly runs his hand along part of the burnt wall as they walk past and a chunk of drywall clatters to the floor.

“Ugh, sorry about that,” Feuilly says, “I’ve got a friend coming over tomorrow morning to help me pull down the drywall and patch this up. He’s also gonna touch up the paint on a couple of the window frames outside. Let us know if we’re making too much noise, ok?”

Enjolras assures him it will be fine. After the constant noise of the highway outside their room at the Thenardier Hotel Suites and Motor Lodge (Homo-tel! his inner Courfeyrac pipes up), he doubts he can be bothered by the sounds of minor construction.

They continue through the gleaming kitchen filled with appliances that Enjolras doesn’t ever anticipate touching, lest there be another fire in this house. He is a terrible cook. At least there is a fairly straightforward looking coffee machine.

Feuilly continues, “He’s a good kid, Pontmercy. I always felt kinda bad that he was pledging himself to a house full of asshole douchebags. Sounds like you guys will be cooler. Pontmercy had great things to say about all of you.”

That’s interesting. Enjolras didn’t think that Marius Pontmercy had thought much of the les Amis during his one or two visits to their meetings at the Musain. The kid’s freckly little face always wore an expression of vague confusion and minor terror whenever Enjolras looked at him.
Feuilly led the way up an ornate stone staircase. “This goes to the second floor and then goes up higher to the tower room. Looks like one of your guys already claimed it.”

Sure enough, a pink sheet of paper is pinned on the door at the end of the staircase above them and Enjolras can make out Jehan’s looping penmanship: This room is property of Jean “Jehan” Prouvaire. Woe be to the brigand who dares challenge this claim - J.

Enjolras smiles, “Yep. Jehan is exactly the kind of guy who wants to live in a tower. He’s a bit on the romantic side. Have you met him?”

Feuilly nods his head and a wisp of reddish brown hair comes free of his ponytail and rests along his forehead. “Yeah, they all came by yesterday on something your friend Combeferre called a ‘reconnaissance mission.’ Took a bunch of pictures, talked about game plans. Seemed like a good group of guys.”

“They are,” Enjolras may still be a bit pissed at his friends for ganging up on him about this fraternity thing, but he can’t deny their general awesomeness.

“Anyway,” Feuilly leads him down the hallway on the second floor. The rooms they pass are all comfortably furnished in rich dark wood and soft upholstery. “Most of the rooms on this floor are suites, which means that there are two bedrooms in each attached by a common area.”

They are at another staircase, a carpeted one this time, at the back of the house. “But you don’t need to worry about sharing, your room is up there on the third floor. President gets his own suite on his own floor. It’s pretty rad.”

Enjolras bites his lip. He really doesn’t want to be rude to Feuilly but there is no way he is accepting that room. “I’m sorry, but… I’m not the president.”

Feuilly’s brow furrows slightly. “Aren’t you Enjolras? The guys told me specifically that you were supposed to take the president’s room. And frankly, you seem pretty authoritative, bro.”

“No, please. There was a misunderstanding. I’m not actually going to be president.”

Feuilly just stares at him, frowning slightly.

“I’ll take any other room that you have,” This is as close as Enjolras gets to begging, "Anything. Uh, preferably a single?”

Feuilly shrugs and continues past the staircase to door at the very end of the hallway. They must be at the far back corner of the house by now. “We’ve got this one. It’s small, no common room, but it’s pretty private. And it’s a single.”

He pushes the door open. The room is indeed small, but it has everything Enjolras needs. A bed, a desk and two wide windows, one overlooking the side lawn of the house while the other had a view of the pool and hot tub in the back yard. “It’s perfect,” Enjolras smiles as he tosses his bag on the bed. “I’ll take it.”

That evening, Enjolras reads late into the night and doesn’t worry about his lamp keeping anyone awake. He leaves both the curtains and the windows wide open, enjoying the moonlight and the cool fall breeze. The sounds of the neighboring houses parties are diluted into a dull white noise by the time they reach his window. Enjolras smiles as he snuggles down into his pillow, reveling in the privacy of it all. Maybe this isn’t going to be so bad, he thinks as he drifts off to sleep.

###
Grantaire is at a fraternity house at 7 o’clock in the morning and he is hungover as balls.

None of these things are pleasing to him. Grantaire dislikes hangovers, he hates early mornings and he straight up loathes fraternity boys. But Feuilly is a good friend from the Art Department who promised him that he’d make this painting job worth his while. Apparently, some elderly guy was willing to throw money at a quick repair job and Grantaire is more than happy to catch any of that cash that comes his way.

Asking an artist like Grantaire to touch up paint on a couple of window frames was like asking a brain surgeon to put a Band-Aid on a skinned knee, but whatever. A job was a job and this gig would pay enough to get him back on his feet and off Eponine’s couch. He really should have planned better for his final year (well, hopefully final) of school, but planning ahead has never been Grantaire’s strong suit. He is broker than usual and is alternating between living in his truck and crashing in on the musty futon in Eponine’s studio.

Truth be told, Eponine probably would let him stay with her indefinitely, but a one-room studio where the bathtub is in the kitchen isn’t the most comfortable of living situations for two friends. And Eponine had recently started mooning over some guy she’d met in the library. Marius Something, who always carried stacks of books and has nice hair and uses big words and smells like a combination of leather and fresh cut grass and likes opera and… eventually Grantaire just tuned her out. While all of these qualities had made ‘Ponine fall instantly in love with the kid, the second hand reporting of them simply made Grantaire want to smack him. Luckily for Marius Something’s face, Grantaire thought it was highly unlikely that the two of them would ever cross paths. Art students and pre-law aristocrats didn’t move in the same circles at this school.

He grunts as he pulls the large aluminum ladder off the racks on top of his beat-up green pickup truck. The early morning sunlight is already hitting the east side of the house, so he figures he’ll start there. There is good light and the paint would dry quickly enough in the sun for him to put on the second coat in an hour or so.

There is one window that is already in full light at the back of the house. Might as well make that his starting point. Grantaire pulls the ladder in that direction, sliding his knock-off Ray-Bans down off of his nest of unruly black curls. He needs to block his bright green, slightly bloodshot eyes from the early morning sunlight. It is way too bright for a day that is going to be filled with frat boys.

His room is blissfully quiet. It takes Enjolras a moment to break through his sleepy haze and remember where he is. In the calm of the morning, the frat house isn’t so bad. The house is still at this hour, a shaft of sunlight from the uncovered window is falling gently across his bed and there are no best friends spooning in a bed across the room.

Maybe living in a fraternity house isn’t going to be as bad as he thought. 

He stretches on his new sheets, reveling in their sun-drenched warmth and softness against his bare skin. So nice to be able to sleep in just his underwear again. Fuck, it actually is really nice. Really, really nice. Enjolras feels a stirring in his groin and, for the first time in weeks, he doesn’t feel the urgent need to repress it.
Screw it, he’s alone in his own room, he might as well revel in it for the time being. He runs his hand along the cotton of his red briefs and feels himself get harder. *Fuck.* It really has been a long time. Enjolras slides his hand under the waist band, wraps his fist around his cock and let out another shuddering groan. A groan that drowns out the sound of an aluminum ladder scrapping up against his windowsill.

**R**

Grantaire is frozen at the top of a ladder, a paint can in one hand and brush clutched in the other and he *cannot move.* If he moves, the vision inside the room might disappear forever and Grantaire wants to keep seeing it as long as he possibly can. He calls it a vision, but it might be an illusion, or possibly a hallucination. Whatever it is, it is a figment of his imagination because there is no way that the golden-haired, gorgeous young man sprawled out on the bed inside the room can be an actual human being that exists.

He absolutely cannot be real because A. there aren’t supposed to be any frat guys living in the house right now and B. the guy in the room is too beautiful to be living, breathing thing. There is no way a mortal human being looks like that, a perfect combination of marble-white skin and golden, luminous curls tumbling forward onto a sculpted, aristocratic face. Long, perfectly toned limbs that tangled up in the dark grey sheets as the guy’s back arches, his head tosses back and his mouth drops open slightly. Grantaire really needs to stop looking, stop being creepy and get the fuck out of that window but he can’t. He’s frozen.

Grantaire mentally backtracks over the previous night to try and remember if he did any drugs that would result in hallucinations but comes up with nothing. No drugs, just drinking. Lots and lots of drinking.

The golden god on the bed moans and Grantaire unfreezes enough to push his sunglasses off his eyes. It doesn’t help. The god is still in there, but now the colors of his skin, hair and (oh shit) bright red underwear are more vivid without the dilution of the sunglass lens.

Another moan and the guy on the bed bucks his hips. Grantaire bites down hard on his bottom lip and freezes again. He’s so fucked.

**E**

A drop of sweat traces its way down Enjolras’ face as he writhes on his bed. He lets out a throaty moan and enjoys his freedom to be as loud as he fucking wants. No Courfeyrac or Combeferre in this room, not another person on this entire floor. He lets out another moan, louder this time, and begins to stroke himself faster. A warm knot begins to gather in low inside of him, and he encourages it with faster, rougher strokes. Finally, he throws his head back and, with a long, ragged cry, he spends all over his fist.

God, it’s been so long since he was touched by anyone, himself included. His orgasm takes several shaking moments to peak and then subsides as Enjolras shudders down from his self-induced high.

With a small grin, he relaxes back onto the mattress and lets out a sigh of contentment… which is echoed by a slightly more guttural gasp from somewhere across the room.

It takes him a moment to realize he didn’t make the second sound.
Enjolras stiffens. Where the hell did that sigh come from? He forces himself to open his eyes and turn his head toward the window. There is a face there. Pale skin, black curls and a pair of wide green eyes meeting Enjolras’ bright blue ones.

R

Oh, shit. Grantaire knew he should have gotten the hell out of there the second he realized that room was occupied. But he didn’t, he couldn’t have, and now he’s been totally busted watching the most beautiful man on the face of the planet jerk himself off. Also, that beautiful man just so happens to be a fraternity guy, and Grantaire is well aware that they don’t take kindly to other dudes watching them do naked, sexy things. This is going to end badly, possibly with violent things happening to Grantaire’s face and he needs to get out of here. Now.

He takes a step back to make a quick escape, forgetting that he is perched on the top of a ladder, two stories up.

E

Enjolras sees the face in the window and then it’s not there anymore. It’s just… gone.

He hears a thud and a cry from outside the window and realizes exactly what just happened. Feuilly’s house painter friend. Window. Ladder. Really high up. Possibly dead. Oh, shit.

The Eagle Scout inside of Enjolras takes over and he leaps out of bed, taking the briefest of moments to use his brand new sheets to wipe the come off of his stomach, and then he dashes out of the room and bounds down the stairs, skipping as many steps as he safely can in his haste to get to the front lawn. He pauses briefly in the kitchen, forgetting the route to the front door. The burned wall is a clue and Enjolras heads that way, the crumbled drywall chunks digging into his bare feet.

In no time at all, Enjolras is out the front door and on the lawn, his eyes protesting the change from the dim house to the dazzling front lawn. He shades his eyes with his hand and looks around. No one is out here.

Side yard. His room over looks the side yard. Enjolras skids around the corner of the house and almost faints with relief to see that the dark-haired guy is struggling to pull himself into a sitting position. Thank god he’s not dead, is all Enjolras can think at first, but then realizes that the other man shouldn’t be moving at all. He could have hurt his back in the fall. Enjolras knows precisely how to deal with potential spinal injuries and he has the First Aid certification card in his wallet to prove it.

“You shouldn’t move,” he informs the man on the ground as he kneels alongside him, “you fell and you could have injured your back—“

Enjolras reaches a hand out to the man’s shoulders to urge him to lay back and the man snaps away, both hands up in a defensive position. His left arm is a collage of colorful tattoos-- whirls and words that fit together to create a work of art out of his pale skin. The arm is an exquisite mural of skin and ink, but the wrist at the end of it is bent at a strange angle and is already beginning to swell.
A grimace of pain flickers across the man’s face as he looks at Enjolras warily.

“Look, man, if you want to kick my ass for what happened up there, I totally understand. But you might want to take a rain check on that; I think your lawn already did the job for you.”

He contorts a bit toward his left side and his right arm, bare of tattoos except for a set of words on the inside of his forearm, reaches gingerly across his torso and feels the left side of his ribcage. He exhales sharply.

“Fuck. I think I might have cracked some ribs. If you want, you can take credit for these injuries. In lieu of actually kicking my ass, I mean,” he grins over at Enjolras and the brilliance of the off-kilter smile takes the blond by surprise.

In an absolutely unexpected moment, Enjolras finds himself without words, simply taking in the darker man’s wide mouth. His straight teeth. Slightly crooked nose, as if it had been broken at some point. Big, green eyes framed by dark lashes. Light purple circles under those eyes. Dark curls falling onto this pale forehead, framing the sides of his rugged cheekbones. Black stubble covering a sharp jawline. Wiry muscles lining his neck, which connect with well-defined—

Enjolras is just staring. He has no idea what the dark-haired man has said to him, or if he’s said anything at all. Enjolras has been too busy inventorying the man’s features. Those wide green eyes stare expectantly at him, as if waiting for an answer to a question Enjolras hasn’t heard.

He says the only thing that came to mind in that moment.

“My name is Enjolras,” he announces in the most authoritative voice he can muster. “And I know First Aid.”

Enjolras sticks out his right hand stiffly, as if this awkward introduction requires the formality of a proper handshake.

The other man starts to laugh, and then stops abruptly with a pained wince. “I’m sorry,” he tells Enjolras as he keeps his right hand wrapped firmly around his left ribcage. “I’d shake your hand but I’m pretty sure my ribs will fall apart if I let them go. Also…” he pauses for just a moment and then presses on, “I, um, I saw where that hand was about sixty seconds ago.”

Fuck. Enjolras pulls his right hand back and tries to stick it in his pocket, except he doesn’t have any pockets. He becomes very aware that he is standing in the side yard, in full view of the entire neighborhood dressed in nothing but bright red cotton briefs, with a head full of bed curls and a hand that undoubtedly smells like his own dick.

He was wrong earlier. Living in a fraternity house is definitely worse than he thought it would be.

The blond god (Enjolras, Grantaire thinks, Perfection has a name and it is Enjolras) looks down at Grantaire with an expression that is either horror or disgust. Or, based on the events of the preceding couple of minutes, the look could be a combination of both.

Grantaire has no idea what to say. He probably shouldn’t have made a crack about the guy’s hand and where it had just been, but he’d never really had a functioning brain-to-mouth filter. Sometimes things just came out and sometimes those things caused him to get punched.
Enjolras doesn’t punch him, though. He just starts to slowly back away, never taking his eyes off of Grantaire. Finally he speaks. “Um, the next step in First Aid is to call for help, so. I’m going to go inside and call for an ambulance. I’ll be right back, okay?”

No. No, that is so not okay with Grantaire. First of all, he doesn’t want Enjolras to leave his sight. Grantaire wants to look at Enjolras every second as long as they both shall live but, on top of that, he definitely doesn’t want an ambulance to be called. Ambulance rides require either money or health insurance, neither of which Grantaire has.

“Wait!” he calls after Enjolras’ retreating figure (Oh my god, that ass in those underwear) but he disappears around the corner.

With a pained grunt, Grantaire hoists himself off the damp lawn and begins to limp after Enjolras as quickly as his stabbing ribcage will allow.

“Wait up!” Grantaire catches up to Enjolras in the front room of the house, where the latter has stopped to search for the landline that must be installed in the house. “Hey, please don’t.”

“Don’t what?” Enjolras asks.

“Don’t call the ambulance.”

“But you’re hurt. Ribs, wrist, who knows what else? You need to see a doctor, like, right now.”

“I know,” Grantaire acquiesces, “I know. But I’ll go to the student health clinic or something. I just can’t afford an ambulance right now. Or an emergency room visit. Sorry.”

He doesn’t know why he feels the need to apologize for his lack of funds, but he does.

Enjolras just stares at him for a moment, his expression inscrutable. “Fine,” he finally says. “But you have to let me take you, okay?”

Grantaire nods. “As long as you promise to put on some pants.”

Enjolras’ stern gaze breaks into an embarrassed grin and he nervously runs his hands through his curls. “I can do that. I can totally put on some pants. But just for you.”

“I would appreciate that,” Grantaire returns the smile. “I’d hate for your nearly naked perfection to distract me from my crippling pain.”

Jesus. Did he really just say that to a golden god of a frat boy in the living room of an honest to god fraternity house? Grantaire always knew he had a death wish and this just proved it.

Enjolras does nothing but turn a light shade of pink. Grantaire likes this.

He suddenly realizes that he’s forgotten something. “I’m Grantaire, by the way. It’s nice to meet you, Enjolras.”

“Heads up!” Feuilly’s voice comes from behind them, followed by the rough crunch of a sledgehammer meeting drywall.

The wooden studs crack with a shudder and the drywall falls to the floor as the wall behind Enjolras and Grantaire comes crumbling down.
There is no "C" in the Greek alphabet, so Chi is the closest I could come up with.
The Man Recruited on the Front Lawn of a Mansion

Chapter Summary

In which Grantaire gets meds and a place to stay, whereas Enjolras is reminded that his friends are embarrassing.

E

The emergency room waiting area is unnecessarily over-air-conditioned and Enjolras pulls his red hoodie tighter around him, yanking the ends of the sleeves down over his hands. He’s dressed in yesterday’s clothes and they’re rumpled from spending the night in a haphazard pile on his floor. This isn’t Enjolras’ usual neatly pressed turnout and he knows that looks a mess—a combination of wrinkled clothes, tousled blonde hair and tired, worried eyes—slumping into the hard plastic chair. He’s also uncomfortably aware that he’s wearing the same underwear in which he’d... met Grantaire earlier that day, but frankly, when it came down to either wearing those or going commando on a trip to the emergency room, Enjolras was definitely choosing recycled briefs.

Feuilly is in the chair next to him and the wiry, auburn haired man glances down at Enjolras’ right foot, which has been nervously tapping ever since Grantaire had been ushered through the swinging doors by a brusque ER nurse.

“He’s gonna be fine, E,” Feuilly reassures him, putting a comforting hand on Enjolras’ shoulder and giving it a quick squeeze. Enjolras forces the toe of his black boot to be still.

Feuilly has been an absolute godsend this morning. After coming over to apologize for almost sending a wall crashing down on them, he’d immediately noticed Grantaire’s injuries and Enjolras’ wide-eyed panic and swiftly packed them into his old Jeep Cherokee and driven them to the hospital downtown. He waved off Grantaire’s pleas to be taken to the cheap student clinic on campus and assuaged his fears about cost by declaring it a worker’s comp injury.

“You were working as a contractor on fraternity property when you fell,” he informed Grantaire, brandishing a shiny black credit card with “Alpha Beta Chi” imprinted on it, “We’ve totally got you covered. Now, just so I get this straight in my report, what exactly happened?”

The events of that morning were still a bit of a jumble in Enjolras’ brain, so Grantaire was the one to explain. “It’s pretty straightforward, Feuilly: I climbed up on the ladder to paint the window frame, I saw Enjolras in his underwear and then I fell off the ladder.”

Feuilly purses his lips for a second before he replies, “Yeah, we’re not gonna put the naked part in the official accident report. I’ll just say one of the bricks on the windowsill was loose.”

That was the end of the discussion.

Now, Enjolras and Feuilly are on their third cup of murky hospital waiting room coffee when Grantaire finally appears back through the doors, his left wrist encased in a white cast and resting in a sling across his chest. He looks pleasantly surprised to see them waiting but, based on the glassiness of his eyes and the wideness of his pupils, Enjolras suspects that this happy expression has quite a bit to do with pain medication that Grantaire’s been given back there.
The nurse explains that Grantaire has fractured his wrist and cracked three ribs and that it would be best if he has supervision over the next twenty-four hours. “Just to make sure he doesn’t die,” she deadpans and they all stare at her, wordless, until she lets out a short, sharp laugh, “Just kidding. Nurse humor.” The boys relax. “But seriously, keep an eye on him. He could actually stop breathing.”

She hands them a stack of prescription slips and something called an “incentive spirometer” that Grantaire needs to use to encourage deep breathing and then leads Feuilly away to sign the discharge papers.

“I’ll get everything signed, take care of billing stuff and then we’ll get you out of here, R,” Feuilly tells Grantaire as he follows the nurse over to a counter.

“R?” Enjolras asks, puzzled. “What’s that? Is Grantaire spelled really differently than it sounds?”

“No, it’s a nickname,” Grantaire laughs and then tries to explain through his Percoset haze, “In French, the letter ‘R’ kinda sounds like ‘aire’ and then ‘grand’ means ‘big,’ so…”

“So, it’s a French pun?” Enjolras knits his brow at this.

“Pretty much.”

“You know, some people consider puns to be the lowest form of humor.”

“Yeah, well some people consider your face to be the lowest form of humor,” Grantaire shoots back and then pauses. “I’m sorry. I’m on a lot of pain medication right now.”

Enjolras raises one eyebrow at him but says nothing.

“I like your face,” Grantaire keeps talking for some reason, “It’s nice. It’s not funny at all. Not even the tiniest bit.”

Enjolras’ eyes narrow.

“Especially not now. Right now, it’s mainly just scary.”

Feuilly is back. “All right, R, we’re set. E, you ready?”

Grantaire’s glassy eyes light up. “Omigod,” he gushes, “Your nickname is E! Mine is R! That’s the most amazing thing I’ve ever heard!”

He looks at Enjolras and Feuilly as if expecting some sort of response to this epiphany. They stare back blankly. Grantaire sighs in foggy exasperation and continues, “‘E’. ‘R.’ E-R. We’re in an ER?! It’s crazy. It’s like serendipity or, or fate or destiny or—“

Enjolras gives Feuilly a sideways look and informs him, “He’s on a lot of pain medication right now.”

The two of them escort a loopy Grantaire out of the hospital, load him into the back of the Jeep and then slide themselves into the front seats. Feuilly inserts the key into the ignition and then pauses, leaving the car un-started.

“So, here’s the thing,” he begins, keeping his voice down so only Enjolras can hear, “You heard the nurse: R is gonna need some supervision for the next day or so. Someone to check on his breathing, make sure that he takes his meds in the right doses, stuff like that. And I happen to know
that he’s… sort of between homes right now—“

“He’s homeless?!” Enjolras loses control of his inside voice when he’s surprised.

Grantaire pokes his head between the two front seats. “Uh, I can hear you guys, you know. I’m sedated, not deaf. And no, I’m not homeless, thank you very much. I happen to be borrowing a futon at my friend Eponine’s place. You can drop me there. She’ll take care of me. Probably.”

Feuilly argues that he knows Eponine and he is also fully aware of the fact that she works nights. “She can’t take care of you, R. And,” he drops his voice conspiratorially toward Enjolras again, “she would totally sell his prescription meds for a profit.”

“Stop whispering,” Grantaire repeats, his voice nearing the edge of a whine, “I told you that I can hear you. And ‘Ponine would not sell my drugs. It’s not like she’s a drug dealer.” He pauses to consider this. “Well, yeah, she sells drugs sometimes, but just pot and Ecstasy. And occasionally ‘shrooms and… oh. Crap. She is totally a drug dealer. Damn. She would definitely sell my meds. I can’t be there at all.”

“But where am I supposed to go?” he continues, “I can’t convalesce in my truck.”

Feuilly gives Enjolras a pleading look and Enjolras sighs. “I was just telling Feuilly that you should stay with us for a few days at the house. That’s what we were whispering about. We’ve got plenty of room and extra beds—“

“Stay with frat boys? Are you an insane person?” Grantaire’s voice is thick with opiates, but he is adamant about this, “Frat boys are awful. They’re boorish and imbecilic and—“

Enjolras cuts him off. “You do realize that I’m sitting right here, right? And that I am actually a frat boy myself?” Enjolras cannot believe he just said that like he was proud of it, but he feels slightly insulted and wants Grantaire to justify his remarks.

“Pffft, you? You’re the worst,” Grantaire huffs. “You’re all beautiful and terrible and, and you get naked and make me fall off ladders. I can’t stay in a house with you and a bunch of guys exactly like you. I’d probably be dead within the hour.”

Enjolras can’t help but laugh at this. “The other guys are great, R, you’ll really like them. They aren’t normal frat boys—“ He spends the rest of the car ride telling Grantaire about les Amis, which is unlike him. Although he adores his friends, he is normally tight with praise and keeps his thoughts to himself. Something about Grantaire makes the words come easily, though, and soon Enjolras has filled him in on pretty much everything.

“There are way too many names that begin with ‘C’ and “B,” dude. I’m probably gonna fuck it all up,” Grantaire complains.

They are sitting in the car in the pharmacy parking lot waiting for Feuilly, who has ducked inside to pick up Grantaire’s supply of meds. Enjolras is turned around in the front seat, his arms hugging the seatback and his cheek resting against the headrest so he can look at Grantaire, who is curled across the backseat on his uninjured side, gazing up at Enjolras. His green eyes are starting to droop and the sunlight from the window catches in his dark hair, adding dimension and texture to each curl.

It might be Grantaire’s relaxed position or the intimate warmth of the car or possibly even that the Percoset has some weird airborne contagious quality, but Enjolras feels more at ease than he has in weeks. His shoulders are devoid of their usual tension, and his face, while not quite smiling, isn’t
frowning and that is a marked change from his normal expression.

Grantaire stretches out like a cat and then gazes back up at Enjolras, a ripple of worry breaking through his painkiller-induced peace. “Are they gonna be super pissed if I get their names wrong?”

The idea of Courfeyrac or Combeferre getting mad about anything is ridiculous. The only time Enjolras has seen Combeferre truly angry was when Enjolras smashed an annoying miller moth with a rolled up magazine. Combeferre had shouted at him and then delivered a stern lecture about all living things deserving a chance to complete their life-cycle.

“They’ll be fine,” he tells Grantaire. “You can just call them both ‘C’ if you want. That’s what everyone did in high school.”

“You’ve known each other since high school?”

Enjolras nods. “Elementary school, actually. They’ve been my best friends for years. We’re super close.” But that is all he says. He doesn’t mention the… thing between Courfeyrac and Combeferre. He still isn’t sure what that thing is exactly, and even if he did, it isn’t his information to tell. He also doesn’t mention that Bossuet and Joly have been together since the first week of freshman year. Although he has told Grantaire more information than he usually divulges, Enjolras keeps the part about his friends’ romantic connections to himself.

He doesn’t know what Grantaire’s opinions are about boy on boy love affairs and he’s a little reluctant to find out. So far, Grantaire has been borderline flirty, which Enjolras has found to be unexpectedly pleasing. Normally, he shuts down any and all attempts at flirting with a withering stare and the flirter slinks away, metaphoric tail between their legs. But he doesn’t want to shut Grantaire down just yet. Enjolras likes that Grantaire challenges him. Nobody ever stands up to Enjolras like that, not unless they bring a small army along; which, now that he thinks of it, is exactly what his friends did yesterday morning.

If Enjolras finds out that Grantaire has a problem with gay dudes, he’ll be extremely disappointed. Granted, he’ll still tell him to take those antiquated homophobic views and shove them straight up his ass, but he’ll be sad about doing it. He doesn’t yet want to just blurt out “Hey! Me and most of my friends are super gay. Do you have a problem with that?” Enjolras decides to give the burgeoning friendship a little more time to mature before pushing the matter.

They are almost back at the frat house and Grantaire now knows the names and basic personal (although non-romantic) history of all the Amis.

“So Bossuet’s name is actually Lesgles? And he’s called Bossuet because…?”

“It’s another pun, actually.”

“I like him already!”

“You know what they say about puns…” Enjolras allows the tiniest smile to creep in at the side of his mouth as the Jeep turns the corner onto their street. The faint thumping of bass can be heard as they pull closer. “You two can bond over your awful senses of humor.”

The Jeep pulls up to curb in front of the house and faces of all three men inside transform into identical expressions of slack-jawed shock. Apparently, Courfeyrac only needed the few hours that they were at the emergency room to return the house to fully functioning fraternity glory.

Loud music, heavy on the bass, is booming out of the windows and front door, which is propped open with what appears to be a keg, already tapped and surrounded by a smattering of red Solo
cups. Moving boxes and garbage bags full of clothes and bedding litter the front porch. There is a hand-painted banner draped between two of the second story windows that dips down in front of the ABX letters and reads “NEW AND IMPROVED!!”

The ruckus of the move-in and the boldness of the banner have already attracted the attention of the neighbors and ABX is the focus of interested clumps of sorority girls strolling by and a pack of glowering boys on the porch of the Psi Mu house directly across the street.

There is another new addition to the house: an inflatable kiddie pool, the sides decorated with cartoon sea creatures, has been set up on the front lawn with a lawn chair planted right in the middle of it, like a cheap plastic island. And on that chair-island reclines a certain someone who looks an awful like Courfeyrac.

Enjolras takes a deep breath as he jumps out of the front seat of the Jeep and goes around to open Grantaire’s door, stepping aside to allow him to get out. He leads the way up the front walk, feeling inexplicably nervous and protective of the man he’d met only a few short hours ago.

Enjolras normally prides himself on not caring what other people think, but he really wants Grantaire to successfully make it through the gauntlet of meeting his friend. Really, really wants it.

The first challenge is right in front of them in the form of a curly-haired, gregarious fraternity presidential nominee lounging in an inflatable pool. This could go really well or really terribly.

Courfeyrac looks both comfortable and ridiculous on his lawn chair, his flip-flop clad feet resting on the edge of the pool. He’s wearing a tight green tank top with “Gettin’ Lucky In Kentucky” emblazoned across the front (which is an ironic piece of clothing, because Enjolras knows perfectly well that Courfeyrac has never set foot in the South) and a tight pair of knee-length denim shorts with a belt that looks like it’s made from a car’s seatbelt. A pair of neon orange sunglasses tops off the ensemble and Courfeyrac lifts them off his eyes when he spots Enjolras walking up the sidewalk.

“E! You’re back! We got your text about the hospital, and everyone, especially Joly, is freaking the fuck out. Why didn’t you return our texts? What the hell happened—“ Courfeyrac cuts off abruptly as he notices the bruised and bandaged Grantaire limping along in Enjolras’ wake.

“Oh no, Enjolras,” he stage whispers, “What did you do?”

“Nothing, Courf! I didn’t do anything. This is Grantaire. We met this morning and then he had an, um, accident. He’s the reason we went to the ER.”

Courfeyrac studies the pair of them for a second and then whips his head around and screams into the house at the top of his lungs, “Guys! Enjolras is back! And he beat up some hot guy!”

Enjolras ducks his head and his face gets warm. Yeah, this is going to be a disaster. Why did he ever think this was not going to be a disaster? Grantaire just grins and looks pleased at being called hot.

The Amis pile out the front door to the porch in record time. Enjolras hasn’t seen them assemble so quickly since that time at the Musain when he threatened that the last person into the back room would have to help him fact-check his speech on food quality in the dorm kitchens.

They all gather around: Combeferre, Joly and Bossuet, Bahorel, Pontmercy lurking toward the back, his usual startled expression cranked up from “surprised” to “non-plussed.” None of them are even making an effort to mask their curiosity about the slightly banged-up stranger standing shyly
behind their fearless leader.

No, that’s not true. Combeferre makes an effort. A bad effort, but at least he has the courtesy to be falsely nonchalant while everyone else is shamelessly gawking at Grantaire. This is why Enjolras loves Combeferre best of all.

“Um, everybody. This is Grantaire. Grantaire, this is… everybody.” Enjolras is really bad at introductions today.

Grantaire picks up where Enjolras is failing and smiles warmly. “Hey, everybody,” he says with a wave of his non-broken hand. “You can actually call me R. It’s a little easier.”

“It’s a French pun!” Enjolras blurts out. He really needs to stop saying words immediately.

Grantaire glances over at him with a little smirk and adds, “You know, some people say puns are the lowest form of humor.”

Courfeyrac laughs. “Yeah, well, some people say that Enjolras’ face is the lowest form of humor.” He steps out of the pool, strides over to Grantaire, slings his arm companionably around Grantaire’s uninjured shoulder and they exchange a mischievous grin. “Burn on you, E. Total burn.”

“Aw, damn,” Grantaire adds, jumping on the game, “Did you bring some aloe for that burn?”

“Hey, I hope you get the USA Network, Enjolras, ‘cause I just gave you a Burn Notice,” Courfeyrac counters and Grantaire lets out a bark of a laugh.

The two of them are suddenly the perfect picture of dark, curly-haired friendship. Enjolras glares daggers. He really wanted Grantaire to get along with his friends, but he didn’t expect it to happen so quickly. And at his expense.

Grantaire opens his mouth, no doubt to make an additional burn joke, but Combeferre is suddenly there between them, appearing out of nowhere like some sort of cock-blocking ninja. He effortlessly separates the embrace between the new BFF’s, wrapping one arm possessively around Courfeyrac’s waist while offering his right hand to Grantaire.

“Hi, I’m Combeferre. It’s so nice to meet you, R. This is Courfeyrac.” The arm around Courfeyrac tightens ever so slightly, “We are both really pleased to meet you.”

The weight of that “we” hangs over the group like a cartoon anvil, but Grantaire doesn’t balk at Combeferre’s painfully obvious attempt at marking his territory. He just returns the handshake with a firm grip.

“It’s great to meet you guys. Enjolras told me all about you… leaving out a few details, apparently.”

Combeferre takes a deep breath but doesn’t let go of Courfeyrac, who is absolutely beaming at the direction the conversation is taking. “Well, Enjolras didn’t exactly know. About us. About our… relationship.”

Combeferre just used the R-word. This is huge. All eyes, even Grantaire’s, turn to Enjolras to gauge his reaction to this news. Enjolras has no idea what to say. Instead of encouraging words, he only manages to let out a brittle snort at the absurdity of their confession. Of course he knew, they’re his best friends and he’s been sharing a room with them for two weeks.
“Guys. I’m not stupid.” This comes sounds sharper than he intends. Courfeyrac and Combeferre look a little hurt. Grantaire takes a step back from him and a flicker of dismay dashes across his face.

Social tact isn’t Enjolras’ strong suit and apparently he did something wrong, very wrong, because all of his friends are frowning at him. He wishes Jehan was there, because the little poet is usually able to smooth out Enjolras’ social ineptitude with a few well chosen words and hugs. But Jehan is absent and the assembled group on the porch looks uncomfortable.

Pontmercy tries to break the icy silence. “So, um, how did you hurt your arm, R?”

Both Enjolras and Grantaire pause, neither one sure which version of the story to share. Fortunately (or unfortunately) this is the moment that Feuilly arrives on the lawn, having been off parking the car, and relates the story for them.

“Grantaire was here early this morning to paint some of the window frames, he went to go do Enjolras’ window, saw E naked and then fell off,” Feuilly informs everyone matter-of-factly. There is a moment of silence and then the ice is effectively broken by everyone bursting into laughter. Enjolras looks at Grantaire for help, but he’s just laughing along with the rest of the group.

Courfeyrac is near tears. “Oh my god, Enjolras. You almost killed a dude with your hot, naked body. That might be the greatest thing I’ve ever heard in the history of ever.”

“I was wearing underwear,” Enjolras protests.

“Even better, dude! You didn’t even have to do full frontal to destroy R. Just the sheer beauty of your naked torso was enough to smite him. R, you’ve got to give us the details.”

Oh, no. This is not good. If Grantaire gives the unedited, NSFW version of the story, Enjolras will never live it down. He stares hard at Grantaire, attempting to silence him by the sheer force of willpower.

Unfortunately for Enjolras, he is not a Jedi and Grantaire begins to tell the story. He gives Enjolras a quick, sparkling glance before beginning. “There I was, perched at the top of the ladder, the morning sun hot and relentless on my shoulders—“

Enjolras groans. Grantaire is going to drag with out and, worse, be poetic about it.

“—When I glanced through what I thought was a normal, everyday window. I was, however, sorely mistaken because within that room was the most spectacular naked—sorry, underwear clad—being I’d ever encountered. The sight of his golden hair and white, marble skin was enough to outshine the morning sun behind me. Of course, the sun was no match for this being, because he was the god Apollo himself, greeting the day in all his glowing, naked glory—“

Grantaire is unable to go on, the laughter and hoots from the Amis is drowning out his story. Pontmercy is red-faced and has tears streaming down his cheeks. Courfeyrac is doubled over, laughing convulsively. “Oh my god, ‘Apollo!’ It’s too perfect! ‘Apollo!’ E, you are so lucky. We’ve only been in the frat for a day and you’ve already got an amazing fratboy nickname. Oh my god, and by ‘god,’ I mean actual, Greek god…”

Enjolras is done. He pats his pockets for his wallet and keys and, mercifully, both are there. “Well, I’m glad everyone is getting along. If you need me, I’ll be at the storage unit getting my stuff.

Enjoy the rest of the story. Dicks.” He tosses a final, irritated look at Grantaire before spinning on
his heel and stalking down the walk in the direction of his parked car.

“Drive safe, Apollo!” Courfeyrac yells after him, laughter still coloring the edges of his words.
Grantaire and Enjolras' Lieutenants

Chapter Summary

In which Grantaire settles in, but Enjolras takes forever to come home. Grantaire discovers the surname of Eponine’s paramour. Bahorel offers a room with a perfect wall. Courfeyrac is all elbows. Jean Prouvaire is stunned by the beauty of a dumpster.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

R

Enjolras has just stormed off and Grantaire isn’t quite sure what he should do. Courfeyrac, Combeferre and company are perfectly nice and welcoming and all, but Grantaire has been in Enjolras’ orbit since approximately seven o’clock that morning and it has already become his natural habitat. He instinctively moves to follow his sun down the street, but Combeferre stops him with a gentle hand on his chest.

“Don’t. He just needs to blow off some steam,” Combeferre tells him, “Let him work through it and he’ll be back in no time, like nothing has even happened.”

Grantaire’s face must’ve done something sad, because Courfeyrac adds his encouragement as well, “Seriously, R, don’t worry about it. You don’t know Enjolras all that well yet, but sometimes being a normal human being with actual feelings and a sense of humor gets to be too much for him. He just needs to reboot to his factory settings. He’ll be back to his stoic, normal self in a few hours.”

The problem with that is Grantaire has no idea what normal is for Enjolras. If normal was being an emotionless robot, then what had he been this morning when he was worried and caring, offering first aid and playfully criticizing Grantaire’s jokes? If normal Enjolras is what Courfeyrac and Combeferre claim--a stoic marble statue--Grantaire thinks he prefers the next-to-normal version with whom he’d spent the morning.

There isn’t too much time to worry over this, though, as Feuilly is explaining Grantaire’s living situation to the Amis and he is being welcomed into the house with open arms, literally open arms, as everyone is giving him hugs as they usher him toward the front door.

Grantaire isn’t sure if it is simply the pleasant haze of being pumped full of opiates, but he is happy to be surrounded by what might be the nicest group of guys he’s ever met. This was not what he was expecting when he arrived at the house this morning, that’s for damn sure. The brothers that he expected to be aggressive meatheads instead have turned out to be a bunch of hilariously goofy philosophers, poets and social activists. Their cheerful company almost makes up for the fact that a freshly removed chunk of Grantaire’s soul is storming off down the street with Enjolras. Almost.

Courfeyrac, covering for Enjolras’ poor introductions earlier on the front lawn, provides Grantaire with the names of the assorted soon-to-be fraternity brothers as he leads the way into the house. They’re all familiar sounding from the rundown in the car, but it’s nice to have faces to put with the names. Pontmercy, a skinny kid with deliberately messy auburn hair gives Grantaire a shy wave
before he picks up a large box labeled “COURF” in thick black Sharpie and scuttles into the house.

“Careful with that, Pontmercy!” Courfeyrac shouts menacingly after him, “If any of my shit gets dropped, your ass will be doing naked laps around the block until the sun goes down!”

Courfeyrac turns back to Grantaire and Feuilly, rolls his eyes and explains, “His grandfather is the guy who is bankrolling the whole thing. He wants the kid to be treated like a proper pledge, so… name-calling and threats of nudity it is!”

“Courfeyrac is thoroughly enjoying this,” Combeferre adds dryly.

“A little bit, yeah. Except I don’t actually want to see Pontmercy naked. He’s a freckly, skinny little thing. Not my type,” Courfeyrac says and Combeferre laughs at this statement, gesturing to his own lanky frame. Courfeyrac smiles, runs a finger up his boyfriend’s arm and plants a kiss on his nose. “I prefer my skinny boys un-freckly, thank you very much.”

“You two are adorable, I kinda want throw up all over you both.” Grantaire cannot believe that he has somehow stumbled into the gayest fraternity on the planet. It’s like being thrown into a lion’s den expecting to get viciously devoured and then realizing that the lion likes rainbows and unicorns and then it orders you a pizza covered in sparkles and sings you show tunes.

As they walk through the door, Bossuet, a dark-skinned guy with closely clipped black hair, reaches one hand up and taps a horseshoe that has been nailed above the doorframe on the outside of the house. Grantaire looks at him curiously. “For luck,” Bossuet explains, “I nailed that sucker up first thing when I got here. They had a fire, man, I’m taking every precaution to get that bad juju out of here. Feuilly’s gonna help me do a sage smudge later today.”

“As long as Feuilly is the one handling the matches,” Combeferre says into Grantaire’s ear. “Bossuet is a walking disaster.

Grantaire raises his eyebrows. Bossuet is wearing track pants and a white tank top that shows off a fairly toned upper body; he looks like he is at least somewhat adept at physical activity. But that illusion is shattered when he walks squarely into the edge of the plush brown sofa, cursing loudly.

“Don’t be fooled by the workout ensemble,” Courfeyrac picks up where Combeferre left off, “Anybody can buy a tracksuit, that doesn’t make ‘em athletic. Bossuet can just look at a weight bench and get seriously injured. I think that’s one of the things that Joly loves best about him: dating Bossuet is like having your own living crash test dummy.”

Joly is the young man with sandy blonde hair and round tortoiseshell glasses who is excitedly digging through the sack of medications. Although he seemed somewhat reserved moments ago on the lawn, he’s like beaming like a kid on Christmas morning as he explores the pharmacy bags. The sleeves of his pinstriped shirt are rolled up and he fills his arms with the bottles and pamphlets. “Oh wow! Percoset, Diclofenac, Tramadol… they loaded you up, R! Don’t worry, I’ll read all the info and make a med schedule and, uh, a list of possible side effects and, and—Feuilly do we have a printer set up here? Mine is still in a box somewhere and I want to print out a spreadsheet for all of this.”

Feuilly assures him that they do indeed have a printer and then searches in one of the other bags for the contraption that the nurse had sent them home with. “He’s also got this, Joly. To make sure he can breathe. It’s an, um—“

“An ‘incentive spiromenter’?!?” Joly is practically quivering with excitement, “That’s great! Well, it’s not great that you may have complications breathing but… I’m so excited to get to use one of
these! Thanks, R. This is going to be awesome…”

And Joly is gone, the meds and the spirometer clutched in his arms as he bounds up the stairs to prep the patient’s sick room. “Don’t get over-excited, babe!” Bossuet calls after him, “You’ll give yourself an asthma attack!” He stands up and starts to follow Joly up the stairs, still favoring the leg he smacked on the couch. “I’m gonna go grab his inhaler and help him set up the room. Hey, where are we putting R, anyway?”

“Well, he’s probably gonna have to share a suite with somebody,” Feuilly tells them. “The only singles are the tower room, the president’s suite and then that little room that Enjolras took on the second floor.”

“We could take this opportunity to move all of E’s stuff to the president’s room?” Courfeyrac offers hopefully. “I bet Pontmercy could get that done in twenty minutes. Or less, even, if we pumped him full of Red Bull.”

Courfeyrac opens his mouth to shout for the pledge, but Combeferre cuts him off with a shake of his head, “Courf, Enjolras would murder us all if we did that. I’m not pushing this president thing any further.”

Grantaire is confused. “Enjolras isn’t the president? He just seems so…um, how do I put this?”

“Bossy?” Courfeyrac offers.

“I was gonna say ‘commanding,‘ but I guess ‘bossy’ works, too.”

“Enjolras is opposed to this whole fraternity thing,” Combeferre says, “It’s so weird: he’s always one-hundred percent in charge our les Amis stuff, and totally freaks out if he doesn’t have control of pretty much everything else that we do, but he adamantly refuses to take any sort of role in this frat.”

“Yeah, you know he’s up to something when he says that I should be president,” Courfeyrac laments, settling down on the couch next to Grantaire. “The last time he put me in charge of anything, I accidentally printed 1,000 copies of a picture of my taint instead of the posters for that rally.”

“‘Accidentally’, Courf?” Combeferre frowns at him. "How exactly does one 'accidentally' take a photograph of one's taint?"

“Well, I took the picture of my taint on purpose, but I accidentally printed 1000 copies of it. I was gonna set it as the wallpaper on Enjolras’ phone but then the files got mixed up and everything went horribly awry.”

“Well, you did get absolved of ever being—how did Enjolras put it?—‘In charge of anything, ever, as long as you both shall live?’ So that was an added bonus for you.”

“And I was happy, ‘Ferre!” Courfeyrac whines, “I don’t want to do this president crap.”

Bossuet politely clears his throat. “Um, I still don’t have an answer about R’s room. Where should Joly and I set him up?”

He looks at Courfeyrac, who looks at Combeferre, who looks at Feuilly, who looks at Grantaire, who shrugs and looks at the only person in the room left: a tall, muscle-bound guy who has been silently filling up a good portion of the sofa with his sizable bulk during this entire conversation. The guy—Bahorel, one of the B names that Grantaire was certain that he was going to mess up--
looks back at him with eyes so brown that they are almost black and nods his square chin in what Grantaire can only assume is assent.

“He can stay with me,” Bahorel says casually, reaching one hand up to scratch the back of his thick neck, “I don’t have a suite mate, yet. But you have to take the room that shares a wall with Enjolras. He practices his speeches in his room and brother can be loud.”

“That’s totally fine,” Grantaire tries to keep his voice steady, and he definitely does not think about what other loud things Enjolras might do in his room on the other side of their shared wall. Grantaire shakes the image out of his head and attempts to sound normal, “I’m not going to be here long, just a week or so, until I feel better… and find a place to rent.”

“Whatever, man. The more the merrier. You got any stuff?”

Grantaire realizes that, apart from a small bag of clothes and a couple of sketchbooks, all of his things are at Eponine’s place. He pulls out his ancient flip-phone to call her up and sees a string of unread text messages from her number. They start off innocently enough, move into angry, then to worried and end in a panicked sounding "TEXT ME BACK 911!!!!" Grantaire should have gotten back to her hours ago, but he was distracted by injuries, pain medication and something stern and blonde. He is a terrible friend, but Eponine will (probably) understand. She gets all flaky after she’s spent an afternoon in the library puppy-dogging over her pre-Law pretty boy, Marius Something. Grantaire still owes that dude a punch in the face whenever he actually meets him; Marius Something is responsible for hours spent listening to Eponine swoon and pine, hours that Grantaire will never get back.

Eponine answers on the first ring. “Where the fuck have you been, R?” Her voice screams from the tinny speaker and everyone in the room scurries out, giving Grantaire privacy in which to get yelled at. He settles onto the enormous sofa and gets on with his phone call.

“Hey, Ponine,” he says gently, like he is trying to soothe an angry pit bull, “So, um, I had a bit of an accident.” Eponine softens as Grantaire explains his fall and emergency room visit. She takes pity on him and agrees to bring his stuff over as soon as she can. In Eponine time, “as soon as she can” could range between ten minutes and three days. Grantaire is hoping she errs closer to the shorter end of the spectrum; his clothes kind of smell like hospital and he’s been sweating in them all morning. Plus, it would be nice if he could change before Enjolras gets home. He’s pretty sure there is a green plaid button down in one of his bags that he’s been told he looks nice in. He considers texting Eponine to asking her to hurry and make sure she brings the green plaid, but thinks better of it. That could make her decide to light his things on fire rather than bring them over. Eponine is mercurial like that.

Grantaire snaps the phone shut and leans back into the plush cushions, glad to be sitting down and calm for the first time all day, even in sweaty clothes. His wrist and ribs are starting to ache; it would probably be a good idea to go upstairs and see if Joly has his next dose of meds ready. He closes his eyes and melts into the couch, the warm brown cushions giving way under his tired body. Going upstairs might be overrated. Maybe Joly can bring his meds down here. Grantaire can probably just sit on this sofa until then, and if he naps a little, well, napping is good for sick people. That is a proven medical fact. His breathing deepens and he starts to drift away.

“What?” says a new voice from directly next to his elbow and Grantaire nearly jumps out of his skin.

“Jesus!” he yelps, then sees the newcomer and feels bad for yelling, like it should be illegal to shout at someone so innocent and delicate. The slight young man perched on arm of the sofa looks like yet another figure plucked out of mythology, but whereas Enjolras was the embodiment of a
god, this boy was a wood-nymph, or a naiad, or dryad or…some sort of forest creature ending with an “–ad.” The pain is starting to creep back into Grantaire’s bones and it isn’t helping with his recollection of mythological beings.

The young man’s eyes are hazel and they are open wide, perhaps from Grantaire’s shout or maybe he just always looks that way- a mixture of bewilderment and curiosity. He is slightly built, but not skinny. Grantaire can see lean muscles outlined underneath his thin grey t-shirt, which is a bit too large and slips down over one shoulder, but whether that is due to fashion or carelessness, Grantaire can’t quite tell. A vine of tattoos, blooming with various flower buds spreads across one delicate collarbone and then dips back into the wide scoop neck of the shirt, as if beckoning to be followed.

His bare feet, toenails painted sea foam green, rest on the seat of the sofa and he has his knees pulled up to his chest, his arms circling around them in a position of quiet contemplation as he continues to take stock of Grantaire, who takes that as his cue to study him right back. One knee of the boy’s snug red plaid pants has been ripped and it is patched with an entirely different pattern of plaid, this one blue and gold. One corner of the patch is beginning to come undone and a bit of pink thread hangs loose on one edge of it. Grantaire itches to pull it to see what would happen, but he restrains himself. One does not pull at loose threads on pants of random strangers, at least not until one had had a couple of beers. And Grantaire has had zero beers, ergo he keeps his hands to himself.

Finally, the young man speaks. “You’re R,” he says simply, reaching one slender finger and twisting it into one of Grantaire’s dark curls. Another vine of flowers runs down his forearm, ending in a small white bloom on his wrist bone. Grantaire isn’t sure if this vine is connected to the tattoo across the boy’s collarbone, but he has a strong suspicion that if he looked, he would discover that not only were they connected, but that the boy’s whole torso is a secret garden of ink flora. Wood nymph, indeed.

“Are you, R?” the boy presses again, tilting his head down slightly and his wavy hair dips across one eye. Grantaire is busy trying to ascertain the exact color of the strands, but he has the wherewithal to nod an assent to this question. “I thought so,” the boy says pushing the curtain of hair off his eye and tucking it behind one ear. The waves catch the sun and Grantaire realizes that the hair isn’t just one color, it is all the colors. Whereas Enjolras is golden, Courfeyrac is dark, Combeferre sandy and Pontmercy ginger, this boy was all of them and more. Not an overambitious dye-job, Grantaire notes, but more like nature couldn’t decide what color hair to give this kid, so he got all of them. The effect is lovely. And on top of that cascade of color sits a woven crown of flowers: mostly blues with random smatterings of pinks and purples and whites.

“Did you know,” he asks Grantaire, keeping his fingers wound up in the single curl, “That we have a whole garden of wildflowers in the alley behind the house? By the dumpster? It’s like the world tried to make our alley ugly, but nature fought back and won. I went back to recycle some of my moving boxes and then I saw the flowers and I had to make this.” He gestures to the flower crown and pulls it off his head, shaking his thick waves loose from the green stems.

“I just knew that you were him,” the boy continues, placing the circlet of flowers on Grantaire’s head. He hasn’t stopped softly smiling. Maybe that is just the default setting for his face: open and smiling and curious and guileless. “And I knew you’d be dark haired. These blue flowers! Your hair! It is going to be absolutely resplendent!”

“Um, how did you know my name? And my hair color?” Grantaire ventures to ask, wondering if birds and squirrels dashed through the alleyway garden to bring this kid news of his arrival. It’s an absurd idea and he knows it, but this day has been full of weird surprises and Grantaire is about ready to believe anything. If such a being as Enjolras exists in this brave new world, it isn’t out of
the question that this boy could commune with woodland creatures.

“Do you really want to know?” the boy replies, leaning in closer to adjust the flowers. Grantaire nods. The boy smiles and lowers his voice secretly, “My phone has been blowing up with texts about you for the past thirty minutes.”

Oh. That is anticlimactic.

“Everyone is very excited about you. Courfeyrac, Combeferre, Bahorel, Bossuet, even Joly and he tries not to get overexcited about anything. I would have come in sooner, but I wanted to finish your crown.”

Grantaire eyes him. “How did you know what I look like? Did people text you pictures?” He doesn’t remember any of the Amis snapping pics when they were being introduced.

“I deduced it,” the boy shrugs, “Everyone texted me that you were the exact opposite of Enjolras so I figured… dark hair. Onyx locks to stand in stark contrast to his golden curls. And I was right. Also, you’re a little smaller. And broader. Stronger.” His hands trace over Grantaire’s shoulders. “But not the complete opposite, because Enjolras is beautiful and you are, too.”

That was unexpectedly nice. “Thanks,” Grantaire says, risking a smile at the kind words.

The kid continues, “Enjolras is beautiful like an icy mountain stream trickling off a glacier in the dazzling midday sun and you… you’re beautiful like the wildflowers around our dumpster.”

Grantaire assumes this is a compliment, but isn’t entirely sure.

The boy’s hands are still in Grantaire’s curls. “Can I braid your hair?” he asks abruptly, his face very close to Grantaire’s. Grantaire can smell earth and flowers and warm sun and… marijuana.

Oh. That explains a lot.

“Um, don’t take this the wrong way but… are you high right now?” he asks.

“As a kite, my love,” the kid replies, “I always have the best weed if you ever want any. Oh! Do you want some now?” He fishes into his back pocket, pulling out a small pipe and a baggie that he offers to Grantaire. “I’m Jehan,” he says as he packs the little bowl, “but my real name is—“

“Jean Prouvaire! No!” Joly stands at the bottom of the staircase, arms firmly crossed. Bossuet trails behind him. “You are not trying to get my patient high. He is on a strict regiment of pain medication right now and he does NOT need to be mixing his drugs.”

Joly crosses to the couch and snatches the pipe away from Jehan. He holds out his other hand and sternly beckons with his fingers until the nymph boy hands him the lighter. Joly shakes his head at Jehan, giving him judgey eyes as he passes it back to Bossuet who promptly takes a hit off the pipe and slowly exhales bluish smoke over his shoulder.

“Relax, Joly,” Jehan lilts, “take a hit, it will calm you down.”

“Jehan, you know I can’t smoke, I have asthma.”

“I’m sorry, love, I completely forgot. I’ll make you some brownies soon, okay?”

“Thank you, that would be lovely,” Joly replies, then informs Grantaire, “Jehan makes amazing pot brownies. You should definitely try them when you’re feeling—“ Joly remembers the task at hand
“—Jehan! Don’t try and distract me with promises of edibles. You should know that you can’t just give drugs to injured people—“

Courfeyrac, drawn by the smell of weed, comes bounding down the stairs with a full cup of beer in his hand. “Hey, R, you want a beer?” he asks, handing his cup off to Grantaire and grabbing the pipe from Bossuet.

“No!” Joly nearly has an aneurism. “He can’t mix alcohol with his medication! He could die. God, you guys. Do none of you watch television?” Joly heads upstairs to get the aforementioned pain meds, spouting a stream of cautions and warnings over his shoulder as he goes.

The second he is out of sight, Courfeyrac offers Grantaire his beer again, but the offer is declined. Grantaire isn’t one to turn down the offer of alcohol- in fact, this might be the first time he’s ever done so in his entire life- but Joly seems to know what he’s talking about when it comes to mixing meds and booze. And Grantaire really doesn’t want to die, especially not before Enjolras comes home. The idea of never seeing that face again makes Grantaire’s chest tighten.

“Suit yourself,” Courfeyrac shrugs as he hits the pipe.

Everyone eventually drifts in to grab a beer or smoke some pot and the whole group finds themselves settled in the front room, except Pontmercy, who is still shuttling bags and boxes upstairs to various bedrooms, Courfeyrac tossing casual threats his way every so often. Pontmercy seems happy enough with the task and no one seems concerned. Enjolras isn’t back yet.

The enormous television is turned on and Combeferre figures out how to switch between the cable box and several video game systems so that Courfeyrac, Bahorel, Bossuet and Joly can start up a game of Mario Kart. Grantaire has taken a second dose of pain meds and he reclines on the left portion of the sofa, which extends from normal-style sofa into a comfortable chaise section, his head back between Jehan’s knees. The nymph boy has found a new part of the couch on which to perch and he is happily braiding and unbraiding Grantaire’s curls as he softly asks about the artist’s life and work and interests. Grantaire might have made a new best friend. But Enjolras isn’t back yet.

It is getting dark outside. The gamers get louder as more beer is consumed and more pot is smoked and Feuilly calls a delivery place and orders a bunch of pizzas. Bossuet drives his Mario Kart off a cliff for the fifteenth time and his controller privileges are revoked and given to Combeferre, who proves to be incredibly good at video games. He wins every race, despite the fact that he is seated next to Courfeyrac, who steers using his whole body and keeps smacking into Combeferre with his elbow when he tries to turn. They all bicker good-naturedly and it is a warm, loving, friendly room. But Enjolras still isn’t back yet.

The doorbell rings, and Grantaire nearly tears a chunk of his hair out on Jehan’s fingers as he jumps up to get it. “Lay down, love,” Jehan scolds him, undoing the section of braid that Grantaire has just destroyed, “It’s just the pizza. Feuilly will get it.”

Oh. Just pizza. Not Enjolras. Grantaire is starting to get a little panicked. He’s been apart from Enjolras for almost as long as he’d been with him this morning and that is far too long. What if he decides not to come back to the fraternity? What if he’s met someone else on the street and they’d fallen in love and decided to move to France? What if Velociraptors have gotten loose in the storage facility and have trapped Enjolras inside the unit and his cell phone battery has died and he’s stuck there, waiting for rescue? A million worst-case scenarios flash through Grantaire’s brain, each of them increasing absurd. He’s on a lot of painkillers right now. But all the painkillers in the world don’t change the fact that Enjolras isn’t back yet.
The person who Feuilly leads into the front room isn’t the pizza guy, nor is it Enjolras. A small waif of a girl with dark, messy waves peeking out from under her grey knit cap. Eponine. Her eyes are narrowed and her hands are clenched at her sides, clearly in full on “fight or flight” mode. She spots Grantaire and softens the slightest bit.

“Oh, R, thank God,” she exhales as she dashes across the room, dodging sprawling limbs and half-full beer cups to grab him in a fierce embrace. He winces slightly, but she doesn’t loosen her grip. “You just gave me the address of this place, you didn’t tell me you were in a full-on fucking frat house, dude.” She pulls out of the hug and cups the sides of his face with her hands, looking him squarely in the eye. “Are you okay? Are they keeping you hostage or something?” she asks under her breath.

“No, ‘Ponine, I’m fine, I swear.” Grantaire wants to shake his head, but Jehan has him anchored in place with his braid project.

“Are you sure?” Eponine hisses, even more intensely, “If you are being held against your will, blink twice and we’ll fight our way out of here. You know how good I am in a fight. I could take any of these guys—” her eyes flick over to Bahorel “—except for him. He’s enormous.”

Grantaire just laughs and gets ready to tell her the whole story, when footsteps stomp into the room behind them and Eponine’s entire face lights up like she’s seen the face of God. That kind of reverent stare can only mean one thing: Enjolras is back! Grantaire whips his head around, dislodging Jehan’s braids yet again, but sees only Pontmercy, slightly dusty and pink-cheeked from his move-in duties.

“Hey! Eponine!” Pontmercy shoots her a big grin and Eponine flushes red. What the hell? Eponine is impossible to embarrass, she is super tough and scrappy and unflappable, except for…Uh oh. No. Oh no.

Grantaire vaguely remembers that when he was introduced to Pontmercy earlier in the day, the kid had a first name. A first name that began with an “M.” A first name that might have sounded something like “Marius,” if Grantaire was paying attention, which he wasn’t because he was too busy keeping every fiber of his being from sprinting down the street after Enjolras. Well, looks like Grantaire has finally met Marius Something. He makes a mental note to sniff him later to see if he really smells like leather and freshly cut grass. The verdict on punching him in the face can be delayed; so far, Grantaire has grown fond of Pontmercy over the course of the day, but if this leads to an increase in Eponine’s pining, then he’ll have to take matters into his own hands. Er, hand.

Eponine abandons Grantaire in order to assist Pontmercy in his never-ending box-moving project. She gives Grantaire a quick peck on the cheek as she goes, whispering a giddy “Thank you!” into his ear and then practically skips off. Grantaire thinks that people look really stupid when they are in love. Then the doorbell rings again, and his heart nearly explodes with the excited hope that it might finally be Enjolras.

It isn’t. This time, it actually is the pizza. Everyone grabs a couple of slices, refills their beers and the party presses on, minus one very important person. Grantaire is trying very hard not to cry in frustration. Why isn’t Enjolras back yet?

E

How long can one feasibly sit in their car, staring at a house, without treading into total creeper status? Enjolras isn’t sure, but he suspects that he passed that mark about an hour ago. The trip to the storage unit was quick—he didn’t have that many things, just a couple of bags of clothing and a few boxes of books—and he made a brief stop at the department store he’d visited yesterday, so
he’d returned to the ABX house within a couple of hours of his departure. But he couldn’t quite bring himself to go in.

The playlist on his ipod is on repeat, and Enjolras has suspicions that this is the third time he’s heard this particular song. Something he doesn’t know the title of, by a band whose name he can’t quite remember, but that’s why Courfeyrac and Combeferre made him this particular playlist: to try and educate him in music that has been made this century. The song is something about following someone into the dark, and Enjolras has grown fond of it by this third listen. Especially now that night had fallen and a deep patch of darkness stands between his hybrid SUV and the warmly lit house.

The car was a gift from his parents, if something forced on you could be considered a gift. They had demanded that he let them buy him a suitable car for the rough winters in the college town, and a hybrid seemed the lesser of many evils. He still felt a little weird about owning a brand-new, fairly expensive car when other people barely had a place to live. And that brought his thoughts directly back to Grantaire.

Although he isn’t sure how his thoughts can come back to something that they’ve never left in the first place. The dark haired artist has been on his mind constantly since Enjolras’ abrupt departure from the fraternity earlier that afternoon. He isn’t sure why he literally can’t think of anything besides Grantaire. He’d like to think it is because he's worried about the guy. Grantaire is injured, after all. That would be a lovely reason—compassion—as it would mean that Enjolras is getting kinder as he gets older, if one could consider being twenty years old “getting older.”

But Enjolras suspects compassion has nothing to do with it. Joly is almost always sick with some malady or another and Enjolras unfailingly forces him to come to les Amis meetings and rallies regardless of his fever or hacking cough or whatever symptoms Joly is imagining on that particular day.

An couple of hours of meditation in his parked car has led Enjolras to suspect that his fascination with Grantaire has more to do with the artist’s wide green eyes, lopsided grin and dark curls. Probably also due in part to his razor sharp wit and ability to verbally spar with Enjolras, even while injured and hopped up on pain killers. If Grantaire is that sharp when he’s drugged, Enjolras can’t wait to debate with him when he’s sober. See what he brings to a real argument. Or to bed.

No. Nope. No.

Enjolras refuses to go there. No thinking about bed. Which is actually kind of ridiculous, considering that it was thoughts of Grantaire in bed that had inspired his pit stop at the department store on the way back to the house. Two full bags on his front seat are physical proof that he’d thought about Grantaire in bed today. But it isn’t anything bad, Enjolras tells himself, it is this new, compassionate side that he is cultivating that considered Grantaire’s needs and simply helped him out. That is what frat brothers do, he thinks wryly, help each other out.

The playlist restarts and kicks off with a bright, bouncy pop song about somebody being a firework. Enjolras can’t handle that one again, so he takes that as his cue to screw his courage to the sticking place and finally leave the car. He takes a deep breath, grabs the department store bags and strides across the dark street toward the brightly lit house.

R

One moment, the house is full of laughter and shouting and flirting (thanks for nothing, Eponine), drinking and eating and hair braiding. And then everything goes away. Enjolras is back.
Just like the nurse had feared, Grantaire stops breathing, but it isn’t because of his ribs or injuries; it is because Enjolras is even lovelier in the warm light of the house and it literally takes Grantaire’s breath away. His hair is darker, richer gold in the glow from the lamps stationed around the room and the battle between light and shadow creates angles and planes on his face that Grantaire hadn’t noticed earlier in the bright morning sun or under the hospital halogens. The fingers on Grantaire's good hand itch to grab a pencil and sketch the sharp edges of Enjolras’ cheekbones. Thank god his right hand is uninjured, as Grantaire anticipates doing a lot of drawing in the near future.

Enjolras’ blue eyes meet his green ones. They both stare for a moment. Grantaire is positive that everyone in the room must see, must notice how their eyes are locked on one another. It must be completely obvious to every single person present that Grantaire is completely, one-hundred percent smitten with the tall blonde standing in the entryway.

But no one seems to notice a thing. Everyone is still talking and laughing and steering their Mario Karts around a snowy, mountainous course. The soft buzz of the soundscape of reality creeps back in around the edges of Grantaire’s consciousness and he realizes that life is going on as normal, no one has noticed anything amiss. Time only stopped for him, just for that brief second.

He wonders if it stopped for Enjolras, too?

Enjolras smiles at him. Grantaire is busy working up the courage to smile back, but the blond is suddenly pulled out of his eye line, tackled to the ground by an exuberant Courfeyrac.

“E! You’re back! We thought we’d lost you forever! We’ve been drifting without your brave leadership…”

Enjolras pushes his friend off of him with a grunt of feigned irritation. “Looks like you guys have been surviving so far without me. You managed not to starve, at least. Hey, is any of this vegetarian?”

Enjolras is handed pizza, swamped with hugs; Marius introduces him to Eponine and then the pair of them head out the door to unload Enjolras’ stuff from his car. Jehan, Bossuet, Joly all crowd around him, trying to gauge the mood of their leader. The whole focus of the room is on Enjolras. He is magnetic. Grantaire leans back into his couch cushion, content to just watch. Enjolras had looked at him, right at him, for several seconds. That is all he needs for now.

But Enjolras finds his way over to Grantaire, a slice of black olive pizza in one hand and a couple of full department store bags in the other. Grantaire has one brief moment to consider what his hair must look like, after hours of attention from Jehan and his flowers. But then Enjolras is there and he is sitting next to Grantaire on the sofa and Grantaire can't think of anything at all. “Hey,” he says softly.

“Hey,” Grantaire returns, “You were gone forever, man. I thought you’d decided to skip town and give up Greek life before you even started.”

“Nope, I just had stuff to do.” Enjolras pauses, “Look, about earlier—“

“Don’t worry about it, E. I told them the same version of the story that we told Feuilly. Totally PG rated. The other stuff… that’s just between you and me.”

Enjolras’ eyes are on him again, and an unreadable expression flickers through them for just a moment. “Thank you,” he says finally. “Sorry I called you a dick.”
Grantaire laughs, “Hey, I’ve been called worse. You’re going to have to get a lot more creative to insult me.”

“Challenge accepted.”

“Oh god,” Grantaire smiles, “What have I done? I’ll probably be eviscerated by your oratory skills before bedtime.”

“Nah, I’ll draw it out for a while. Make you squirm,” Enjolras has no idea what he is doing to Grantaire, no idea at all. Grantaire wants to hug his face so hard right now. But he doesn’t. It dawns on him that he has never touched Enjolras. He’s either hugged, high-fived, shaken hands with or had his hair done by ever other guy in the house, but not Enjolras. If Enjolras touched him, Grantaire might actually die. What a way to go.

“Oh, hey,” Enjolras is still talking and he sounds almost shy, “I got you something.”

Grantaire opens the department store bags: inside are a green comforter and sheets, dark gray with green pinstripes.

That night, Enjolras and Grantaire sleep on nearly identical sheets, separated by one thin wall; one dreams of strong hands wrapped up in black curls and the other of hands in golden ones.
All of these meds that Grantaire is taking probably shouldn't be mixed. I don't know, I'm not a doctor. I didn't go to medical school.
E

Monday morning dawns bright and clear and Enjolras practically jumps out of bed in his haste to seize the day. His typical morning routine usually involves snoozing the alarm on his phone as many times as he can (the record is twelve), stumbling into a hasty shower and dressing in an outfit that he’d set out the night before. Enjolras has no delusions about his inability to function in the morning, so he likes to plan ahead. For today, he’s laid out his favorite red plaid shirt, a thin grey undershirt with the logo of an overseas charity organization and a pair of slim, dark denim pants. And his black leather combat boots. Always his combat boots.

Courfeyrac keeps pushing him to explore other footwear and gifting him random pairs of Toms, Kenneth Coles and even some bright red Chuck Taylors. They all end up unworn in a duffel bag that Enjolras is pretty sure that Pontmercy delivered to his closet last night. He’s been tempted to try out the Chucks on occasion, but he never does. Something about his boots makes him feel authoritative and invincible, like he can do anything.

So on the boots go, because today, he plans to do everything.

Even wake up before his alarm, apparently. Enjolras is wide-awake and staring at the ceiling at seven forty a.m., a good twenty minutes before his phone is set to go off. This might be the first time in his adult life that he’s woken up before his alarm, but hey, that’s okay. His world changed a little bit yesterday and maybe this—the early morning, bright-eyed optimism—is part of the new system. Enjolras can probably get behind this.

Mondays are his second favorite day of the week, even if they do normally start with him dragging ass until his first gallon or so of coffee. Thursdays are les Amis meetings at the Musain so, of course, Thursdays are his actual favorite day. But Mondays run a pretty close second. On Mondays, he has his Ethics of Modern Politics seminar at ten o’clock, a chunk of free time in the early afternoon that he spends in the student union doing all his reading for the upcoming week and then he, Combeferre and Courfeyrac have a standing date in the evenings to plan the agenda for the Thursday meeting. Enjolras adores planning meeting agendas.

And today he wants to make sure that an item on that agenda is “impress Grantaire.” He isn’t going to phrase it that way to Combeferre and Courfeyrac, of course, but he intends to put several issues on the docket that will show him in his best light. The good work that les Amis does is Enjolras’ proudest achievement and he is never more in his element than when he is leading their meetings.

So far, Grantaire has known him as a reluctant frat boy, an inept first responder, an awkward conversationalist and, the most unfortunate of all, an enjoyer of morning time self-abuse. But,
strangely, Grantaire seems to like that version of him. Enjolras cannot wait for Grantaire to see him at his best, doing what he loves most; he cannot wait for Grantaire to actually see him.

The bathroom on the second floor is communal, but Enjolras expects to find it deserted this morning and he isn’t disappointed. He selects the blue and white tiled shower stall farthest from the door and enjoys the pleasant extravagance of being able to take a leisurely shower in the morning. The whole shampooing process is actually kind of invigorating when one isn’t dashing through a turbo-shower in order to make it out of the house on time.

He steps out of the stall, drops of water patterning the navy bath mat at his feet. The bathroom is nice, despite the fact that it is communal- the bright white tile with blue accents is rather cheerful and a set of opaque windows let in the perfect amount of natural morning light. There is a long mirror over the sinks and it is so large that Enjolras doubts that even Courfeyrac could manage to hog the whole thing. Not that any of them need to worry about sharing a bathroom with Courfeyrac: the presidential suite has its own private restroom.

That private restroom alone might have been incentive for Enjolras to take on the presidency; he hates sharing a bathroom. However, it doesn’t seem like sharing one in this house will be a big deal: the second floor has two group bathrooms and, as Joly, Bossuet, Combeferre and Pontmercy’s rooms are situated toward the front of the house and the front bathroom, Enjolras will probably only have to split this one with Bahorel and Grantaire. It is doubtful that the three of them ever run into each other in there; Bahorel is a lazy bastard who never schedules a class before noon and Grantaire confessed to Enjolras that he has an aversion to early mornings.

Although, when he thinks about it, the idea of occasionally running into Grantaire in the bathroom isn’t entirely unpleasant to Enjolras. They might step out of the shower at the same time, both wrapped only in bath towels, water dripping down in sync off their bare legs. The diluted morning light would gleam on a drop falling from Grantaire’s dark hair onto his shoulder, where it slides down his lean, tattooed chest and slowly slips under the towel that hangs low over his hips, disappearing into the V-shape of his hipbone and his—

Dammit. Enjolras needs to stop thinking these thoughts immediately or he’ll need to step back into the stall for a second, more intimate shower and, with his incredible luck lately, Grantaire would probably choose that moment to come into the bathroom. Enjolras isn’t sure he could take the embarrassment two mornings in a row. A series of deep breaths and a brief meditation on the exploitative student loan policy of the University distracts Enjolras’ body and he gets his shit together enough to leave the bathroom without fear of embarrassment.

The door to Bahorel and Grantaire’s suite is closed as Enjolras passes back to his own room. Joly, true to his word, has printed a spreadsheet of Grantaire’s medication schedule and taped it to the dark wooden door. His first dose of painkillers isn’t scheduled until ten o’clock. A flicker of disappointment catches Enjolras by surprise. He hadn’t expected to see Grantaire before he left for class, but he hadn’t not expected to see him either. Enjolras’ brain is being stupidly contradictory and confusing this morning.

Enjolras quickly dresses in the outfit that he set out last night and then spends more time on his blonde curls that he’d ever admit. But his hair looks nice. Good hair Mondays are the best Mondays. He is practically skipping as he heads downstairs and puts the coffee on to brew. The coffee machine is simple to use and he gets the pot started without a problem; another check mark in his win column. Normally, Combeferre is the coffee-starter of the group, but Enjolras is the first (and only) one awake this morning. It makes sense, as all of his friends were up late into the night drinking and celebrating their new living situation, but Enjolras is still a bit surprised. Combeferre and Joly both have eight a.m. classes on Monday and neither of them is big on skipping class. Oh
well, Enjolras thinks happily as he digs through the fully stocked fridge for some creamer, *let them have their fun. You only move into a free mansion once.*

Even his internal monologue is cheerful this morning. This really might be a new leaf for him. He pours his coffee into his signature cup—an over-sized mason jar with a plastic lid and hand-crafted leather sleeve featuring a large, embossed “E”—giving himself a mental pat on the back for reducing paper coffee cup waste, reusing a glass jar and supporting local business, all in one shot. And then Enjolras opens the front door and his cheerful mood is crushed, that new leaf stomped by the boot of reality. The front lawn is white.

At first, he wildly thinks that snow has come early this fall, but that can’t be it. The sun is shining bright and warm on his face out of a cloudless, blue sky. Then he sees that the white blanket is actually a mass of white strips crisscrossing the lawn and porch, draping down from trees. Toilet paper. They’ve been fucking *toilet papered.*

Shaving cream words stand out against the dark wood of the patio: “Welcome to Greek Row, assholes! Xoxo-PM”

“Every fucking Sunday night, man,” Feuilly is awake and has joined Enjolras on the porch, clutching his own ceramic mug of coffee and gazing at the yard through eyes that are still thick with sleep. “They’ve got some sort of vendetta against this house. I thought they’d knock it off once the old crew moved out, but apparently not.”

“Who has some sort of vendetta, Feuilly? Who’s ‘PM’?”

“Psi Mu, the house across the street,” Feuilly points directly across the road to a smaller wood-framed house, lacking in grandiosity when compared to ABX but beating them wholeheartedly when it comes down to lawn debris and general disrepair. A small group of brothers are out on the front porch, smoking cigarettes and staring over at Enjolras and Feuilly. One of them, a black-haired guy who might be extremely handsome behind his dark sunglasses, sends a laconic wave and smirk in their direction.

“Good morning!” he shouts. His voice is smug and Enjolras instantly hates him. “We love what you’ve done with the place!”

Enjolras’ eyes narrow. “You know what?” he says to Feuilly, his voice dangerously calm, “I think I’m gonna go over there and say hi to our neighbors.”

“Bad choice, E.” Feuilly warns him, yawning. “Don’t let them bait you, man. That’s the entire reason that they do this: to get a fucking rise out of us. Just ignore them.”

“Feuilly, the light vandalism doesn’t bother me. The childish note doesn’t bother me. But what I can’t do is stand here and ignore the blatant waste of hundreds of yards of toilet paper. Do you have any idea how long this—” Enjolras angrily gestures to the mounds of white toilet tissue on the lawn—“could have provided for the most basic, necessary sanitary needs for a low income family?”

Feuilly just shakes his head. Even if he’d already consumed his morning coffee and was fully awake, he probably wouldn’t have had any idea what the hell Enjolras was talking about.

“Months, Feuilly! Possibly even a year! I can’t just stand idly by while those assholes waste our dwindling natural resources and veritably spit in the face of the struggling working class all for the sake of an immature prank!”
A bleary eyed Combeferre stumbles out onto the porch, clutching a mug of Enjolras’ freshly made coffee like his life depends on it, which might actually be the case. Combeferre has always been a bit of a lightweight and this morning’s hangover leaves him looking like he was run over by a freight train. His plaid pajama bottoms are untied and sit low on his hips, allowing a peek of hipbone between their waistband and his inside out t-shirt. Combeferre’ sandy hair sticks up in hedgehoggy tufts off the back of his head and his tired eyes squint behind his smudged glasses lenses, as if trying to figure out a particularly difficult puzzle.

“Why,” he begins sluggishly, “is Enjolras shouting about ‘dwindling natural resources’ at eight fifteen on a Monday morning?”

Courfeyrac shuffles out the door and joins him, wearing an even more pained expression and even lower slung pants.

“And why,”Courfeyrac says, “is he being so loud when he knows that his best friends in the world, who he loves very much even though he doesn’t say it nearly enough, are hung-over as shit?”

“And why,” Combeferre adds, “Is Enjolras even awake right now, when we all know perfectly well that he usually rolls out of bed at nine thirty on Monday mornings and barely makes it to his first class?”

“And why the fuck,”Courfeyrac has finally opened his eyes wide enough to see the condition of the front yard, “is our lawn white?”

The explanation of the Psi Mu prank doesn’t incite the same indignant rage in the two C’s as it did in Enjolras. They shrug, mumble something about boys being boys and simply begin picking up the toilet paper and shoving in into black Hefty bags that Feuilly has produced from inside the house.

Courfeyrac’s only form of retaliation is to send an overly cheerful wave across the street at the Psi Mu brothers, who are still watching smugly. “Thanks guys!” he shouts, “We were worried our recycling bins were going to be too empty this month! ‘Preciate it!”

He turns to Enjolras. “You can’t let them get under your skin, E,” Courfeyrac says as he starts skimming a layer of soggy toilet paper off the top of his inflatable pool. “Just turn the other cheek, be a bigger man and decide to—what the FUCK!!”

Courfeyrac cuts off his patronizing monologue and is staring, horrified, down into the water of his little pool, which is slightly more yellow in color than it was the previous afternoon and, floating on the surface, is what appears to be…

“Oh, shit. Is that shit? They shit in my pool. Those assholes,” Courfeyrac’s eyes get stormy and his mouth settles into a hard line. “Enjolras, let’s go.”

But Enjolras is already on the move and Courfeyrac tosses aside his bag of toilet paper and falls in behind him.

Combeferre looks desperately at Feuilly and then announces, “I’d better go get back up. BAHOREL!” Combeferre continues to shout for Bahorel as he dashes into the house and upstairs.

The brothers of Psi Mu rush to meet Enjolras and Courfeyrac at the edge of their front yard, letting their wooden front gate serve as a barrier between themselves and the enraged duo. The dark, handsome boy who had shouted to Enjolras earlier is in the front of their pack, the rest of the crew flanking him on both sides. One guy, small and pale and easy to miss, tries to make himself more
invisible by tucking in behind the leader as Enjolras and Courfeyrac stop and stand off against the larger group.

“Gentlemen, what can we do for you?” The dark haired guy drawls, raising one eyebrow in mock-concern. “You look like you’re having a shitty morning.”

Courfeyrac is the one who answers, stepping slightly in front of Enjolras and getting in the guy’s face. “What? The? Fuck?” Courfeyrac demands, his normal eloquence lost to his blinding rage at the desecration of his poor inflatable pool.

The guy doesn’t back down, he just continues smiling in that irritatingly confident way. “Is something wrong?” is all he says, as his pack of brothers tightens in around him, one particularly large guy toward the back crossing his meaty arms and glaring at Courfeyrac and Enjolras.

“Yes,” Enjolras pushes in front of Courfeyrac and gets closer to the guy’s smug face. “You demonstrated absolutely contempt for our valuable natural resources and blatantly wasted enough toilet paper to provide—”

“Priorities, E,” Courfeyrac tells him, slipping back in front of Enjolras and taking back his place in the dude’s face, “You took a shit in my pool. What the fuck, man?”

“Well,” purred the dark haired boy, “we just thought it seemed an appropriate welcome gesture, given that you’re a house full of pretentious assholes.”

Enjolras has to throw his arm across Courfeyrac’s chest in a bear hug to physically restrain him from putting his fist in the head Psi Mu’s face.

“You want a piece of this, bra? Come at me!” the guy shouts at Courfeyrac, his stereotypical verbal assault confirming Enjolras’ suspicions that this guy was the worst kind of clichéd douchebag. “You want some?”

“No, he doesn’t,” Bahorel’s gritty voice comes from behind Enjolras and Courfeyrac and Enjolras has never been happier to hear that cigarette roughened sound in his entire life. “But I do, dick. Just step out of your yard and let’s do this.”

Bahorel’s face has that manic, I-need-to-punch-something look that Enjolras normally associates with two o’clock am on at Saturday night out. But it clearly comes in handy on Monday mornings, too, because the Psi Mu’s take a step back en masse. Bahorel cracks all the knuckles on his right hand and they take another step.

Although Bahorel alone would have provided more than enough back-up for Enjolras and Courfeyrac, Combeferre’s summoning shouts woke up the entire frat, and everyone is rushing across the street to join the fray at the Psi Mu gate. Having achieved his objective of rallying the troops, Combeferre hurries back to take his usual place by Enjolras’ side. Feuilly has abandoned his passive attitude and is heading over, too, accompanied by Joly and Bossuet. Bossuet’s shirt is somewhat tangled over his head and Joly leads him by a free hand as he struggles to get it on properly.

Even Jehan has descended from his tower to rush to Enjolras’ aid. The soft-spoken poet could be surprisingly fierce when provoked, something they all learned last year when Prouvaire had flattened a football player for calling girl in their dorm fat. Jehan has a soft-spot for the downtrodden, and a mean right hook.

Speaking of downtrodden, Grantaire limps along after Jehan, looking like he’d been trampled by a
herd of wild horses. His messy bed hair sticks up in every direction and bits of Jehan’s flower crown are still clinging to a few of the wild curls. Grantaire has chosen not to put on a shirt and the left side of his torso is a violent collage of purple and navy blue bruises. But he wears the look of a man who has jumped into many a fight: his blue eyes are shining above tired circles and his mouth is turned up in grim smirk. The sight of this sanity-be-damned expression on top of the ugly injuries twists Enjolras’ heart and he wants nothing more than to run to Grantaire and pull him back, keeping his brave heart and battered body out of the altercation. But the best way to keep him safe is to stop the fight before it starts, so Enjolras is determined to solve this Psi Mu problem with words rather than the punch that he so wants to throw into their leader’s haughty face.

Pontmercy is the last ABX out of the house, followed closely by the dark-haired girl from the previous night, who is sporting morning-after hair and sticking to him like a shadow in the early morning light. Interesting. Enjolras didn’t peg Pontmercy as the type of guy who had either the skill or the guts to get a girl to spend the night. Based on the innocent manner in which Pontmercy is gaping at the brewing fight and Eponine’s tough sneer, Enjolras wonders if the girl maneuvered the overnight. Probably. She seems pretty shrewd.

Eponine pushes her way to the front of the crowd and addresses the leader directly. “Wow, Montparnasse. You’re being pretty ballsy for a little bitch who still owes my dad money.”

Montparnasse narrows his eyes at the tough little waif and dodges the accusation. “Got some new boyfriends, ‘Ponine? Surprised that they’re slumming around with the likes of you.”

She just shrugs. “What can I say? I’m moving up in the world. And I’ll be happy to leave you behind once and for all… after you’ve given me the grand you owe my father.”

“We’ll talk about that later, ‘Ponine,” Montparnasse hisses at her. He replaces his glare with a wide, insincere grin as he addresses the whole Alpha Beta Chi group. “Just a little welcoming prank, neighbors. Nothing to get your panties in a twist over.”

Enjolras leans forward, his nose almost touching Montparnasse’s over the gate. “If you ever come on our property again,” he growls, “We’ll have the cops over here so fast that—”

“You can’t just go around bullying people, Enjolras!” squeaks a voice from almost directly behind Montparnasse.

“What?” Enjolras’s train of thought has been derailed and he peers around the head Psi Mu, trying to get a glimpse of the speaker. “How do you know my name?”

The pale, beige boy who had taken refuge behind Montparnasse takes a trembling step out from his leader and glares up at Enjolras, attempting to look defiant despite his trembling chin. “Don’t pretend you don’t know me, Enjolras. Careful, ‘Parnasse. This guy is literally the worst.”

Enjolras stares blankly at the odd, neutral kid. He has absolutely no recollection of his name, voice or completely unmemorable face.

“It’s me, Enjolras! ME!”

Enjolras looks at Combeferre and Courfeyrac for help but they both shake their heads.

“How do you not remember me? I’m Claquesous!” The pale kid keeps pressing the issue and then lets out a squeak of frustration at Enjolras’ lack of recognition. At he sound of this noise, Courfeyrac’s face lights up in recognition.

“Oh, Squeak Pig!” Courfeyrac exclaims. “Enjolras, this is your old roommate, Squeak Pig.”
The kid’s face crumples in displeasure at the resurrection of the nickname. “Don’t call me that. It’s Claquesous. And you can’t mess with me anymore, Enjolras. I’ve got brothers now and they’ll stand up for me.”

Enjolras doesn’t dignify his former roommate’s existence with a response, he just ignores him and turns his focus back to Montparnasse. “Don’t let this happen again,” he says as he turns to cross the street back to ABX, the rest of the Amis preparing to follow. Enjolras notices the beer-related garbage strewn across the Psi Mu lawn and turns back around to fire one last volley at Montparnasse, “And recycle your cans! You’re a terrible world citizen!”

Montparnasse mutters something under his breath, not daring to make his threat out loud, as Bahorel is still watching him, daring him to incite some violence. Enjolras grabs the big man’s elbow and pulls him to the back of the ABX group. “Thanks, buddy,” Enjolras says softly to Bahorel as they make their way back home, “That was about to get really bad.”

Bahorel grins. “No problem, jefe. Always happy to be the muscle.”

They’ve caught up to Jehan and the slowly-moving Grantaire, who turns to Enjolras and shakes his head.

“You’re pretty incredible, Apollo.” Grantaire says appreciatively. “Out of all the things you could have said to that guy, you go with ‘You’re a terrible world citizen.’ That’s gonna be my new go-to insult when somebody doesn’t recycle their coffee cup, or drives a Humvee or shops at Walmart or…”

Enjolras isn’t sure if Grantaire is being sincere or making fun of him, so he just frowns slightly and keeps walking.

They are back to their porch and Grantaire is still talking. “Hey, speaking of coffee cup, nice travel mug you’ve got there.” Grantaire nods to Enjolras’ mason jar full of coffee with its distinctive ‘E’, which has been slowly cooling on the porch railing during the whole Psi Mu showdown.

Enjolras snatches it off the railing and informs Grantaire, “These are really eco-friendly. They reuse old glass jars, plus the lid and leather sleeve are made by local small business so it’s also supporting—“

Grantaire laughs. “I was giving you a compliment, E. I like it. It’s cool.”

“Oh.” Enjolras is pleased that he wasn’t being mocked. “Well, I could get you one, I mean, if you want. They sell them in the Café Musain, you know, that little coffee shop just off the Hill?”

Grantaire shakes his head. “Not familiar.”

“Oh, you should go there sometime. It’s great. It’s actually on the way to campus. If you’re going to class soon, we could walk together.”

That suggestion just fell out of Enjolras’ mouth but he loves it. Walking to class with Grantaire and stopping to buy him coffee on the way suddenly sounds like the greatest plan in the world. He is so smart to come up with such brilliant plans off the top of his head.

“He can’t, love. It’s time for his meds, plus R said that he’s taking this week off of classes, right, R?” Jehan reminds them, ruining everything.

Grantaire makes a face and then answers. “Yeah, I’m kinda taking the week off. The doctor recommended it and I figured that I’ve actually got excused absences for once so I might as well
use them, right?”

“But I could still walk to the coffee shop with you if you want—“ Grantaire’s face is hopeful and lovely and then Jehan steps in yet again to be a total ruiner.

“No, love, you should stay here. Joly’s probably got your meds ready and he said that you get a little groggy after taking them. I’ll make you breakfast and we’ll watch TV or something this morning. Plus, Enjolras walks really fast and I don’t think you could keep up. You wouldn’t like that. He gets very irritated when people fall behind.”

“I do not, Jehan!” Enjolras is lying a little bit here. He does get annoyed when people don’t walk with purpose. But he’d be patient with Grantaire. He really would.

“He’s probably right, E,” Grantaire gives in. “But I’ll catch you later? Are you back tonight?”

Enjolras explains about his weekly planning session with Combeferre and Courfeyrac every Monday night. He thinks that Grantaire looks disappointed, but he isn’t sure. He might just look tired. Sometimes tired and disappointed look an awful lot alike.

“Well, I guess I’ll see you…when I see you, Apollo.” Grantaire winks at him from under that nest of unruly black curls and then turns to saunter into the house. His plaid pajama pants sit low on his narrow hips and Enjolras does not notice that Grantaire has lower back dimples. He definitely does not notice that at all. And he certainly doesn’t think about them during the entire walk to campus.

###

R

After his morning dose of meds, Grantaire takes a cautious shower. Joly has tied a plastic shopping bag over his cast in order to keep it dry and Grantaire is beyond grateful that Enjolras has already left the house so he has no risk of being seen in this awkward, plastic-wrapped state. It’s a miracle that the situation didn’t get even more uncomfortable as Joly was overly concerned about Grantaire’s ability to shower on his own so soon in the recovery process and he practically demanded to help soap and scrub and rinse. Grantaire was terrified that this might actually be a thing that was going to happen, but luckily Bossuet asserted his boyfriend-veto to the shower assistance. And now Grantaire finds himself mercifully alone in the blue and white tiled shower stall furthest from the door.

A couple of light green bottles of bath products are sitting in the corner of the shower and Grantaire maneuvers his good right hand and plastic-wrapped left to awkwardly help himself to some shampoo. Who ever it belongs to won’t really mind missing a tiny bit of shampoo, just this once. Grantaire will go to the store (or perhaps send Pontmercy to the store) and buy his own products in the next day or two. The owner of the shampoo won’t even notice that any has gone missing.

And then the distinctive scent of the shampoo hits Grantaire’s nostrils and he almost falls over. He know exactly who owns this bottle of hair product. A heady mixture of oils—Grantaire thinks he smells peppermint and perhaps rosemary somewhere in the bouquet—that remind him of warm golden hair falling over smooth pale skin over in a hot car on a fall afternoon. And if Enjolras’ shampoo is in this shower, that could only mean that Enjolras was in this shower at some point in the morning. And if Enjolras was in the shower, that also means that Enjolras was naked. Enjolras was naked in the exact same place where Grantaire is currently standing with warm water pounding down on his own naked body. Oh, god.
His groin stirs a bit and Grantaire is even more relieved that Joly isn’t helping him with his shower, because the little Pre-Med student’s presence wouldn’t have been able to stop Grantaire’s body from reacting to the smell of Enjolras along with the detailed mental image that currently painting itself in his brain.

Grantaire is well aware that it is creepy and weird to jerk off in a shared shower stall. He never did that in the dorm or when he was showering at Eponine’s. But neither of those places smelled like the most perfect human being on the planet. And hey, it’s not like no one has every done that in this bathroom. It’s in a frat house, after all, and hundreds of guys have probably done that very thing in this very shower stall. What’s the old saying? When in Rome, do as the Romans do? He’s practically a frat boy now anyway, making this house Rome, right? All the blood in Grantaire’s body is obviously not going to his brain right now and he can’t quite think straight.

He forces his hands to stay away from his lower half, cranks on the cold water. He manages to finish his shower in only minor discomfort and is extremely proud of himself for getting all the way back to his own room and closing the door before giving in to the inevitable and doing as the Romans do.

###

After a couple of hours spent on his bed intermittently napping, pondering the likelihood of Enjolras buying him a coffee jar, checking his Facebook, deciding that Enjolras won’t buy him a coffee jar, Instagram stalking Courfeyrac and Jehan, hoping that Enjolras will actually stop at the Musain and buy him a coffee jar, and totally ignoring his stack of textbooks on the desk, Grantaire has had enough of being an invalid.

Joly recommended that he stay in bed, but it can’t hurt to wander downstairs and see what everyone else is up to. After the near-brawl that morning, everyone had dispersed off to their various morning classes, but the house has been filling up with the sounds of its residents arriving home for the past hour or so and Grantaire wants to know what they’re up to.

He wanders into the backyard and right into the middle of a pool party. Grantaire hadn’t had time to check out the backyard on the previous day, what with his visit to the emergency room and all, and he had no idea that it was practically a country club. A large kidney-shaped pool is sunk into the middle of the expansive yard, one side of it dominated by a diving board and water slide. A small stretch of decking separates it from a gigantic hot tub that is sized more appropriately for a resort hotel than backyard recreation.

Courfeyrac, his sorrows over his dearly departed kiddie pool already forgotten, floats happily on an inflatable mattress in the middle of this bigger, better version. Grantaire waves and him and ambles over, trying to nonchalantly glance around the yard to see whole else might be home.

“Hey, R!” Courfeyrac paddles over to the edge of the pool where Grantaire has sat down a dipped his feet in the edge of the water. “Glad you could make it to the land of the living, man.”

“Yeah, I’d had about enough of laying in bed, staring at my ceiling. Thought I’d see what else this place has to offer.” Grantaire nods at the yard appreciatively. “Pretty impressive, Courf.”

“I know, right? Feuilly said the we’ll have to drain the pool for winter in a couple of weeks, so might as well use it while we can, huh?”

“Uh, is it safe? From, you know, gross Psi Mu bodily fluids and stuff?”

Courfeyrac laughs. “Yeah, that was Joly’s first question. Feuilly swore that we’ve got security
cameras and motion sensors all over the yard, so there’s no way they could’ve gotten back here and fucked with it. Seemed good enough for Joly—“ It was true: Joly and Bossuet were up in the shallow end, Joly looking worried as Bossuet and Bahorel smacked each other with pool noodles—“so I figured it was good enough for me.”

Grantaire runs his good hand up through his hair and tries to make his next question as nonchalant as possible. “So, um… where is everybody?”

Courfeyrac raises his eyebrows. “Where is everybody?” He gestures to the yard, and, sure enough, almost all of the Amis are there. Jehan is tucked in a lounge chair under an enormous umbrella, his nose stuck in a thick book of Yeats. Combeferre has his feet dangling into the pool as he studies class notes on his iPad and Feuilly is loading chicken onto the grill. Even Eponine is present and accounted for in the hot tub; she keeps inching closer to Pontmercy as he, in turn, scoots further away. Grantaire wonders how many laps they’ll make before the end of the afternoon.

“Did you intend to ask where ‘everybody’ is, R, or did you mean another ‘E’ word?” Courfeyrac quips. Dammit. Courfeyrac totally knows. The pain meds must be screwing with Grantaire’s nonchalance. He’s usually so much sneakier than this. Luckily, Courfeyrac is distracted by Combeferre, who has set his iPad safely on a patio table and slipped into the pool to paddle over to the two of them.

“Hey, speaking of E,” Combeferre begins, running his hand up Courfeyrac’s calf.

“We weren’t!” Grantaire yelps and the two C’s look at him curiously.

“Anyway,” Combeferre continues, ignoring Grantaire’s outburst. “Did you text him, Cour?”

“Absolutely, I did.”

“Great.” Combeferre’s hand has moved up Courfeyrac’s body to his neck and gently massages its way into the dark curls as Combeferre pulls him down for a quick kiss before continuing, “Our meeting starts at six and I really want him here tonight.”

Courfeyrac isn’t listening to a word his boyfriend is saying and he cuts Combeferre off with another kiss, deeper this time. Grantaire takes this opportunity to excuse himself from their makeout sessions and plops into a lounge chair next to Jehan, who begins reading aloud to him from his volume of Yeats. The late fall sun is hot and Grantaire strips off the soft green t-shirt that he’s been wearing all day. He supposes that swim trunks would probably be more suitable poolside apparel, but his plaid pajama bottoms will have to do. He’s quickly relaxing into the chair and doesn’t want to run upstairs and change his pants.

The warm sun and the gentle voice of the little poet lull Grantaire back into a state of quiet contemplation as he forms a brilliant plan: if Enjolras is going to be back at six, then Grantaire will be-- wait for it!--patiently sitting on the couch in the front room when he gets home. Enjolras can’t help but look in the living room and then see him. Then Enjolras will come over, say hello and possibly give Grantaire a coffee jar. And then they’ll get married, buy a condo and adopt babies.

It is a simple plan, cunning in its brilliance.

###

E

Courfeyrac did text Enjolras early in the day, just like Combeferre had asked, but he texted him a picture of a baby fox pouncing on top of another baby fox with the caption that read “Surprise!
Buttsex!” Courfeyrac did not, in fact, text Enjolras that he and Combeferre would not be meeting him at the Musain that evening, as originally planned.

Which is why Enjolras is sitting at an empty table at the Café Musain at six o’clock p.m., tapping his foot impatiently and wondering where the hell the two C’s are. They always met here on Mondays, arriving at least ten minutes early so they can chat and then be ready to talk business promptly at six. Even when they were all living together at the homo-tel, they still came to the Musain to plan. It is their thing, their Monday night thing and they aren’t doing it. Enjolras doesn’t like this deviation from the norm, not even the tiniest bit.

He frowns and heads up to the little red-headed barista to order a coffee refill for his jar. The shelf behind her has a small selection of makeshift mugs similar to Enjolras’, some with plain leather sleeves, others with different letters embossed on them. Enjolras glances up at them as he approaches the counter.

###

The clock has long since passed six o’clock and Grantaire is tired of fake reading the copy of Ready, Player One that Feuilly has lent him. Every time he hears footsteps on the sidewalk outside or the slightest creak of the wooden porch, he buries his face in the book and tries to look casually appealing in his corner of the sofa. As if he just happened to be sexily snuggled up in a blanket and engaged in a good book when Enjolras arrives home.

Grantaire pulls the blanket tighter around him, sets the book aside and tries not to get overwhelmed by the high stakes he’s set for this coffee jar that he may or may not be receiving. He has nothing else to do, so he ponders the implication of the hypothetical purchase yet again.

If Enjolras bought him a jar, it would mean that he was thinking of Grantaire during the day. It could be possible that he just thought about Grantaire as he walked past that little coffee shop that he mentioned, or it could mean that he was thinking about Grantaire as much as Grantaire had been thinking about him. Well, almost as much as Grantaire had been thinking about him. There is no way that anyone could have been thinking about anything as much as Grantaire had been thinking about Enjolras and have still had the mental capacity to walk to class or purchase a fancy, hipster coffee jar.

Grantaire feels like a little girl, pulling petals off of a daisy and reciting “he loves me, he loves me not,” except that he is a grown man and his daisy is a piece of recycled glassware. If Enjolras brings one home, he likes Grantaire. If Enjolras doesn’t, he likes Grantaire not.

Basically, Grantaire has a lot riding on a simple mason jar.

###

Enjolras does not have a coffee jar in his hands when he bursts into the house shortly after seven o’clock. He does not see Grantaire’s deliberately casual pose on the couch. He does not even glance into the living room. He just heads directly to the basement, like a man on a mission.

Grantaire snuggles back into his blanket and pouts alone in the empty room. His brilliant plan had flaws and apparently Enjolras loves him not.

###
Enjolras doesn’t bother looking around as he slams through the front door of the house, he is zeroed in on finding the basement. And when he gets down there, it might get ugly. As he storms down the basement stairs, he glaringly reviews the text conversation he’d had with Courfeyrac and Combeferre after he’d shown up at the Musain for their weekly planning session and they hadn’t.

To Combeferre and Courfeyrac: At Musain. Where are you?

From Combeferre: At house. Courfeyrac told you that we couldn’t meet tonight.

To Combeferre and Courfeyrac: NOPE.

From Combeferre: COURF?

From Courfeyrac: Oops. But did you get my picture of the fox? Buttsex!

From Combeferre: Oh shit. So sorry! Courf is dead to me.

From Courfeyrac: Rude.

To Combeferre and Courfeyrac: Where are you?

From Courfeyrac: ABX exec brd mtg!!!

To Combeferre and Courfeyrac: Excuse me? Is that supposed to be “bird” or “board”?

From Combeferre: Board. We have to meet to prep for initiation next week and assign offices. Everyone is here in Members Room. Come!

To Combeferre and Courfeyrac: Where is Members Room?

From Courfeyrac: In ABX bsmnt. Come ovr. U can sign up to b Prez!!!!!!

To Combeferre and Courfeyrac: NO.

From Combeferre: Also, I forgot to tell you: we probably have to meet every night this wk to get stuff sorted out before Friday nite.

To Combeferre and Courfeyrac: Except Thursday, right?

From Combeferre: Except Thursday! We wouldn’t miss an Amis mtg.

From Courfeyrac: But we need to end thurs early. We got invited to sorority mixer at 10

To Combeferre and Courfeyrac: WTF??????

The door to the Member’s Room is closed, but Combeferre opens it quickly once Enjolras starts pounding on it. Combeferre looks vaguely afraid as Enjolras pushes past him into the room, taking stock of the situation through narrowed eyes. The Member’s Room is nothing special: just a dusty, windowless basement room with walls that are either dark wood-paneled or covered in floor-to-ceiling bookshelves. Two closets are set into one of the paneled walls; one is cracked open, revealing rows of folding chairs shoved inside, and the other secured tightly with padlock.

All of his friends are seated around a large wooden table, the surface of which is covered with three-ring binders, notepads and several encyclopedia-looking leather bound volumes.
Courfeyrac’s text was right: everyone is here, everyone except Grantaire, Marius and Feuilly. Enjolras didn’t really expect to find Grantaire down here planning frat stuff, but he does ask why Marius and Feuilly are absent.

Combeferre explains that Feuilly isn’t actually a member and Marius can’t be part of the Executive Board until he’s initiated in the spring. Their job this evening, Combeferre informs Enjolras as the latter prowls the room glaring at decades worth of composite pictures that cover the longest of the walls, is to assign executive offices so they’ll have a fully functioning board as soon as they initiate on Friday. He urges Enjolras to take a position, even if he doesn’t want to be the President.

“There are plenty of other options,” Joly reads from one of the three ring binders, “Vice President…”

“No.”

“Treasurer?”

“No.”

“Secretary? Scholarship Director? Pledge Educator?”

“No, no and no.”

“How about Social Director?”

“No… oh, wait. Social Justice Director?” Enjolras is suddenly a bit interested.

“No, E,” Courfeyrac sighs. “‘Social.’ Just normal social activities. Parties, formals, sorority mixers —”

“Oh. Ew,” Enjolras scrunches his perfect nose up in disgust. “No, thank you. I’ll pass on taking an office, if you don’t mind.”

“Okay, suit yourself, Enjolras,” Combeferre gives in. “You don’t need to do anything but initiate next week. But, as for tonight… it’s just that… um…”

Courfeyrac finishes what Combeferre can’t. “You’re not allowed to be in here tonight. Executive Board only. So, bye!”

Enjolras is so stunned that he can’t even protest as Courfeyrac takes him by the elbow and leads him out of the room, depositing him neatly in the hallway.

“Sorry, Enjolras,” Combeferre apologizes as stands in the doorway, practically blocking Enjolras from coming back in. “We really need to get some executive stuff sorted out before Friday night. There are just a lot of balls in the air right now—”

“Yeah, there are!” Courfeyrac shouts.

“Courf, not helping!”

“Sorry, not sorry!”

“It shouldn’t be more than a few hours tonight. We’ll see you in a bit, Enjolras,” Combeferre looks horribly uncomfortable as he says this, but that doesn’t stop him from shutting the door in Enjolras’ face.
That actually just happened.

Enjolras has no idea what they are all up to in there and he hates being left out. Not that he cares, because he totally doesn’t care. Whatever. Enjolras has things to do. Frowning, he stomps up the stairs to his room and flips open his political science book to the assigned reading for the week. Which he is already did this afternoon. Same with criminal law, business ethics and biology.

He’s already done the reading for his classes twice over earlier today in order to make sure that he’d have planning time tonight, time that his friends are now using to lock themselves in some stupid fraternity meeting room being stupid fraternity boys planning stupid fraternity stuff without him. What is he supposed to do?

In his zeal that afternoon, he’d also written and revised his speech for the meeting at the Musain on Thursday. Enjolras takes the next hour to review it (which doesn’t help, it’s already perfect) and then he signs every online petition he can find and even organizes his sock drawer. The socks have been folded, rolled together and arranged by color, which didn’t take as much time as he’d hoped because all of the socks are black.

Enjolras is bored.

Frowning even harder, he stomps back down the stairs and angrily flops onto the large brown sofa, landing on his back with his legs draped over one couch arm.

A throat clears gently behind him and Enjolras tips his head back slightly, catching an upside down glimpse of Grantaire snuggled into the couch behind him. The artist is curled into a blanket in the joint of the couch, where it shifts from being a normal sofa to an extended L-shaped chaise.

“Sorry,” Enjolras says, pulling his legs over the arm and sitting up like a normal person, “I didn’t expect you to be here.” Since Feuilly and Marius were notably absent from the house, Enjolras just assumed that Grantaire was out somewhere with them, avoiding the stupid clubhouse meeting in the basement. He should have known better, though. Grantaire is looking slightly less wrecked than the previous night but still weak and tired. “Should you be upstairs resting or something?” Enjolras asks.

“Meh,” Grantaire shrugs noncommittally, then grins, “I was up in my room, like, all day. I figured I might as well come out and try my hand at this fraternity house thing. So… what exactly does one do for fun around here?”

Enjolras has absolutely no answer to that question. His idea of fun is homework, which he has done, and getting into debates with his friends, which is impossible because they are all locked away behind a secret door doing secret things. This is a whole new world to him. “That’s why I’m down here, I guess,” he confesses, “I have no idea how to operate here.”

The television looms in front of them, like a giant flat-screened challenge. Grantaire gestures to it. “Wanna try out the technology?” he asks, sliding cautiously forward out of the crack of the sofa, shrugging off the knit blanket that has been wrapped around him and Enjolras loses his words for a moment. Grantaire is shirtless. He has no shirt on.

“You’re not wearing a shirt,” Enjolras points out helpfully.

“True fact,” Grantaire replies as he reaches for one of the Xbox controllers on the table.

“Why aren’t you wearing a shirt?” Enjolras presses, as if the meaning of life might be concealed in Grantaire’s answer.
“I got hot.”

“Oh. But you were wrapped in a blanket.”

“Then I got cold.”

“Oh. Why didn’t you go upstairs?”

“Didn’t feel like climbing the stairs.”

“Oh.” Seems like a reasonable explanation for not wearing a shirt, but does not change the fact that Grantaire is not wearing a shirt.

Grantaire maneuvers the game menu and selects characters for the both of them to play. Things go fairly well for about fourteen seconds and then Enjolras realizes he can’t make his character walk. While Grantaire’s avatar is busy running through a space station and shooting aliens, Enjolras’ robot-looking Spartan thing gets stuck running into a wall for an uncomfortable amount of time, causing him to throw his controller across the room in frustration.

“Easy, Apollo,” Grantaire chides him, “It takes more than five minutes to master walking.”

He is correct. Under Grantaire’s patient instruction (“Okay, now press the Left Thumbstick backward to back up. No, that was the D-Pad. No, that’s the Right Thumbstick. Please stop yelling at me.”) it takes Enjolras a full twenty minutes to perfect his walking technique, and then another ten to get used to aiming and firing. By the time the others emerge from the Members Room an hour and a half later, Enjolras is picking off enemy aliens and pegging orders at Grantaire.

Combeferre looks at them curiously as he passes by. “Having fun?”

“No,” Enjolras growls, still focused on the game. “I should have been planning our meeting, not decimating a fictional alien race in a stupid videogame—dammit, R, I said to cover me!”

Enjolras’ character has been killed while Grantaire was distracted by Joly taking his temperature.

“Sorry, E. Just re-spawn and we’ll give this mission another run?”

Enjolras tosses his controller on the sofa and stands up, stretching his long legs. “Nah, I should call it a night. Thanks, R.”

“Wanna play again tomorrow?”

Enjolras shakes his head. “I should really work on some stuff for this Thursday. I’ll have to pass.”

The following evening, Enjolras makes good on his promise and totally works on his meeting agenda for Thursday… for an hour. And then he finds himself back on the couch with Grantaire, who is once again shirtless.

“Do you not own a shirt?” Enjolras complains as they start up the game. “Is that what’s going on here? Do you need me to buy you a shirt?”

“I do own a shirt, thank you very much,” Grantaire replies, “but I find that sleeves restrict my alien-shooting abilities. I work better unrestricted by the confines of clothing. You should see me when I paint. Totally naked.”

Enjolras almost chokes.
On Wednesday night, Enjolras stares at his laptop screen for ten whole minutes before slamming it shut and bounding down the stairs to join Grantaire, who is wearing a button down plaid shirt. A red, button-down plaid shirt that looks suspiciously like Enjolras’ favorite, which was buried in the bottom of his laundry bin the last time he checked.

“Nice shirt,” he says to Grantaire. “Reminds me of one that I used to have.”

“Huh,” Grantaire says, stretching his arms out in front of him and admiring the sleeves, “red plaid must be super ‘in’ right now.”

Enjolras makes a big show of leaning past Grantaire to reach for his controller and obviously sniffing him.

“Kinda smells like mine, too,” he says.

“ Weird.” Grantaire grins. He then fails at hitting any of his targets for the next twenty minutes.

“You really are terrible at this game with a shirt on,” Enjolras informs him, eyes glued to the screen.

“Sorry, chief.” Grantaire shrugs out of the red plaid and tosses it at Enjolras. His aim improves immediately.

During these gaming sessions, Enjolras sits to Grantaire’s right side, his less-tattooed side. While Grantaire’s left arm (and much of his left torso) is covered in colorful designs and words, his right side is nearly bare: there is one small line of text running up his forearm and a double set of the letter R on his right wrist. Enjolras is dying to know and now seems as good a time as any to ask.

“What’s up with your tatts?” Enjolras inquires, as the game goes into story mode and he and Grantaire have a moment talk without fear of getting shot by vicious aliens.

“Which part, E? I’ve got a lot of ‘em.” Grantaire replies, reaching down and grabbing his beer off the table. He’s getting weaned off of his meds and Joly has lifted the ban on alcohol, provided Grantaire drinks in moderation and promises not to operate any heavy machinery.

“I don’t know? The whole story?” Enjolras takes a drink of his own beer, which is some sort of local microbrew that he doesn’t completely hate. At least it isn’t Courfeyrac’s Pabst Blue Ribbon

“Well, we don’t have an eternity, so I won’t tell you about all of them, but here’s the gist—“ Grantaire explains that he designs most of his tattoos, draws them on his own arm or chest and then at tattoo artist buddy of his does the actual ink work. “That’s why most of them are on my left side. I’m right handed.”

“What about your right side?”

“I save my right side for the special stuff. Stuff that I never want to forget.”

“And what’s special about those two?” Enjolras presses, pointing to the ink on Grantaire’s forearm and wrist. His fingers get close to the skin, but they don’t actually make contact. Enjolras has still never touched Grantaire, not even in passing or by accident, and it seems like the longer they go without physical contact, the bigger deal it becomes. Enjolras feels like he should just reach his hand out and touch the other man’s arm, just to get it over with… but he doesn’t. The distance between them is agonizing, but exhilarating.

Grantaire looks at Enjolras out of the corner of his eye, and then flicks his gaze back toward the
Enjolras is about to keep pushing for more information, but the in-game movie ends and he and Grantaire find themselves on an alien planet, instantly besieged by enemy fire. A story for another time, then.

###

R

On Thursday night, there are no videogames and there is no Executive Board meeting. Enjolras personally herds everyone out of the ABX house to ensure that they are all headed to the Musain for the weekly *les Amis* meeting. Even Feuilly and Eponine are swept along. Grantaire could have begged off sick, but he hasn’t left the house in days and he’s feeling a bit stir crazy. Plus, he really wants to see Enjolras in action.

All of Enjolras’ friends speak of his fervor at meetings in the sort of reverent tones that are usually reserved for ancient deities: “amazing,” “brilliant,” “beautiful and terrible as the dawn,” although that last one was courtesy of Courfeyrac and Grantaire is pretty sure it is a quote from the Lord of the Rings. In any case, Grantaire can’t wait. He’d pay good money to watch Enjolras read the phone book out loud, he’s certainly not going to miss seeing him speak at his own meeting.

The Café Musain has a small backroom that has a standing reservation for *les Amis* on Thursday nights. Although billed as a coffee shop, the Musain does serve wine and beer and Courfeyrac makes a stop at the counter to pick up a couple of bottles of red wine for the meeting.

“Meetings are great and all,” Courfeyrac tells Grantaire as they walk up the stairs to the backroom together, Courfeyrac’s arms laden with wine bottles, “but everything gets so much better when you’ve got a buzz on.”

Grantaire couldn’t agree more. He’d be completely off his meds by Friday and he was planning on getting well and truly drunk at the party following the initiation that night.

As Combeferre and Enjolras confer in the corner, Courfeyrac starts opening wine bottles and pouring glasses. Grantaire looks over at Joly, who nods at him sternly and holds up one finger. Grantaire would like to interpret that as “one bottle” rather than “one glass,” but Joly glares at him and Grantaire decides not to push it.

Grantaire takes a sip of the red and takes stock of the room. The little space is dimly lit by a single overhead fixture, but Jehan has made up for the lack of electrical light by supplementing it with a small candle on each round café table.

Most of the attendees are the guys from the Alpha Beta Chi house, but there are a few unfamiliar faces. Combeferre had told Grantaire that *les Amis* were always accepting new members and that the meetings were open to anyone interested in social justice and implementing real change. Courfeyrac is making the rounds among the new faces, introducing himself and offering drinks.

At the front of the room, Enjolras and Combeferre finish their conference and Combeferre sits down at a small square table, while Enjolras stands at his side, slipping off his black overcoat. Grantaire is surprised to see that he’s wearing the red plaid shirt which, based on its slightly rumpled appearance, hasn’t been washed. Grantaire wonders if it smells like a combination of himself and Enjolras. He has a moment to take another sip of wine and wonder what the mix of his and Enjolras’ scents would actually smell like and then his brain stops functioning because Enjolras is standing on the table.
Grantaire forgets where he is, forgets who he’s with and might have actually forgotten his own name for a moment. He is so captivated by Enjolras that there isn’t room for anything else. Enjolras is speaking in low, measured tones that fill the room with their pleasant, intoxicating hum despite the lack of aggressive volume. He speaks of oppression, broken government, the rights of the people. Under the soft candle light, he looks like a man out of time; someone who should be leading revolutions and changing countries, casting down Caesar or standing up to the redcoats in colonial Boston.

The wine must be going to Grantaire’s brain, because he doesn’t hear a word that Enjolras says during the entire hour. He just sits there, basking in the literal golden glow of the speaker and drinking in the intoxicating sound of his thrumming voice.

Finally, after what seems an eternity of bliss, the meeting ends. Jehan blows out the candles, the bottles are carried out and the group exits the backroom and winds their way through the front of the Musain.

Enjolras finds his way to Grantaire. The spell has been broken when they stepped out of the candlelit backroom and Enjolras no longer looks like a 18\textsuperscript{th} century revolutionary, but he’s still lovely. He looks at Grantaire with what almost appears to be apprehension.

“So? What did you think?” Enjolras asks.

Grantaire couldn’t have repeated a word that Enjolras had said during the meeting, not if his life depended on it, but his answer to the question is honest nonetheless. “You were brilliant, Apollo.”

“Thanks,” Enjolras looks grateful and almost relieved. And then irritated, “Also, don’t call me Apollo.”

“Sorry, Apollo,” Grantaire smiles as they walk past the counter to the front door. Enjolras glares, but he can’t repress the tiny smile that forces its way out of the corner of his mouth.

As they are about to exit the Musain, a voice calls out Enjolras’ name and they both turn. It is the small, red-headed barista and she’s waving one hand at Enjolras and digging around under the counter with the other.

“Hey! I almost forgot,” she tells Enjolras as she pulls a lumpy, brown-paper wrapped package out from under the cash register. “This got dropped off this morning for you. Constantine said that he made it as fast as he could. And that’s totally something, considering that it usually takes him forever to fill custom orders.”

She hands Enjolras the package and then continues wiping down the countertops. “Good night, guys.”

Enjolras thanks her and then passes the package off to Grantaire as soon as they get outside. “Here, I got you this.”

It takes Grantaire forever to peel off the brown wrapping paper with his one good hand, but that give Enjolras time to explain. “I came in here the other day, but they didn’t have an ‘R’ one. They had ‘G,’ but that didn’t feel right, so I had them custom order it from the leatherworker who makes the sleeves. Is it okay?”

Grantaire managed to rip open the paper to reveal a mason jar coffee cup, with a leather sleeve embossed with a big, bold letter “R.” It’s more than okay.
“It’s… perfect,” he manages to say. Enjolras and Grantaire walk home in silence behind the rest of the ABX boys, the inches of empty space between their bodies more electric than ever.

###

The first official meeting of the new membership of Alpha Beta Chi is held on the following night, Friday, in the Members Room, the locked closet has been opened up to reveal weird-looking ceremonial accouterments as well as several boxes of what appear at first glance to be white sheets. A representative from ABX nationals has flown in conduct a brief initiation ceremony and hold general elections.

Everyone is getting ready for this except for Grantaire, Feuilly and Marius, who take their cue to leave the house as soon as the national rep starts passing out gold lame laurel leaf crowns and giving them instructions on how to fold the white sheets into togas. Feuilly has secured a fake ID for Marius, and he and Grantaire are going to try to sneak the little pledge into the Corinth, a student bar around the corner.

Courfeyrac promises to text them once the ceremony is over so they can come back to the house for what he claims will be “the party of the century.” Grantaire secretly hopes it doesn’t get too insane. This is his first night completely off his pain medication and he fears his alcohol tolerance might have dropped in the last week. The last thing he wants is to get completely shit-faced and do something stupid in front of Enjolras.

Speaking of Enjolras, Grantaire spots him on his way out the front door and shoots him a grin as he passes by. Enjolras looks frustrated and frowns in return; he’s wrestling to get his toga to stay draped properly. It keeps slipping down over his shoulder and baring his chest.

“Wanna rethink that Apollo nickname?” Grantaire asks, “The whole Mount Olympus look is working for you.”

“I will take this toga and shove it down your throat, R, if you aren’t careful,” Enjolras growls, yanking the ends of the cloth over his other shoulder and succeeding only in getting his head stuck.

“Hey, if that means that I get to see you in your manties again, I’ll take it. What color underwear does one wear with a white toga? Surely not red—“

“Please,” Enjolras is begging by now, “please go. This is humiliating enough without having witnesses.”

“All right, all right. We’ll get out of your pretty blond hair. And I’ll delete the pics I already put up on Instagram—“ Enjolras pales “—Kidding, dude. I’m kidding. I wouldn’t put them out for the world to see. I’m totally keeping those all to myself.”

The other soon-to-be members of the frat file down past the arguing duo in the front hall. The run the gamut of appropriateness in their ensembles, from Combeferre, who looks dignified even draped in bedclothes, to Bossuet, who has his sheet uncomfortably bunched up on his shoulder and precariously secured by a safety pin. A few drops of blood belie the difficulty he had working with the pin.

Courfeyrac twirls around, admiring the way the white sheet settles around his legs. “These are awesome, you guys. Super comfy, tons of ventilation around my junk.”

Everyone grimaces except for Combeferre, who turns a little pink at the mention of Courfeyrac’s junk.
Enjolras growls at him from underneath his toga, which has once again managed to tangle itself over his face. “Courf, these are terrible. The second this ceremony is done tonight, I’m taking this off and burning it in the fireplace. Never again, guys, never again.”

“I don’t think so, Enjolras. These are amazing. I think the first thing I’m gonna do after I’m sworn in as president tonight is declare a mandatory toga day every week. ‘Toga Tuesday’ has a nice ring to it, don’t you think.”

Enjolras only has one eye peeking out the armhole of his toga, but it is enough to glare at Courfeyrac.

Courfeyrac returns the look coolly. “Unless you’d rather be president. If you were president, you could burn all the togas you want, whenever you want. You could make toga burning a mandatory pre-meeting activity. Think about it, E…”

“No, thank you. I’m quite sure I made my stance on the issue clear. If I have to endure a weekly toga night in order to stay out of fraternity leadership, then I’ll do it. I won’t be happy, but I’ll do it.”

“Fine,” Courfeyrac snaps. “I give up! I’ll be the president, Enjolras. I’ll be the most presidential president that has ever presidented in the history of the presidency. And you’ll sorry. You’ll Be. Sorry.”

With that, Courfeyrac stomps into the Members Room, followed by the remainder of les Amis and, finally and with great reluctance, Enjolras himself. An hour later, they all emerge as fully-fledged brothers of Alpha Beta Chi.

Chapter End Notes

These are the mason jar mugs, btw.
http://www.holdsterusa.com/
The initiation party on Friday night might have gotten a little out of hand.

This theory is entirely based on the fact that Grantaire wakes up on Saturday morning on the sofa in the front room of the Alpha Beta Chi house with an aching face, a girl’s name scrawled on his arm in black sharpie and, most troubling of all, with Enjolras’ red plaid shirt draped over his face. The theory is not, however, based on any actual memories that Grantaire has of the previous night because those are few, far between and extremely fuzzy.

He clearly remembers returning to the fraternity after the initiation ceremony ended, he remembers Courfeyrac jamming a beer bong in his face and pouring out massive shots of tequila and then everything else has been reduced to flashes of blurry consciousness: Bahorel insisting he could jump from the roof into the pool, a pair of empty swim trunks floating in the hot tub, Pontmercy balancing precariously on his hands on top of a keg as he did his first keg stand. Enjolras’ blue eyes narrowed in an icy glare. More shots of tequila. A girl’s hand tucked into the waistband of his jeans.

The house is dim in the predawn light. Grantaire lifts his alcohol-weighted head from the soft brown couch cushions to glance out the window and sees that the sky is still dark, a deep green speckled with fading stars. Only the slightest hint of warmth at the horizon signaling the impending sunrise. Grantaire drops his head back and winces at the impact. His head aches, his face hurts and he is exhausted. His body didn’t wake him up at this god-awful hour because it’d had enough sleep, it had merely allowed him to regain consciousness when enough alcohol had finally seeped out of his system to let his brain function.

He rolls off the couch and begins to pick his way through the detritus of the previous night’s festivities. Empty pizza boxes sit on the floor by the sofa and half-filled red Solo cups are scattered around the living room- on the coffee table, on the videogame cupboard, on the steps to the entryway. Grantaire hears a soft snoring sound and glances over at the other portion of the sofa: a dark shape is curled up under a throw blanket and the spill of deep brown waves identifies the shape as Eponine. Grantaire is surprised to find her down here, not in Pontmercy’s room.
Something teases at the edge of his brain, a reason that Eponine didn’t stay with Marius last night. A fight? Grantaire can’t remember. He may be awake, but he is far from sober.

He slowly lurches up the stairs to the rooms on the second floor and makes his way down the dark hall to his own suite. The door to Enjolras’ room, just past his own, is wide open and Grantaire loses the fight to not go and peek in. He really can’t help himself. Images of a displeased Enjolras from the previous night float in and out of his memory and Grantaire wants to look at him in the flesh, just for a moment. Something about last night makes him think that he and Enjolras might not be on very good terms when the day actually dawns, so Grantaire could use a look at his face while it is peacefully sleeping and not angry.

The lump on Enjolras’ bed is wrapped up in blankets and turned away from the door, so Grantaire lightly pads into the room, trying to remain as quiet as possible. He gets as close to the bed as he dares and then peeks down… at tangle of long red curls and a decidedly female face. It’s the bartender from the Corinth.

“What the hell?” he whispers. Grantaire’s eyes search the bed for another shape, an Enjolras-shape, but the bartender is the bed’s only occupant. He breathes a sigh of relief. Enjolras didn’t hook up with this girl. Or if he did, Grantaire’s drunk brain is cruel this morning, he didn’t stay and snuggle.

Grantaire is seized with the urge to search the wrecked house from top to bottom to locate his missing Apollo, but he hasn’t taken more than two steps away from the bartender-filled bed before his head starts spinning. He figures he’s got somewhere between sixty and ninety seconds to find a place to lie down before his alcohol clouded body forces him down on the nearest piece of furniture or patch of floor.

Keeping one hand on the wall for support, Grantaire manages to make it back to his own suite without falling over. Bahorel’s door is open a crack and the thick snores pouring out of it assure Grantaire that his suitemate survived his leap from the roof to the pool. He pulls the door shut, although it does little to muffle the sound of the snores, and crosses the common room to his own bedroom. Before Grantaire flicks the light switch off, he notices dozens of drawings on paper torn from his own sketchpad scattered around the room. The same face is present on each one: a girl with huge, angelic eyes and light hair. Each rendition of the face is slightly different, as if Grantaire was trying to get the details correct.

He has a vague recollection of repeatedly sketching that face and seeing it briefly in the flesh, but he isn’t sure if it is from the party or before. Grantaire thinks she might be connected to Pontmercy, but can’t quite remember how. And he has absolutely no time to ponder the mystery at the moment, as his tired brain needs to focus its rapidly diminishing energy on navigating him safely to his own bed.

Grantaire makes it into his own room, but he doesn’t get in his bed. He can’t. It’s occupied. This figure isn’t curled up toward the wall; it is sprawled out across the top of the comforter, red briefs standing out against white skin, golden curls glimmering in the cold predawn light that seeps through the open curtains. Enjolras is asleep in Grantaire’s bed.

“What the actual fuck?” Grantaire groans before his body gives out and he collapses on the floor, snuggled up in a ball with Enjolras’ red shirt still clutched in his hand. And that is where Enjolras finds Grantaire a couple of hours later, when he almost steps on his head.

E

Enjolras wakes up disoriented and wonders for a moment if he’d fallen through a looking glass. He
is in a room that feels like his room and a bed that looks like his bed, but something isn’t right. The bed is up against the wrong wall and the sheets are… weird. The stripes are green instead of red. He wonders how someone managed to change the color of the pinstripes and flip his room before the actual, logical answer is finally able to break through the hangover fog that still sits thickly around his brain.

These are not his sheets and this is not his bed. The sheets look familiar because he bought them and the room is backwardly familiar because it’s the one that shares a wall with his own. Grantaire’s room.

Oh, shitfuck.

Although Enjolras stepped past his self-imposed alcohol limits the previous night and allowed himself to get properly wasted, he remembers everything. He finds that recalling last night, however, is a bit like traveling on an express subway train- most everything is a noisy blur but every so often he'll catch a glimpse of a clear memory, like a station that speeds by too quickly. And sometimes he’s lucky enough for the train to stop at a crystal clear moment.

One of those perfectly lucid memory stations is of himself interrupting Grantaire, who was mid-conversation with a skinny brunette sorority girl at the time, and suggesting rather brusquely that Grantaire should probably go to bed. But Grantaire had declined, said something about being on a mission and turned back to the girl to continue to show her something in his sketchbook.

Enjolras had replied with a retort along the lines of, “Fine. If you won’t use your bed, then I will.” The logic behind that statement had seemed perfectly clear at the moment, but that reasoning had been influenced by at least eight beers and a couple of shots. And now that the alcohol has (mostly) left his blood stream, Enjolras can’t remember exactly why taking Grantaire’s bed had been a good idea.

There was something about the way the girl had been looking at Grantaire that Enjolras hadn’t liked. He hadn’t liked it one bit. He also didn’t appreciate Grantaire showing off his sketchbook in an obvious attempt to impress her. It seemed that Enjolras that Grantaire and the brunette were well on the way to hooking up that night, and that was absolutely not okay with him.

As he stares at the ceiling of Grantaire’s room, Enjolras thinks that his logic went something like this:

A. Grantaire was planning to hook up with the sorority girl.
B. Grantaire was likely going to take her upstairs to his room for the aforementioned hook-ups.
C. Hooking up requires a bed.
D. Grantaire could not take the sorority girl back to his room for hook-ups if his bed was occupied.
E. Therefore, Enjolras needed to be in Grantaire’s bed to prevent the hook-ups.
F. For some reason, Enjolras also needed to take off his clothes.

That was a dumb plan, Enjolras realizes clearly in the bright light of day. The house has several beds that could have been commandeered by Grantaire and the girl. Oh god, they could have even gone to Enjolras’ own, unoccupied bed. That would probably serve him right for being a stupid, drunk, cock-blocking idiot. Enjolras vaguely thinks of that Alanis Morissette song and wonders if this scenario fits into the actual definition of irony. He thinks it does, but he’ll have to check with Jehan later. Jehan is the expert at all things literary.
Enjolras curls up against the wall and rests his forehead against the smooth painted surface. On the other side of that wall sits his own bed, a near-mirror image of this one. But instead of a lonely, hung-over blond curled into a sad fetal position, it might contain a sleepy, satisfied black-haired artist wrapped around a brunette sorority girl with terrible judgment. That thought makes Enjolras want to vomit.

Well, that thought and the tequila and beers from the previous night. Enjolras throws his legs over the side of the bed in preparation for a mad dash to the bathroom. Thankfully, he happens to glance at the floor before slamming his feet down, and he freezes. A sleeping Grantaire is snuggled up with what appears to be Enjolras’ favorite plaid shirt against his chest, breathing peacefully, and blissfully unaware of the foot that is paused in the air less that an inch from his face.

Enjolras sits back and tucks his feet up onto the bed. The urge to vomit has subsided and, unbeknownst to him, the smallest of smiles appears in the corner of his mouth.

R

“Wakey, wakey, eggs and bakey!” Courfeyrac is perched on the countertop looking suspiciously perky when Grantaire finally makes it downstairs at the crack of noon.

“Courfeyrac, I’m going to murder you if you keep talking that loud.” Grantaire growls as he pours himself a cup of coffee and then eases his aching body down at the kitchen table.

“No, you’re not, because we’re making you breakfast,” Courfeyrac replies. He’s dumping vodka into a pint glass while merrily banging his dangling feet against the cabinets. He is nowhere near the stove.

Combeferre, who actually is standing over the stovetop tending to a couple of pans that sizzle and smell amazingly greasy and delicious, flips over some bacon strips, and corrects his boyfriend, “Actually, Courf, I think I’m making breakfast. You’re just making noise.”

“And drinks. I’m making noise and drinks. Breakfast drinks are an important part of a balanced, hung-over breakfast,” Courfeyrac says, adding a stalk of celery to the liquid concoction he’d been creating and then hopping off the counter to set the enormous Bloody Mary down in front of Grantaire with a bow.

“That explains why you’re so chipper this morning, Courf.” Grantaire’s words are sarcastic, but he takes a sip of the cocktail anyway. He instantly starts to feel better.

Courfeyrac and Combeferre continue to cook breakfast and bicker good-naturedly as Grantaire stares into the dark red depths of his Bloody Mary and thinks, just thinks, desperately trying to fit together the puzzle pieces of last night.

The previous evening had started off so well. He, Feuilly and Marius had vacated the ABX house so the others could participate in their super-secret, members-only, toga-mandatory initiation. They’d had no problem getting the underage Pontmercy into the over-21 bar, despite the fact that the kid was practically having a heart attack as they’d waited in line to have their ID’s checked. The bouncer had barely glanced at the fake driver’s license before stamping his hand and waving them inside.

Once inside the bar, Grantaire behaved himself quite nicely. He’d only had two beers and a single shot spread out over the two hours that they were there. Pontmercy, true to form, had panicked when asked what he’d like to drink and ordered an Amaretto Sour. The pretty, red-haired bartender cocked one eyebrow at the request, but turned to the well without comment to hunt down the
“Jesus, Marius,” Grantaire admonished once the bartender was out of earshot, “you’re gonna give yourself away if you keep ordering shit like that.”

“It’s what my great-aunt always gets,” Marius replied sheepishly.

When the bartender returned with Marius’ drink, complete with decorative cherry, Feuilly requested four shots of Jamison (one for each of them and one for her) and handed her a credit card to start a tab.

“Thanks for the drink,” she smiled, taking the black Visa and setting out four shot glasses, and then she noticed the name on the card. “Whoa. Alpha Beta Chi, huh? You’ve got pretty good manners for a bunch of fraternity brothers.”

“We’re just the entourage,” Feuilly told her and explained the initiation situation as the four of them knocked back their shots. Grantaire felt instantly warmer and more at ease. Pontmercy looked a bit shocked at the strength of the whiskey and washed it down by guzzling his Amaretto Sour. The bartender moved to make him a second, but Grantaire and Feuilly insisted that she serve him something a little less elderly.

“I think he can handle a rum and coke,” she decided for him.

By the time Courfeyrac’s text had buzzed in (“Get back here! Party starts now! Beeeeeeeeeer!”), Marius was delightfully tipsy off of three drinks, Grantaire had a pleasant, controlled buzz going on and Feuilly had slipped the bartender, Musichetta, their address and invited her to the party.

“I don’t know, kitten,” she’d said, when Feuilly told her the cross streets of the ABX house, “I feel like I get enough unwanted attention from frat boys at work.”

Feuilly just laughed at this. “Trust me, lady, there is no frat house on earth where you’re less in danger of getting harassed. You’ll probably have to compete with this guy—“ he jabs his thumb in Grantaire’s direction—“for attention.”

“Well, he is pretty cute,” she said, grasping the implications, “I doubt I’ll get any admirers at all with this one around. I strangely like the sound of that.” Musichetta promised to try and stop by after her shift and blew them a couple of air kisses as the three guys pushed their way through the crowded bar.

“What was that about?” Grantaire asked Feuilly when they were out on the street, which was marginally quieter than the bar but not by much. Excited groups of college kids shuffled in packs on their way to or from the various bars that lined 13th Street, the main thoroughfare of the Hill. Grantaire tried to stay at Feuilly’s side but had to keep dodging staggering sorority girls in short skirts and skimpy tops, all of them way too underdressed for the cool September night air. “What did you mean about her competing with me?”

“Well, R, in case you hadn’t noticed, most of the guys in the house are gay—Careful, Marius!” Feuilly pulls Pontmercy away from the curb, where the kid was trying to balance on the edge, skinny arms outstretched like a tightrope walker.

“Yes, Feuilly, I had indeed noticed that. But pretty much all of them are dating each other, so that doesn’t really put me in the equation, now does it?”

“Jehan is always playing with your hair!” Pontmercy was now bouncing exuberantly in front of
them, his face toward his friends and his back to oncoming foot-traffic in an absurd version of drunk-idiot chicken.

“Marius, don’t be dumb. He plays with everyone’s hair. That’s what Jehan does.” Grantaire tried to phrase the next part carefully, strategically… but instead blurted out a series of semi-coherent questions, “But there isn’t anyone else, right? I mean, in the house? Who’s interested in me? I mean, that would be crazy, right? Right?”

“Come on, R,” Feuilly shook his head, “You can’t have not noticed that—“

At that moment, Pontmercy, still walking along with his back to oncoming pedestrians, collided with a group of sorority girls and knocked one—a tiny, blonde slip of a thing—flat on her ass.

“I didn’t see you there,” he’d stuttered out as he’d turned around to help her up, “forgive me.”

Then Pontmercy completely lost his power of speech and just gaped at the girl, who stared right back with her enormous blue eyes as she took his outstretched hand and got back up on her feet. They remained that way, fingers intertwined and just staring mutely at one another, until one of her sorority sisters yanked her away down the street, shooting an angry “Watch where you’re going, asshole!” back at Marius. The crowd swallowed them up and Pontmercy looked like he was about to cry.

The rest of the short walk home was spent trying to keep Marius from sprinting back down the crowded street looking for the blonde girl, so Grantaire had no opportunity to finish grilling Feuilly about his earlier comment. It was just as well, though. There was no way that Feuilly could have been talking about Enjolras. Enjolras was beautiful and perfect and beautifully perfect guys don’t take notice of scruffy artists squatting in their frat house. Besides, Enjolras was constantly trying to get him to put on a shirt. If you are interested in someone, you try to get them to remove clothing, not put more clothing on. This was basic human behavior.

The Alpha Beta Chi house was already in full party mode when Feuilly, Grantaire and Marius arrived. The door was propped open and a small crowd of people milled about on the front porch: some talking, some smoking, but most of them waiting in line for the keg.

Bahorel was making the rounds with a tray of Jell-O shots and pushed his way through the crowd to greet his friends. “Courf invited the neighbors,” he informed them, indicating the random strangers gathered on the porch and the lawn, “thought it was a good time to make some friends.”

“No Psi Mu’s, right?” Feuilly frowned and took a shot off of Bahorel’s tray.

“Nah, they have the good sense to keep to their side of the street.”

True enough, a small pack of Psi Mu’s with Montparnasse at their center sat on the porch of their own house, pointedly not looking at the ABX party.

“I fuckin’ hope they start something tonight,” Bahorel continued, “I want to do two things tonight: kick some ass and take some Jell-O shots. And we’re almost out of Jell-O shots.”

This wasn’t just a clever saying. Bahorel handed the final three shots to his friends- one to Pontmercy, who looked delighted at the blue color and completely baffled in regard as to how to take it, and two to Grantaire.

“Actually,” Grantaire began, balancing one shot in his good hand and one in his cast hand while trying to find a tactful way to return them to Bahorel, “I’m trying to take it easy—“
“Abso-fucking-lutely not, bro,” Courfeyrac appeared out of the crowd, still wearing his toga and brandishing an enormous beer bong and clutching a six-pack of PBR. “I bought all kinds of awesome drinking accessories for tonight and we’re goin’ balls to the wall. Now, R, open up and show Pontmercy how to properly do a beer bong.”

Grantaire was about to protest but Courfeyrac had practically shoved the tube end of the bong into his mouth and was already pouring the first of the cans down into the funnel. Some random girl in miniscule denim shorts rushed over to help Grantaire hold up the bong’s plastic tube with one hand and wound her other hand into the curls at the back of his head for support as he drank down as much as he could. The crowd kept track, counting encouragingly as Courfeyrac popped open beers and poured them down the funnel-- One! Two! Three! Four!-- but Grantaire had to pull back halfway through the fourth can, cheap beer spilling down his chin and the front of his grey t-shirt.

When Grantaire finished spluttering and wiped the tears out of his eyes, Enjolras was the first thing that he saw. Grantaire started to smile at him, but stopped halfway through the beginning of the grin, leaving him with a lopsided, awkward grimace on his face. Something was wrong with Enjolras. He was standing stone-faced by the door, surrounded by a half-dozen tipsy girls who were gazing at him with predatory stares that Grantaire had only seen in wildlife documentaries on Animal Planet. Their manicured hands kept seeking purchase on his shoulder, waist, in his hair, but Enjolras absent-mindedly batted them away as he focused his blue eyes on Grantaire.

“Starting early, I see,” Enjolras said, flicking his eyes from the two Jell-O shots in Grantaire’s hands to the spilled beer that soaked his t-shirt. This momentary distraction allowed one of the girls to wrap one hand around Enjolras’ bicep and press a shot glass of amber-colored liquid in front of his face with the other. “What is that, six drinks?”

“Looks like you’re starting strong, too, E.” Grantaire retorted, wiping a remaining drop of beer off of his chin. “What are you at? Six, too?”

“This is my first drink, thank you very much,” Enjolras replied and lifted the bottle of craft beer in his hand, still ignoring the shot glass bobbing in front of his face. The girl pouted and pulled herself closer to him. Grantaire was dismayed to see that the shirt that the sorority girl was getting her drunk hands all over was his (their?) favorite red plaid. He had to physically fight the urge to walk over to her, pull her off of Enjolras’ arm and throw the shirt in the washing machine on the “heavy soil” wash cycle.

“I wasn’t talking about the drink,” Grantaire said, nodding to the six girls around Enjolras. For the first time, Enjolras seemed to fully realize that he was completely surrounded by women. His eyes widened a bit. “Oh, no, it’s not—“

“Don’t worry about it, Apollo,” Grantaire sucked down his two Jell-O shots in rapid succession, “It seems like the kind of night to make bad choices.” He crossed over to Enjolras and his harem and snatched the shot out of the girl’s hand.

“Here’s to making mistakes!” Grantaire announced, ostensibly to the crowd at-large but he kept his eyes on Enjolras as he tossed the shot back in one fluid motion. Tequila. Ow.

“Grantaire, wait,” Enjolras shook the girl off his arm and moved as if to take Grantaire by the shoulder, but Courfeyrac magically appeared again like some kind of booze fairy and pressed extremely full shot glasses into both their hands.

“Carpe diem, bitches,” Courfeyrac offered in the way of a toast, clinking his glass into Grantaire and Enjolras’ and knocking back his shot. Grantaire raised his own glass to his lips and cocked one
eyebrow at Enjolras, daring him to do the same.

“What do you say, Apollo?” Grantaire smiled mockingly, “Race you to the next bad decision?”

Enjolras said nothing, but a muscle twitched in his jaw as he raised his shot glass in the air to mimic Grataire’s. Their eyes locked, green meeting blue, and stayed that way as Grantaire and Enjolras downed their tequila, never looking away from each other.

And then things got a little fuzzy.

###

Grantaire is snapped out of his reverie by Courfeyrac smacking him in the side of the face with a piece of bacon. “Eat up, kid. I’ve got a busy day of laying by the pool planned and I need you to join me.”

“Courf, how are you even forming words right now?” Grantaire groans and wipes the smear of bacon grease out of his black stubble with the heel of his hand. “If I recall correctly--and keep in mind that I may not be recalling correctly—you drank just as much as I did last night.”

“Hair of the dog, bro. That and breakfast meat,” The piece of bacon disappears into Courfeyrac’s mouth as he pours himself a second Bloody Mary. “Helps with the recovery.”

“Or,” Combeferre, who is just drinking coffee, adds, “You could have done a couple fewer shots of tequila last night and not have had to recover at all. I managed to make it through the night without getting absolutely plastered and losing my pants in the hot tub.”

“And that’s why I love you.” Courfeyrac snuggles up behind Combeferre and nestles his head on his shoulder. “Because you let me get drunk and do stupid things and remain sober enough to bring me pants when I lose mine.”

Combeferre smiles and reaches his hand back to ruffle his boyfriend’s curls. “You're an idiot and I love you, too. And I will always bring you pants.”

Something taps insistently on the edge of Grantaire’s memory. Swim trunks floating on top of bubbling water. “Those were your trunks in the hot tub, Courf?” he blurs. “Oh, thank god.”

“Yep, those were mine.” Courfeyrac replies, “I’m not a hundred percent sure why I lost them. I have vague memories of betting Bahorel that he couldn’t jump from the roof to the pool and the payment being pants, but those memories aren’t super complete.”

“Damnit. You’re also having trouble remembering last night?” Grantaire asks, disappointed. “I was hoping you could help me figure what the hell happened. I woke up on the couch at, like, five a.m. with absolutely no recollection of what went down last night. Also my face hurts. Why does my face hurt?”

Combeferre pushes his glasses up his nose and reluctantly asks, “Grantaire. Have you not looked in a mirror yet this morning?”

“No,” Grantaire had come straight downstairs after waking up a couple of minutes ago on the floor next to his empty bed, “What’s wrong with my face, ’Ferre? Oh, shit, what’s wrong with my face?!”

Courfeyrac just wrinkles up his nose and hands Grantaire his iPhone, quickly opening the photo app and adjusting it to use the front-facing camera setting to create a makeshift mirror. The face
that looks back at Grantaire from the phone screen is sporting a large purple and red bruise around the right eye and cheekbone.

“Oh, fuck my life,” Grantaire groans, “What did I do?”

“Got drunk and stupid and hit on every girl at the party,” Enjolras stomps into the kitchen, wearing pajama pants, an Avengers t-shirt that Grantaire seems to remember being his own, and a deep frown. Enjolras’ blond curls are hanging limply in his face and there are uncharacteristic dark circles under his eyes. Even wilted, he is still lovely.

“One of their boyfriends probably punched you. Or maybe one of them did. Either way, you definitely deserved it.” Enjolras gets a mug from the cupboard and begins preparing his own cup of coffee. “You were ridiculous last night.”

Courfeyrac snorts at this. “Excuse me, E?”

Enjolras stirs his coffee a little too hard, sending a small wave of brown liquid over the rim of the mug and onto the counter. “Both of you, Courf, both of you got crazy drunk and loud and stupid. It was embarrassing.”

Grantaire says nothing, just stares down at his nearly untouched plate of breakfast, but Courfeyrac snatches the unused tea-kettle off the back of the stove and then starts digging around in one of the cupboards.

“Oh, I’m sorry, E. Me and R were drunk and stupid?” Courfeyrac’s voice is muffled by the sound of the wooden cabinets and then he cries out in victory and emerges with a cast iron pot. Grantaire, Combeferre and even Enjolras have no idea what Courfeyrac is doing as he begins manipulating the kitchenware like puppets, first wiggling the pot. “Hey, Kettle, guess what?” Courfeyrac makes the pot say, in a stern tone that sounds like either a well-practiced imitation of Enjolras or a bad rendition of Draco Malfoy.

Enjolras rolls his eyes.

“E! I’m not done yet! Wait for it! ‘What, Pot? What is it?’” Courfeyrac makes the kettle reply, its voice a little gruffer and almost surfer-dude sounding in its laid-backness. The pot continues in the Enjolras-voice, “Well, Kettle, you’re black!”

Enjolras, Combeferre and Grantaire stare blankly at the conclusion of Courfeyrac’s cookware puppet show.

“Get it?” Courfeyrac grins.

“We get it, Courfeyrac,” Enjolras says.

“Are you sure? Because I can break it down for you: the pot is you, E, calling the kettle—that’s me and Grantaire—black because you sir, were shit-faced yourself last night.”

“You were?” Grantaire is surprised by this. He didn’t remember Enjolras being drunk. But, then again, he didn’t remember much at all.

Courfeyrac looks smug. “Yes, R, yes he was. So he shouldn’t throw stones from his little glass fraternity house.”

“Too many metaphors, Courf,” Combeferre runs his fingers through his boyfriend’s hair. Courfeyrac instantly shuts up and rubs his head back into Combeferre’s hand like a cat trying to
coax extra petting from its owner. “I’ll clean up breakfast, you go get changed into swim trunks and I’ll meet you by the pool.”

“I can’t,” Courfeyrac pouts, “Bahorel won my swimsuit.”

“I have an extra pair you can borrow. Go! You, too, R,” Combeferre promises to bring them another round of Bloody Marys, giant glasses of water and some aspirin once they are settled by the pool. Courfeyrac grabs Grantaire’s hand and hauls him out of his chair.

“Let’s go, R. Enjolras can come, too, if he wants.” Courfeyrac says as he leads the way out of the kitchen, “but he’ll have to change out of his grumpy-pants and into a pair of swim trunks. Can you handle that, E?”

Enjolras glares at them. “I’m sure Grantaire would rather that you call up a couple of sororities and have them come over. They’d be a lot more fun than me.”

“A pack of angry wolverines would be more fun than you right now, E. If you want to be like that, then fine. But if you snap out of it, you know where to find us.” With that, Courfeyrac and Grantaire are gone.

E

Combeferre listens to the sound footsteps banging their way up the stairs, and then, when he’s sure they’re alone, he pulls a chair up next to Enjolras and looks at him steadily. Enjolras pointedly avoids the gaze, staring instead at his half empty coffee mug.

“Okay, Enjolras,” Combeferre says gently, resting one hand on Enjolras’ forearm and giving it a reassuring squeeze. “What’s going on? You’ve been avoiding me.”

“It’s nothing, ‘Ferre,” Enjolras lies, draining his coffee and getting up to pour himself a refill.

“No, it’s not. Things have been… I don’t know, off, ever since we moved in here. Is it the whole ‘me and Courf’ thing? The frat? What’s up?”

This is the thing that Enjolras loves and hates most about Combeferre: the man’s ability to identify an issue, analyze it and then break it into a list of action steps that would allow the problem to be solved or a plan to be accomplished. Enjolras loves it when it’s one of his plans that Combeferre is analyzing. It is because of Combeferre that Enjolras’ idea of a social activism club—les Amis—was able to get off the ground. Enjolras had come up with the inspiration, Combeferre had found them a meeting place and petitioned the university to allow them to become an official club, Courfeyrac had drummed up members and made people feel welcome. That was how they always operated; they were normally a triumvirate of awesome and now… now everything was different.

It had only been a week since Courfeyrac had slammed through the homo-tel door with this great idea and Combeferre had followed him with his irritatingly well-constructed PowerPoint presentation, but it felt like a lifetime ago. Everything had turned upside.

And now Combeferre wanted Enjolras to tell him what was wrong so that they could solve the problem together, but how could Enjolras tell him what was wrong when everything was wrong. The fraternity and the relationship between Courfeyrac and Combeferre and missed les Amis planning session and the out of control feeling that had been nestling deep in Enjolras’ stomach for the past week. And Grantaire.

Grantaire was confusing. He was fragile, yet surprisingly strong. He was hilarious, with a sharp, biting, invulnerable wit, yet sometimes there was such a sad, deep hurt in his eyes that it made
Enjolras wanted to wrap him up in his arms and never let go. He was always right there next to Enjolras, but never close enough to touch. Grantaire was infuriatingly wonderful; or possibly wonderfully infuriating. Grantaire made Enjolras feel feelings and Enjolras hated feelings. And now Combeferre wanted Enjolras to start talking about those feelings so that they could whittle them down to a manageable problem that could be solved with a plan of action.

Enjolras was too hung-over and miserable to talk about feelings today.

“I’m fine, Combeferre,” he finally answers. “It’s been a stressful week, but I’m fine. We’re fine. Everything is just fucking fine.” And with that, he stomps out of the kitchen, leaving a speechless Combeferre sitting alone at the table, surrounded by used breakfast dishes.

Once he’s upstairs in his room, back in his own bed and snuggled up in his red comforter, he starts to regret the brusqueness of his exit. Combeferre was just trying to be a good friend and Enjolras had been an asshole. Enjolras didn’t mean to be an asshole, it was just something that he did sometimes without realizing it.

Like last night.

Enjolras really didn’t intend the start the party off by being an asshole, he really didn’t. In fact, he’d been looking forward to seeing Grantaire from the second the initiation ceremony had ended. There were so many stupid frat-y things that happened--oaths, secret handshakes, sharing wine from a “sacred chalice of brotherhood” that was so obviously made of plastic and purchased at a cheap party store--and Grantaire was the only person who would find it as hilariously ridiculous as Enjolras did.

That was one thing that Enjolras has gleaned from his week of hanging out with Grantaire and playing videogames- the man had a wicked sense of humor. If anyone could be counted on to mercilessly mock the Greek system along with Enjolras, it was Grantaire.

And if that conversation happened to take place outside in the hot tub with Grantaire shirtless, that would be just fine with Enjolras. He had, in fact, come up with a brilliant plan to segue into the shirtless hot tub party. After ridiing himself of the hated toga, Enjolras had dressed himself in his (their?) favorite red plaid button-down. There was no way that Grantaire would pass up an opportunity to tease Enjolras about wearing the shirt again and, when he did that, Enjolras would say something clever (“Well, then we should move this conversation to somewhere where shirts aren’t required,” was his current favorite option) and he and Grantaire would find themselves half-naked in the hot tub and then they could just let nature take its course.

Enjolras wasn’t sure when he had decided to seduce Grantaire, of if seduction was even the goal of this subterfuge. He just knew that he wanted to be somewhere private where he could admire Grantaire’s tattoos and the hot tub seemed as good a place as any. Enjolras was still unsure about Grantaire’s sexual orientation, but all signs pointed toward gay. Grantaire was flirty, often shirtless, and there was so much charged sexual energy between them when they were close (always close, but still never touching) that Enjolras couldn’t imagine that it was one-sided.

Enjolras needed to man-up and just ask him. It was a simple, three-word question—“Are you gay?”—it shouldn’t be so damn hard, especially for Enjolras, who wielded words like Inigo Montoya brandished his sword. But he found himself unable to ask. With Combeferre and Courfeyrac busy with their fraternity business and with each other, Grantaire was quickly become Enjolras’ closest ally in the house. Asking that question, that complicatedly simple question, would have consequences for their friendship: either bring them closer or push them apart. Enjolras wasn’t sure which option scared him more.
The party got off to a blazing start. The keg was tapped, the music was turned up and the house began to fill up with guests. Enjolras waited quietly in the back corner of the kitchen, nursing a bottle of microbrew and waiting for the only guest who mattered to arrive.

When he’d heard from Jehan that Feuilly, Grantaire and Marius had arrived back at the house, Enjolras had practically bulldozed his way through the crowd to get to the front porch to greet them. This took him longer than expected, as his progress was constantly being impeded by random girls stopping him to try to talk and then blindly following him when he not-so-politely dismissed their attempts at conversation. On that note, why were there so many girls at this party, anyway? How did a house of social activists know so many Woo Girls? Enjolras blamed Courfeyrac.

Enjolras was given something else for which to blame Courfeyrac the moment that he stepped onto the porch. The newly sworn-in president was, at that moment, cracking open a can of beer and dumping it into a funnel that was connected to a rubber tube that was directly connected to Grantaire’s face. And Grantaire’s face, Enjolras noted bitterly, was connected to one of the unwelcome female party guests, who had one hand supporting his chin and the other wound rather intimately into his inky curls. Curls that Enjolras hadn’t allowed himself the luxury of touching were at this very moment being violated by a strange, prying hand. Enjolras narrowed his eyes and glared, adding this most recent infraction to his growing mental list of Things That Are Courfeyrac’s Fault.

“Four!” the crowd of onlookers screamed and it took Enjolras a moment to realize that the number coincided with the amount of beers that Grantaire had guzzled. Jesus. Adding four beers to the two potent Jello-O shots that filled both of Grantaire’s hands yielded a sum that Enjolras found troubling.

He’d tried to express his concern about that to Grantaire and he’d just gotten snapped at for his troubles. And then they had argued about the drinking and about the girls and Enjolras lost track of Grantaire for a while.

Until Eponine.

Enjolras wasn’t sure when Eponine had arrived at the party. He seemed to remember her there earlier, then she’d disappeared for while, and then she’d returned. By that time, the shots had seeped into Enjolras’ system and he was stationed on the couch, his crowd of female admirers growing increasingly aggressive with their attentions as more alcohol was consumed. As he finished a beer and had another one instantly thrust into his hands, Enjolras was beginning to get suspicious of the motives of these girls. Eponine’s entrance through the front door of the fraternity was just the excuse he was seeking.

“Eponine!” Enjolras had shouted, hoisting himself off the couch and throwing himself at the little brunette, wrapping her in his arms in a fierce hug that only spilled a tiny bit of beer down her back. Eponine pushed him back to arms length and looked at him warily. “I need you, ‘Ponine,” Enjolras pleaded in a whisper, his blue eyes desperate.

“I swear to god, if another guy says that to me tonight, I am going to punch him in the face,” Eponine growled, pushing Enjolras’ hand off her shoulders. “I am so not in the mood for this shit, Enjolras.”

He grabbed her hands with his free hand and pulled them up to his chest, then ducked down to talk into her ear. “Please, Eponine. I am… kinda drunk. And those sorority girls are terrible. And they keep giving me beer. Please, just… just stay with me. You’re scary. They’ll leave me alone if you’re with me. Please. I’ll do anything.”
Eponine glanced over at the pack of sorority girls on the couch. They glared at her. She glared back harder. The girls immediately dispersed.

“Oh my god, thank you, Eponine. Don’t leave me for the rest of the night, okay?” Enjolras could’ve fainted with relief. Normally he could easily fend for himself against aggressive suitors but his little tequila shot showdown earlier with Grantaire had gotten him a drunker than he’d expected and Enjolras was finding that he was a bit off his game tonight. Oh shit, that reminded him: Grantaire. Something had happened between him and Grantaire and he needed to fix it.

“Hey, ‘Ponine, I need to find R.” Enjolras told her, a little wobbly but still holding tight to her hands.

“And I need to find Marius,” Eponine replied, managing to look both sad and angry at the same time.

Bahorel was walking by at that moment, arm around one of the girls who had been hanging on Enjolras not two minutes ago. “You guys are in luck,” Bahorel said, “They’re together. They’ve been locked up in me and R’s suite for, like, the last hour.”

“WHAT?!’ Eponine and Enjolras’ faces wore the exact same shocked expression.

“I dunno what they’re doing in there, but the door is locked and they won’t open it. Which sucks because I need my swim trunks. And R knows I need my swim trunks. He was totally there when I said I could jump from the roof to the pool and then he goes and locks himself in our—“

“You can’t make it from the pool to the roof, Bahorel.” Courfeyrac pushes his way into the conversation, “I mean, from the roof to the pool. Sorry, I think I might be a little bit drunk. Hey! Bahorel! We should make a bet…”

Enjolras and Eponine took this opportunity to sneak out of the conversation and rush upstairs to the second-floor. They crept along the hallway until they were within eye and earshot of Bahorel and Grantaire’s door. It was shut tight and they could here muffled voices behind it. They stopped.

Eponine looked at Enjolras and Enjolras looked at Eponine.

“So, should we--?” Enjolras jerked his head toward the door.

“And listen?” Eponine curled her lip in disgust. “Ew, Enjolras. You're a perv.”

Enjolras was suddenly struck by her meaning. “You don’t think that they’re… you know? That they’re—” He couldn’t finish the sentence. But if Grantaire and Marius were locked in Grantaire’s room doing the things that Enjolras couldn’t put to words, then he was, unfortunately, going to have to have Marius Pontmercy killed.

“You mean, that they’re—?” Eponine makes a rude gesture, sliding her index finger inside her curled fist, creating images in Enjolras’ brain that made his gag reflex kick in. “Nope, no way,” Eponine laughed, sounding more confident now that she’d thought about it. “That’s definitely not happening. There is no way R would do that.”

There is no way R would do that. That sentence was somehow worse. There is no way R would do that. Eponine and Grantaire were good friends and if she said that there was no way that Grantaire would hook up with a guy, well, she would know. Enjolras’ stomach twisted and he tried to extinguish the feeling by draining the bottle of beer that was still in his hand. It didn’t work.

“I need another beer,” Enjolras complained. Surely another beer would fix things.
“Then go get one,” Eponine replied, her eyes locked on the door. “I’m staying right here.”

Enjolras pouted, whining, “I can’t go down there without you, ‘Ponine. I’ll get devoured. Please, Eponine, I need you.”

“I told you I would punch the next guy who said that to me,” Eponine said, narrowing her eyes and clenching her left fist menacingly.

Enjolras held both hands out in defense, “Whoa, whoa. Hold it. I already said it to you, so technically I’m not ‘the next guy who said it to you,’ I’m a ‘guy who said it already and then just said it again.’”

“Oh, drunkypants. I sort of understand your twisted logic. You get a pass, just this one time,” she conceded and then leaned back against the wall, sliding down into a sitting position. Eponine pulled a small silver flask out of her pocket and offered it to Enjolras, motioning for him to join her on the floor of the hallway.

He plopped down unceremoniously next to her, curled up his knees to his chest and took a grateful swig. More tequila. Ow.

“Why do you want to punch people in the face for saying that they need you?” Enjolras asked her, after the burning of the tequila had finally subsided.

Eponine let out a huge sigh and tipped her head back until it clunked against the wall. “Enjolras, I am well and truly fucked. Marius Pontmercy is ruining my life.”

That was not an answer to the question. “I don’t understand,” Enjolras took another sip of the tequila and handed the flask back to Eponine. “Aren’t you guys, like—” Enjolras repeats the rude hand gesture that Eponine did earlier, earning another glare.

“Don’t think I can’t change my mind about that punch, E,” she threatened. “And no, we aren’t—” There was the hand gesture again. “We’re just friends. I am ‘the best friend he’s ever had’ and he ‘can’t live without me,’ but, yeah. I am firmly in the friendzone.”

Enjolras is confused. “But you stayed over nearly every night this week.”

Eponine sadly explained, between swigs of tequila, that she’d been maneuvering her way into Marius’ room all week, ever since the night she came over to bring Grantaire his stuff. Late nights study sessions, movie marathons, anything she could come up with to spend more time with Marius but nothing had ever happened. “He’s never laid so much as a finger on me,” she sighed.

“And then tonight, while R was putting on his amazing beer bong show, Marius comes running up to me, all excited and bright eyed and a little drunk and he grabs my shoulders and goes, ‘Eponine! I need you!’ and I thought: Finally. Finally. Eponine, he’s come to his senses and has realized that he has feelings for you. And then, just when I’m about to lean in and kiss him, he tells me that he”—Eponine inserts air quotes here—“‘needs me’ to go around to every sorority house on Greek Row and invite them to our party because he met the most amazing girl and he doesn’t know how to find her. And, of course, I go. I trot off like a good little puppy and run my errand. Fuck my life, Enjolras, just fuck it.”

Eponine drains the flask and drops her head onto Enjolras’ shoulder. This is not something that Enjolras normally allows—he’s a big fan of personal space—but Eponine is sad and her story tugs at him a little bit. He has no idea what to say to make her feel better, so he goes with the truth. “Marius Pontmercy is an idiot, Eponine.”
“I know, Enjolras. Trust me, I know. But he’s so pretty. And he smells so fucking good.”

Enjolras had never had the opportunity to smell Marius, but he knew what Eponine was talking about. The shirt that he was wearing, still unwashed after its busy week, bore the mixture of his own scent and the smell of Grantaire. Enjolras took a deep breath in, enjoying the earthy mixture that clung to the soft fabric; his own scent was there—distinctive lavender and mint from his shampoo—but Grantaire was there, too, smelling like wood and salt and the tiniest bit of tobacco smoke. It was a musky, earthy smell that blended with Enjolras’ and the perfection of the combination made him want to weep. He let his head drop to the side, resting against Eponine’s and together they stared at the locked door, thoughts fixed on the two men inside and how amazing they smelled.

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Back in the present, Enjolras reaches to the floor and grabs the plaid shirt that Grantaire had left behind that morning, pulls it to his face and takes a deep breath. A sharp, boozy scent has been added to its bouquet, but it still smells like heaven. Enjolras curls up around the shirt, snuggles deeper into his comforter and tries not to listen to the snatches of sound from the backyard that come drifting through his open window.

He stares blankly at his wall and wonders things. He wonders who punched Grantaire. He wonders why he found a long, red hair on his pillow. And he wonders most of all about that name scrawled in marker on Grantaire’s arm. Who the hell is “Cosette Fauchelevont?”

Chapter End Notes

I meant to wrap up all the mysteries, but then this got a little lengthy. Things will be concluded soon.

Also, don't do beer bongs. And don't drink as much as everyone does in this chapter. It would probably be very bad for you.
The Enigma Becomes Doubly Mysterious

Chapter Summary

In which the origin of Jehan’s bed is discovered, Courfeyrac plays detective, Joly and Bossuet explore a new lifestyle choice, Bahorel proves marginally observant and Grantaire’s confusion escalates. Also, Enjolras sleeps.

Enjolras is exhausted and grumpy and still slightly nauseous, but his traitorous body won’t let him sleep his way through his hangover. He keeps trying to force his brain to shut down and go into nap mode or at least let his thoughts drift away from Grantaire for two seconds, but he can’t. He is wide-awake and snippets of Grantaire are looping constantly behind his tightly closed eyes. The voices from the backyard—mainly Courfeyrac, although Enjolras thinks he hears Grantaire a few times, loudly chatting and splashing in the pool--are not helping him focus and he should really just get up and close the damn window but walking all the way across the room sounds like so much work right now. He’s so tired.

There is soft tapping on his open door. “Enjolras?” A gentle voice drifts across the room and Enjolras raises his head enough to see Jehan peering through the doorway, the edges of his too-big orange cardigan covering the hands that grasp the dark wood doorframe.

Enjolras says nothing, just drops his head back onto his pillow. Jehan takes that as an invitation to enter. He sits down on the edge of the bed and gingerly strokes his friend’s soft, golden curls.

“You’re not okay.” Jehan says. It is not a question.

Enjolras just shakes his head, face still buried in the pillow. The fibers of the pillowcase scratch his nose a bit.

Jehan softly sighs and says nothing, but he takes Enjolras by the hand and pulls him out of the bed, leads him down the hallway and up the front spiral stairway to the tower bedroom. Enjolras keeps his eyes down, staring at his t-shirt, as they walk down the hall, careful not to look at Grantaire’s door. He knows perfectly well that Grantaire is out at the pool with Courfeyrac at that moment and there is absolutely zero risk of running into him, but Enjolras still doesn’t want to see anything that reminds him of Grantaire right now. Instead, he keeps his eyes locked on the Avengers logo on the front of his shirt. Then Enjolras remembers that he doesn’t own an Avengers t-shirt. He swiped this one off of Grantaire’s bedroom floor this morning when he didn’t want to run the risk of pulling his own red plaid shirt out of the sleeping man’s grasp. Dammit.

He shifts his gaze to the beige carpet just in front of his feet. Grantaire walks on this carpet every day, his cruel brain reminds him. Enjolras sighs. This is terrible. Everything is reminding him of the one person he wants to forget.

He really didn’t mean to be a dick to Grantaire this morning, but he couldn’t help it. Enjolras knows that he should go down and apologize, but what does he say? I’m sorry I was a dick? I was just jealous because you were busy hitting on girls all night when I wanted you to be having a naked hot tub party with me? Nope. That’s not gonna fly. Enjolras pushes all thoughts of apology
out of his head and instead tries to justify his behavior on the basis of respecting women and responsible alcohol consumption and… reasons. Ugh. His argument is terrible and he knows it, but it’s better than apologizing and admitting everything to Grantaire. Grantaire. Why can’t he stop thinking about Grantaire?

Enjolras pads up the stone spiral staircase after Jehan, taking comfort in the fact that Grantaire probably hasn’t walked on these stairs. Probably.

Jehan’s bedroom is a perfectly round little room that sits at the top of the tower and it is breathtaking. He’s turned the simple circular space into a kind of ethereal heaven. The room is devoid of furniture except for a simply enormous bed that sits at one end of the room, a small half-moon of space between the straight wooden headboard and the curving white wall. The small amount of carpet on the sides of the bed (seriously, it is huge. Enjolras didn’t know they even made beds this large) is taken up by stacks of books enjoying a free-range, bookshelf-less existence across Jehan’s floor. There is a flat-screen tv hanging on one wall and Enjolras is willing to bet that it came with the room. Jehan isn’t one to buy electronics.

Two windows are flung wide open and the cool fall breeze flutters the opaque white drapes. One of the windows opens onto a small Juliet balcony that overlooks the backyard. Jehan has covered most of the narrow perch with pots full of wildflowers, but there is just enough room for someone to stand out there.

One of the pots is knocked over and a trail of dirt spills across the little balcony.

Jehan sees this and shakes his head. He deposits Enjolras on the soft, white cloud that is his bed and then goes to scoop the soil back into the pot. “Bahorel is like a bull in a china shop,” he says in way of explanation and sets the flowers upright. “Lay down, Enjolras.”

Enjolras does.

He sinks into the top of the mattress and instantly begins to feel better as his aching limbs relax into the soft feather bed that Jehan has put on top of his mattress. Enjolras burrows into the white goose-down comforter and stretches his arms and legs out as far as he can; he is a tall guy, but he doesn’t even come close to reaching the edges of the mattress.

“Jehan, why is your bed so big?” Enjolras asks, pulling a light gray chenille throw blanket over his shoulders.

“It’s two beds, love,” Jehan answers. Enjolras can hear the click of the television coming to life and Jehan is busy with the remote control. “We should have a movie day. What do you want to watch? The house AppleTV has, like, eight million movies.”

“I don’t care, Jehan. Whatever you want.”

“Legally Blonde?” Jehan suggests.

“Whatever you want that doesn’t have sorority girls in it. I’ve had enough of them for a while.”

“We’re watching The Breakfast Club,” Jehan decides for them and joins Enjolras on the bed. “Some eighties teen angst will do you good.”

He crawls across the expansive white landscape of the mattress and curls up right next to Enjolras, despite the copious amounts of space. Jehan is lanky and his knees tuck in right behind Enjolras’ own. He wraps one arm over his friend’s torso while his other hand immediately entwines itself in Enjolras’ hair. Enjolras relaxes.
Out of all of his friends, Jehan is really the only person who gets to cuddle with Enjolras. Sometimes Courfeyrac will manhandle him into snuggles, but it is always a battle to achieve and Enjolras typically endures the duration of Courfeyrac’s aggressive cuddling like an angry kitten being clutched by an exceptionally strong toddler. But when he’s wrapped up in Jehan, Enjolras softens and enjoys it. Jehan is magic.

“Courfeyrac and ‘Ferre gave me the extra bed from their suite, since they didn’t need it,” Jehan explains, his warm breath tickling the back of Enjolras’ neck.

“Don’t you mean the extra one from Combeferre’s suite?” Enjolras asks. “Courf has his own room that he keeps bragging about.”

Jehan’s hand stops carding its way through Enjolras’ curls for the briefest of moments and then continues as he cautiously answers. “Yes, that’s right. I meant Combeferre’s suite.”

Normally, Enjolras would challenge the uncertainty in Jehan’s reply, but he is far too comfortable in this epic bed, all wrapped up in Jehan, to do much of anything. He sighs contentedly, closes his eyes and drifts into a gentle sleep as the opening credits of the movie begin.

He cannot hear the noise from the pool from here.

R

“Seriously, R, who the hell is ‘Cosette Fauchelevent?’” Courfeyrac asks from his raft, using his foot to send a flick of water onto the back of Grantaire’s head.

“I’m gonna give you the same answer as I have to all the rest of your questions, Courf.” Grantaire replies. “I have no fucking idea. I don’t know who that is, I don’t know who punched me and I definitely don’t remember what I did to make Enjolras so mad at me today.”

Grantaire is facedown on his own inflatable mattress, his feet dangling in the pool. The day is sunny and mild, the water is cool and the soft bobbing of his raft should be calming, but he’s still a ball of anxiety. “Everything is terrible,” he says into the shiny blue plastic.

“Snap out of it, R,” Courfeyrac paddles closer. “You didn’t do anything except get drunk and stupid and that is what you are supposed to do in college. E’s just mad because we had fun and sometimes he has a vendetta against actual fun.”

“Sorry, Courf,” Grantaire replies, “I can’t shake the feeling that something really bad happened last night.”

“A lot of bad things happened last night, buddy. It was a frat party.”

Grantaire just groans.

“You’re not going to cheer up, are you?” Courfeyrac pokes Grantaire’s leg with his big toe, sending the other boy’s raft away from Courfeyrac’s own.

Grantaire finally picks his head up and his water-spotted sunglasses lenses look vaguely in the direction of Courfeyrac. “You are correct, Courf,” he says, “I’m not going to cheer up.”

Grantaire has been excessively dour ever since Enjolras had stomped into the kitchen and delivered his little “you drank too much and behaved inappropriately toward women” lecture. Courfeyrac still proclaims this speech to be hypocritically hilarious, considering that Enjolras spend most of the party with his head on Eponine’s shoulder, draining her flask, before disappearing into parts
unknown to pass out.

This argument didn’t sway Grantaire from his melancholy. “Enjolras is right, Courfeyrac,” Grantaire tells him, “I got way too drunk last night. I have no idea what I did. I’m the fucking worst.” His face buries itself back in the plastic of the raft. “I should apologize.”

His words are muffled by the plastic, but still understandable to both Courfeyrac and Combeferre, who has been quietly laying along the side of the pool this whole time, his toes dangling in the water and a large Biology textbook spread open on his towel in front of him. He closes his book with a sigh and sits up to join in the conversation.

“You can’t apologize for something you don’t remember, R,” Combeferre tells him.

“Do you remember what I did last night, ‘Ferre?”

Combeferre pinches the bridge of his nose and frowns. “Honestly, R, no. I saw you take a bunch of shots at the beginning of the night and then you disappeared for a while. I was, however, distracted by trying to keep somebody—” Combeferre splashes water toward Courfeyrac with his foot—“from losing his pants. So I wasn’t paying a ton of attention to everything else that was going on. The next time I saw you, though, it was a lot later and you were showing some girl your sketchbook.”

“My sketchbook?” This is news to Grantaire. Although he figured that something must’ve happened with his sketchbook last night. There were all those rejected drawings of that blonde girl lying around his common room.

Courfeyrac is delighted by this tidbit. “A clue!” he exclaims happily, sliding off his raft and swimming over to the edge of the pool to wrap his arms around Combeferre’s calves, which are now dangling in the water. “Thanks, babe. You’re amazing. And you’ve given me the best idea ever.”

“What?” Grantaire and Combeferre ask at the same time, in identical suspicious tones.

Courfeyrac just grins at them and cocks one eyebrow. “The game, Mrs. Hudson,” he announces in a posh British accent, “is on!”

Not five minutes later, Grantaire finds himself in the unused bedroom of Combeferre and Courfeyrac’s suite--

(“Wait,” Grantaire had asked, “Don’t you mean ‘Combeferre’s suite?’ You’ve got your own room, Courf, that you keep bragging about.”

“Don’t worry about it, R,” was Courfeyrac’s only reply.)

--which is missing its full-sized bed. In place of the bed, however, are nearly a dozen portable racks stuffed with costumes, boxes of hats and several shelves of wig heads. This explains why it had taken Pontmercy so long to move all of Courfeyrac’s boxes into the house. He had been installing a costume shop.

Courfeyrac is burrowing through a pile of headwear, casually throwing unwanted hats over his shoulder. “No, no, no…” he mutters as he tosses a crown, a newsie cap and a shiny top hat into the refuse pile. “I know it’s here somewhere… aha!”

He proudly jams a dark grey deer-stalker cap onto his head and turns to grin at Combeferre and Grantaire. “Perfect, right?”
“Courf, you just happen to have a room full of costumes and, in that room full of costumes, is a Sherlock Holmes hat?” Grantaire is incredulous.

“Uh, yeah,” Courfeyrac replies, as he pulls on a black overcoat, adds a scarf and then rakishly pops the collar on the coat. “How am I supposed to solve mysteries without the right outfit?”

The ensemble is actually a remarkably good imitation of Benedict Cumberbatch’s Sherlock costume… if Cumberbatch’s Holmes wore his coat over blue swim trunks and only blue swim trunks.

“What do you mean by ‘solve mysteries,’ babe?” Combeferre asks, although he probably already knows the answer to his question. Combeferre is far from stupid.

“Well, we need to figure out what happened last night. I don’t remember much. Rremembers even less. We just need to talk to people who actually do remember. Investigate. Deduce. Delve deep into the darkness of the human psyche.”

“Oh. That’s what I was afraid you were going to say.”

“Step one: interview the witnesses!”

The first “witnesses” turn out to be Bossuet and Joly. Grantaire, Courfeyrac and Combeferre find them sitting in their common room, looking uncommonly sad. Bossuet is on the floor, piecing together a large puzzle of what is probably going to turn out to be a windmill. Joly is curled up on the sofa, silently watching him with puppy dog eyes. There is a good three feet of distance between them, which is unusual. Normally, the two boys are physically connected in some way, if not many ways. But not right now. Right now, Joly’s hands are pinched between his knees and Bossuet nervously shuffles puzzle pieces through his fingers.

“What’s wrong with you two?” Courfeyrac asks bluntly. He had just burst into their common room with excessive theatrical flair and neither boy had acknowledged his entrance with so much as a nod. “My heightened sense of perception tells me that something’s up.”

Combeferre, who was wearing what Courfeyrac calls his “Watson coat” over his own swimsuit—

(“‘Ferre’s my boyfriend,” Courfeyrac had explained when Grantaire had complained about role assignments. “He has to be my Watson.”

“Courf, Watson and Sherlock aren’t gay,” Combeferre had pointed out.

“Pffft, right. Whatever,” had been Courfeyrac’s only reply as he’d tossed a tan tweed blazer to Combeferre.)

--sits on the sofa with Joly. “You okay, Joly?” he asks softly, resting on hand on his friend’s leg and giving it a reassuring squeeze.

“Mmmmm hmmm,” Joly nods his head, not entirely convincing.

“Boss?” Grantaire says to Bossuet as he joins him on the floor and pulls a sky-colored puzzle piece out of his hand. Grantaire has been dressed in a plain black overcoat and been told that he has to be Inspector Lestrade. He was displeased at this assignment and had planned to pout about it, but he could set his petulance aside in order to comfort a friend. “What’s going on, buddy?”

“Nothing, just having a hard time making all these corners,” Bossuet lies, gesturing to the scatter of puzzle pieces that bear no resemblance to a rectangle.
“Seriously, guys, something’s going on,” Courfeyrac declares, coming back into the common area after having peeked in both bedrooms “See, I’ve just now observed that both, yes both, of your beds have been slept in. Ergo, you slept separately, which you never do, unless Bossuet has a cold. But, judging by the distinct lack of flu-like symptoms, it is clear that Bossuet is perfectly well. Therefore—“

“Courf—“ Combeferre tries to interrupt but is brushed off by Courfeyrac.

“—Quiet, Watson, I’m quickly arriving at my hypothesis. As I was just saying, therefore the only reason for you two to sleep in separate beds is because you two had… a fight.” Courfeyrac looks extremely please with this speech.

Bossuet and Joly sigh and answer at the same time. “We met a girl,” they say in one voice.

“You met a what?” Courfeyrac sits down in an armchair, shocked. “Watson, you’d better take notes.”

The Evidence of Joly and Bossuet

As transcribed by Combeferre Dr. John Watson

(“Courf!”

“Sorry, you need to stay in character.”

Friday, 13.Sept

After exiting the initiation ceremony at ten p.m., Joly and Bossuet (aka “Lesgles,” aka “L’aigle” aka “L’aigle de Meaux”) procured two cups of beer from the keg in the backyard. They spent most of the evening sitting together near the fire pit. Joly’s primary goal was to keep Bahorel from jumping off the roof into the pool. He was successful at this until about midnight, when Bahorel had consumed enough alcohol to deem the jump a good idea and had, in fact been dared by Courfeyrac. At about midnight Bahorel leapt off the roof and landed in the pool, after which Courfeyrac took off his swimsuit in the hot tub and gave it to Bahorel, leaving Courfeyrac naked for approximately five minutes.

At one o’clock am, Feuilly entered the backyard with a young woman. Interview subjects identified her as “Musichetta” and Feuilly claimed she was the bartender at the Corinth, whom he, Grantaire and Marius had invited to the party.

Let the record show that both Joly and Bossuet just squealed her name (“Musichetta!”) like they are twelve year old girls talking about Harry Styles from One Direction.

(“Courfeyrac, you can’t keep interrupting my notes”

“Ugh. Fine.”)

From that point on, Joly, Bossuet, Feuilly and Musichetta were engaged in a rousing game of strip poker that escalated rapidly when Courfeyrac provided them with a giant bottle of tequila.

(“Aaaaand, you’re welcome!”)

At one point in the game, Feuilly excused himself to go help R hold Marius Pontmercy’s feet while Pontmercy did his first keg stand.
A loud ruckus was heard in the main part of the house at around two a.m. Neither Joly nor Bossuet knew what the ruckus was about, and there was no evidence of its origins when the two of them and Musichetta came inside. Also, when they came in from the backyard, they were the last people awake. There were several people asleep on the sofa, but our subjects did not stop to identify them.

Musichetta said that it was late and she was worried about getting home safely. Joly and Bossuet offered to let her stay at the house and put her to bed in Enjolras’ room.

“Wait,” Combeferre cuts off their story, “Why did you two think it would be a good idea to put her in Enjolras’ room?”

“We couldn’t put her in one of our rooms, ‘Ferre!” Bossuet exclaims. “I mean, she was clearly into Joly and I would have felt really weird—“

“No, no,” Joly interrupts, “she was totally into you and I kinda felt like you liked her, too, and if you want to explore dating women, I totally understand—“

Joly and Bossuet both launch into a synchronized diatribe about why each one should explore dating Musichetta, if that’s what the other one wanted and that neither of them wanted to impede the other if they were discovering new aspects of their sexuality and finally Grantaire has had enough.

“Stop!” Grantaire stands up and shushes both of them. “Oh my god, just stop. You both clearly her, it sounds like she likes both of you. Just… ask her out as a couple.”

Joly and Bossuet stare at Grantaire, thunderstruck by this previously un-thought of revelation.

“Bossuet and I need to have a conversation,” Joly says, biting his lower lip thoughtfully.

Bossuet crosses over to him and slides his hand into Joly’s. “Yeah, can you guys leave?”

“We don’t want to be rude, but… please go.” Joly’s eyes are shining.

Team Baker Street begins to exit the room when Combeferre, always a stickler for details, needs something clarified. “You never told us why you decided to put her in Enjolras’ room.”

“Two reasons,” Bossuet explains, “One: we figured it was the safest. Nobody would dare set foot into Enjolras’ room without permission—“

“And two,” Joly finished, “it was the only room with an empty bed. Enjolras wasn’t there.”

Once they are back in the hallway, Courfeyrac excitedly turn to Combeferre and Grantaire. “Did you hear that? Enjolras didn’t stay in his room last night! Gentlemen, the plot thickens- where was he?”

Grantaire says nothing.

E

Enjolras sleeps peacefully in Jehan’s bed.

R

The snores had stopped coming from Bahorel’s room, so Grantaire decided that he was probably awake. He was, but just barely. Bahorel’s dark eyes peer out at them like an angry, sleepy badger
from under a gigantic pile of blankets. “Guys, I’m tired, I’m hungover and I seriously doubt I can be of any help on your little mission,” he told them, twisting his head to crack his neck with a series of loud pops.

Bahorel was correct; he provided almost no new information, as he had gotten as drunk, if not drunker than Grantaire and Courfeyrac. He did, however, offer one interesting detail.

“You and Enjolras pretty much monopolized all the ladies last night, R,” Bahorel tells them from his little cocoon of quilts. “Every time I saw one I liked, she was either hanging all over E or checking out your sketchbook. That’s a pretty good pick-up line, dude. ’Hey, I’m an artist. Wanna check out my sketches? And then bang?’”

“Oh my god, I didn’t say that, did I?!” Grantaire is horrified.

Bahorel laughs and then winces. “Ow, too loud. Fuck. I need to go back to sleep. But no, dude, you didn’t say that. It was just heavily implied from your body language.”

“Bahorel, I’m gay.”

“Oh. Well, that’s that I thought, but things looked different last night when that girl had her hands all down your pants.”

“This is getting worse and worse,” Grantaire moans, as Courfeyrac and Combeferre look at him in surprise.

“Well, now I’m starting to understand why Enjolras was mad,” Courfeyrac grins and Combeferre flicks him on his bare chest. “Ow, ’Ferre!”

“Why would that piss Enjolras off?” Grantaire asks. “I wasn’t being inappropriate with her, it sounds like she was totally taking advantage of me. He can’t be mad at me because some girl groped me.”

Combeferre shoots Courfeyrac a look, but Courfeyrac is undaunted. “Um, R? How would you feel if you saw some girl climbing all over Enjolras, even if he totally wasn’t into it?”

Images of the predatory pack of women that surrounded Enjolras at the party flood Grantaire’s brain. The girl with her grasping hand clawing into Enjolras red-plaid clad bicep. Grantaire’s chest tightens. Okay, Courfeyrac may have a point. But all Grantaire says is, “Whatever. Enjolras can do what he wants. I don’t care.”

Bahorel shoos them out of his room, shutting the bedroom door firmly behind them, so he can nurse his hangover in peace.

Grantaire frowns. He can’t imagine using his sketchbook to pick up girls. First of all, he has no idea why he’d want to pick girls in the first place. He’s been fully aware of his homosexuality since high school and he hasn’t show interest, real or feigned, in a girl since he came out in his junior year.

Also--and this is distressing--is the fact that his active sketchbook is almost entirely filled with drawings of Enjolras. He seriously doubts that he could be either drunk enough or stupid enough to prance around a frat party showing off his artistic obsession with one of the frat brothers. Could he have been?

Where is his sketchbook anyway? The drawing are still scattered all over the common room, but they’ve been torn out. No sign of his actual book anywhere. Grantaire adds that to his mental list of
mysteries to solve before the day is out. He’d really hate for that sketchbook to fall into the wrong hands, and by “wrong hands,” he definitely means Enjolras.

Courfeyrac leads the way in search of Marius Pontmercy. Grantaire hopes that the kid can shed some light on the mystery, because he feels more confused (not to mention worried) than he had when they’d started this whole thing.

Marius is not in his room. He’s not in the yard. He’s not in the kitchen. They walk through the living room, but it is also empty. None of them—neither Courfeyrac, Combeferre, nor Grantaire—notice the edge of Grantaire’s sketchbook peeking out from between the sofa cushions.


Which Explains How Courfeyrac Solved the Case

Chapter Summary

In which the mysteries of the party are finally solved by committee, Jean Prouvaire excels at Japanese poetry, bedside etiquette is observed, Feuilly discovers an artifact in the attic, much is made of Eponine’s hands, Cosette Fauchelevent proves to be bold, and a point is proved over tofu and bacon.

R

“If you wake him up, I’m afraid I’ll be forced to end you,” Jehan’s tone is pleasant and he’s smiling softly, but the underlying menace of his words is enough to make Courfeyrac freeze in the doorway to the bedroom, stuck in the semi-crouched pose that was clearly his preparation for a leap onto the gigantic white bed and on top of a peacefully sleeping Enjolras. Grantaire and Combeferre pause in the hallway behind Courfeyrac, intimidated by the implied threat by the normally peaceful Jehan.

“How dead?” Courfeyrac asks, still in his pounce position.

“Dead-dead,” Jehan assures him, his eyes barely flicking away from the television screen and his left hand un-pausing as it strokes Enjolras’ tousled curls. “He’s very upset today and needs to sleep.”

Grantaire groans inwardly. He feels one hundred percent responsible for Enjolras’ bad day, although he still can’t remember why. Too many pieces are still missing. Who punched him? Why did he wake up with Enjolras’ shirt? And, seriously, who the hell is Cosette Fauchelevent?

Combeferre is the first to take action, grabbing the collar of Courfeyrac’s overcoat, hauling him up into a standing position and yanking him through the doorway into Jehan’s room.

“Do you mind if we ask you a few questions, Jehan? We’re on a bit of a mission to figure out what happened last night. Any chance that you saw anything weird happen? Particularly involving this one—” Combeferre nods at Grantaire—“or Enjolras?”

Jehan shrugs his shoulders and pats a big empty space on the non-Enjolras filled side of the bed. “Hop in and I’ll tell you what I know.”

Courfeyrac is too happy to accept the invitation and dives into the soft white bed, while Combeferre gingerly positions himself on the edge of the mattress. Grantaire hesitates in the doorway, unsure if climbing into a giant bed with Enjolras is the smartest move at this particular juncture.

Jehan senses his apprehension. “You too, R,” he reassures Grantaire as he turns down the volume on the television, where the closing credits of The Breakfast Club are still scrolling.

Don’t you forget about me, don’t don’t don’t don’t… fades away into silence as Jehan repeatedly presses the volume button. Grantaire still hasn’t moved.
“Come here, love,” Jehan insists. He holds out his left arm, his Enjolras-free arm, and beckons to Grantaire. Resistance to Jehan is futile; Grantaire sighs, shrugs off his Lestrade sport coat that Courfeyrac made him wear and reluctantly climbs in.

“You need some snuggles, too, R. You look almost as sad as Enjolras,” Jehan’s eyes are wide and guileless but Grantaire thinks there might be more going on in the little poet’s brain than he’s letting on. Once Grantaire is situated in a curled-up, snuggly position that sufficiently satisfies Jehan’s cuddling aesthetic, Courfeyrac begins his standard line of questioning.

“I was on the roof for the most of the party,” Jehan answers, after Courfeyrac’s barrage of questions. “There was supposed to be a meteor shower last night and I wanted to see it, but I couldn’t. Too much light pollution. Oh! Did you know that Marius’ grandfather has a cabin in the mountains? He said we can all stay there whenever we want. We should go soon. I want to see the stars.”

“We’ll do that soon, Jehan, I promise,” Courfeyrac assures him and then presses on. “But, back to last night…”

Jehan explains that the meteor shower had initially drawn him up to the roof, but the loud crowd below had kept him up there. Jehan could be a bit shy when it came to large groups of strangers. At some point, Bahorel clambered onto the roof and joined him.

“He knocked over one of my plants,” Jehan laments, glancing over at the small pot of lavender that sits out of the balcony, still looking a bit disheveled from the fray. “It’ll be okay, but I think it really caused the flowers some undue stress. Lavender can be very sensitive to trauma and—”

“Did you see anything else from there, Jehan?” Combeferre presses. “Did anyone, oh, I don’t know… punch Grantaire in the face?”

Grantaire’s hand instinctively flies up to his right eye, where the bruise has finally settled in its swelling. It probably won’t get any puffier, just uglier in color. Jehan reaches over and traces the corners of the bruise with a feather-light finger as he ponders his answer.

“Hmmm,” Jehan presses his lips together as he thinks. “To be perfectly honest, I was pretty high. Oh! But I was writing. Maybe… wait a second…”

Jehan releases Grantaire for a moment and climbs over him to fetch a sheaf of papers that have been crammed under the bed.

“Here,” Jehan exclaims, shoving the unruly stack at Courfeyrac.

Courfeyrac eagerly snatches the papers from Jehan, his eyes lighting up. “Another clue! Watson, take notes—“Combeferre already has his notebook out and pen waiting.—“And Lestrade you… just lie there.”

Grantaire can totally handle that. He snuggles back into Jehan as Courfeyrac scans the pages.

“Um, Jehan?” Courfeyrac finally ventures. “These are kinda hard to decipher.”

The Testimony of Jean “Jehan” Prouvaire

(Told entirely through Haiku)

Lost boy searches on
Questioning high and low

He’s upside down now

Sun avoids the moon

The earth stands firm between them

But still they orbit

Hell hath no fury

But it has a mean left hook

Don’t say you need her

Wager on a leap

But fortune favors the brave

Courfeyrac is nude

“I gotta say, the last one is kinda brilliant, Jehan,” Courfeyrac says. “But, um, what exactly do they mean?”

Jehan just shrugs and winds his fingers into Grantaire’s curls. “It’s poetry, love. Open for interpretation.”

Combeferre, Courfeyrac and Jehan begin discussing possible meanings to the scribbled verses and the sound of their voices fades away as Grantaire finally relaxes enough to drift off.

Enjolras wonders if this is becoming a thing.

He stares across the white landscape of Jehan’s enormous bed directly into Grantaire’s sleeping face. That same morning, he’d woken up to find Grantaire curled up on the floor next to the bed and now, only one sleep later, Enjolras yet again awakens to look directly at a slumbering Grantaire. Is this a curse? Some sort of trick of the fates? The premise of a bad 90’s movie? Is Enjolras doomed to see Grantaire’s face first thing every morning (or every nap time)? Actually… that wouldn’t be so bad. As far as curses go, Enjolras might be able to get behind this one.

Of course, Enjolras is supposed to be mad at Grantaire. There is some residual anger and angst from the previous night left in his veins, but Enjolras can feel that ebbing away with every flutter of the sleeping man’s eyelids. Grantaire’s dark lashes fall softly, casting shadows over the violet under-eye circles that still stand in testimony of the raucous party and late night.

Enjolras isn’t quite sure when Grantaire arrived in Jehan’s bed. The last thing he remembers, he
was drifting off to the sound of the kids arriving at detention in *The Breakfast Club* and the reassuring, friendly warmth of Jehan next to him. And now, Grantaire is here, snuggled up in the fluffy down comforter and looking like an adorable human burrito. There is a small white feather resting in his hair and Enjolras feel an intrinsic need reach over and pluck it out.

*There's nothing weird about that*, he tells himself, *it's just common courtesy to remove blanket detritus from one’s friend's curls*. The fact that said friend is unconscious doesn't lessen the kindness of the gesture and, if Enjolras finally gets to touch Grantaire's hair, well... that is simply an added bonus. Enjolras reaches one arm out from under his own blanket and tentatively stretches his hand toward the feather entangled in those black curls.

Grantaire shifts slightly just then, murmuring softly in his sleep, the feather breaks free of his hair and the duvet slips down from around his ears, revealing one shoulder. One naked, naked, very naked shoulder.

Enjolras’ internal monologue is reduced to a burst of static. He knows that he should get out of the bed, just creep away, before Grantaire wakes up and finds him there, staring. That is the most sensible thing to do. In fact, a similar version of that plan worked quite well that very morning. But Enjolras doesn’t really want to follow his own advice.

His brain kicks back in just then and, although it doesn’t yet have the wherewithal to get the hell out of the bed, it is able to string together a desperate prayer—*Oh god, please let him be wearing pants, PLEASE let him be wearing pants*—followed by an even stronger plea—*Oh my god, I hope he’s not wearing any pants.*

Apart from the bare, lithe shoulder staring Enjolras directly in the face and the slight possibility of a pants-less Grantaire, there are other enticements to stay. Jehan’s bed is ridiculously comfortable and the soft rhythm of Grantaire’s breath makes for a hypnotically soothing soundtrack. Enjolras could get lost in the softness of the large white bed and the gentle rise and fall of Grantaire’s chest. He finds himself fascinated by the movement of one inky curl: on every exhale, it flutters off of Grantaire’s forehead and with every inhale, it settles back down to rest on his thick, ink smudge of an eyebrow.

It impossible to leave this show. What if the curl gets caught up in the rest of Grantaire’s hair and doesn’t fall back into place? What if another curl joins the first on his forehead and then their combined weight is too much for the gentle breath? What if Grantaire changes his sleeping position? What would his hair do then? What if the blanket moves more and there is possible nudity? Enjolras is unwilling to leave the bedroom and miss the answers to these pressing questions. He snuggles into his own pillow a little deeper and pulls the chenille throw tighter around him as he continues to watch Grantaire perform the incredible sexy act of quietly sleeping.

Enjolras has been so lost in thought that he fails to notice when a certain pair of green eyes flutter open and return his stare. He snaps back to reality at the sound of Grantaire’s voice.

“What happened to Jehan?” Grantaire asks, sitting up and looking around. The blanket falls completely off Grantaire’s torso and Enjolras has to force himself to breath.

“I don’t know,” Enjolras manages. He rips his eyes away from Grantaire and locks them firmly on his own feet. He can feel Grantaire’s gaze on him, but they are both quiet for several long moments.

“Are you still mad at me?” Grantaire finally cuts through the heavy silence, sounding soft and worried.
Enjolras just shakes his head and keeps his eyes on his toes.

Grantaire continues. “Because I can keep apologizing, and I will keep apologizing, it’s just… I don’t even know what happened, E. And I feel terrible. I didn’t mean to do whatever it is that I did.”

“I know.”

“Honestly, E, if you would just tell me exactly what it is that I did wrong, that would be super helpful. Then I could make sure never to do it again.”

Enjolras wishes that he could. That he could just say Never talk to another girl again EVER, and never let anyone else put their hands where that girl had her hands last night and always be right next to me and for the love of God get over here right now so I can kiss your face off.

But he does not say any of those things.

Instead, Enjolras simply replies, “You can do what you want. You’re a free, autonomous human being and it isn’t my place to tell you what to do.”

“I don’t know, Enjolras,” Grantaire replies and Enjolras thrills at the sound of his full name coming out of Grantaire’s mouth. “I’m pretty sure my life would be a whole lot better if you just bossed me around. I’d probably do less stupid shit. And remember to eat breakfast. And wear nicer shirts. And finally stop dying on that one level with the giant alien boss—“

Enjolras laughs. “You’re right. Your videogame survival rate would go way up if you would just listen to me for once. Just once.” He ventures a glance back at Grantaire and finds him with his head nestled back into the pillow, smiling indulgently up at Enjolras.

“Got any other orders, sir?” The corner of Grantaire’s mouth pulls up in a smirk and his eyes are shining and holy fuck, Enjolras has no idea if Grantaire is just teasing him or if he legitimately wants to be ordered around. Because there are so, so many orders that Enjolras wants to give. Starting with demanding an answer to the pants question from a few moments before.

Before Enjolras can work up the nerve to reply, the beautiful moment is shattered by the cacophonous clanging of what sounds like a giant bell coming from downstairs.

“What the fuck?” Grantaire groans, burrowing his head under the pillows in an attempt to escape the aural assault, which continues unabated. “Oh my god, make it stop.”

“No way. You just said I’m in charge of you,” Enjolras replies, his hands pressed over his ears. “I order you to get out of this bed, go downstairs and make that bell stop.”

“All right, all right. I did foolishly give you executive power over me,” Grantaire swings his legs over the side of the bed. He is wearing pants. Dammit. “But I think it’s really rude of you to just kick me out of bed. Buy me brunch first, at least,” he jokes as his feet hit the floor.

“Ohay!” The words fall out of Enjolras mouth before he even realizes what he is doing.

“Ohay what?”

“Ohay, I’ll buy you brunch.”

“Enjolras,” Grantaire raises one thick black eyebrow. “I was kidding. It’s, like, eight o’clock on a Saturday night. Now is not an acceptable time for brunch.”
Enjolras is undeterred. “Tomorrow then. Sunday is perfect for brunch. Wanna?”

“Yeah. Yeah, I wanna,” Grantaire smiles at him and the last of Enjolras’ hangover slips away. “Now, let’s go find the person who is ringing that bell and murder them, shall we?”

To the surprise of absolutely no one, the bell-ringer is none other than Courfeyrac, who still wears his bastardized Sherlock Holmes ensemble and is happily yanking on the clapper of an enormous brass bell that has recently been attached to the repaired wall. Feuilly stands beside him, a drill still in his hand.

“Courfeyrac, what the hell are you doing?” Enjolras growls, coming to a halt in the foyer. Grantaire stands behind him, crosses his arms and tries to imitate Enjolras’ frown. He doesn’t quite succeed.

“Enjolras! R! I had the best idea ever!” Courfeyrac grins and gives the bell a couple more clangs for good measure. “I was wondering earlier, ‘How can I quickly assemble all the members of the frat if I need them, like, immediately?’ I mean, I could just yell for everybody, but that would probably blow out my voice and I need to be careful with that because auditions for the fall musical are coming up and if I want a shot at playing Pippin, I need to take care of my vocal cords—“

“Babe, get to the point,” Combeferre gently interrupts from his place in an armchair across the living room.

“Sorry. Anyway, I was like, ‘What makes people react quickly?’ and then it hits me: alarm bells! I thought maybe I could just pull the fire alarm whenever I wanted everyone—“ Combeferre shakes his head “—but ‘Ferre said no. So then I thought: bell! And it totally worked.”

Grantaire looks around the room. Courfeyrac was right about the bell being an effective summoning tool. All the members of the frat are gathered in the living room: Joly and Bossuet are tangled in a human pretzel on the chaise section of the sofa, Combeferre is tucked into an armchair and Pontmercy is sprawled face down on the rug in front of the fireplace. Jehan lies inverted on a smaller sofa, his legs over the back cushions and his head dangling backward off the edge of the seat. Bahorel comes down the stairs to complete the group, wearing a dark scowl and dragging a knit blanket behind him, looking like the world’s largest, angriest toddler.

Grantaire finds a spot near Joly and Bossuet on the sofa. He sits close enough to them to leave an open spot for Enjolras on his other side, but Enjolras perches on the arm of the sofa, arms crossed and frown intense.

“Oh, Courf, how exactly do you plan summon somebody if they aren’t actually at the house?” Grantaire asks, to take his attention off pouty Enjolras. If he allows himself to dwell too much on the shape that Enjolras’ mouth makes when he’s pouty, Grantaire might actually lose it in the middle of all these people. His new friends. He happens to like having a houseful of friends and would rather not alienate them by leaning over and stroking their de facto leader’s mouth. Courfeyrac tends to be a good distraction.

“He texts them a gif of a ringing bell with a ‘hashtag summoned.’” Eponine appears out of nowhere and throws herself into the empty space on the couch next to Grantaire, flashing her phone at him. Sure enough, an animated bell is swinging back and forth on her screen with a large, yellow “#summoned” blinking over it.

“How and why are you here?” Grantaire asks as she nestles into his personal space.
“Door was unlocked, Courf summoned me, so…” Eponine shrugs and does her best not too look at Marius’ prone figure on the other side of the room.

Enjolras groans. “Courfeyrac, you can’t summon Eponine. She’s not in the fraternity.”

“Well, she practically is. She’s been here every night this week. And Eponine has some very important clues to share.”

Grantaire cannot imagine what Eponine can possibly contribute to the mystery of the previous night, but it can’t be good. He’s still got a feeling that something weird happened between the two of them at the party. Even though she’s sitting next to him, Eponine won’t look Grantaire in the eye.

“And that brings me to my point,” Courfeyrac begins in his normal voice and then switches into his British-ish accent. “I suppose you’re all wondering why I’ve gathered you here tonight--”

“We’re actually wondering where the hell you got that bell.” Enjolras grumbles.

“Feuilly found it in the attic! Isn’t it fantastic?”

Feuilly still has the drill in his hands and guns the trigger a couple of times, grinning. “Whatever the president wants, the president gets,” he says.

“That’s right,” Courfeyrac says. “I’ve officially been president for almost twenty four hours now and I think it’s time I start doing some presidential shit. So listen up, this is my first decree: every time I ring my awesome Presidential Bell, everyone needs to meet in the living room posthaste. That’s Presidential Decree Number One.”

“What?” Enjolras’ eyebrows are nearly off his face at this.

“I’m the president, E. I get to make decrees as I see fit.”

“Says who?”

“Uh, the Alpha Beta Chi rulebook?” Courfeyrac rolls his eyes at Enjolras, who glares back. “If you wanted to make decrees, E, you should have taken the presidency when you had the chance. But you snoozed, therefore you lose-d.”

“I don’t want to make decrees.”

“Good, because I do want to make decrees. I’m gonna make so many decrees I’m gonna need, like, an entire wall for my decrees.” Courfeyrac’s eyes light up. “Oooh, Feuilly! Can we put up a giant bulletin board on one of these walls?”

“Sure, man,” Feuilly shrugs and guns the drill again.

“Awesome,” Courfeyrac grins, and then, remembering the task at hand, switches back into his British accent and adjusts the brim of his deerstalker cap. “As I’ve already said, I suppose you’re wondering why I’ve called you all here?”

Courfeyrac is met with blank stares from all the boys, with the exception of Marius, whose face is still planted firmly in the carpet. Grantaire is slightly surprised not to hear the actual sound of crickets. It must not be the right time of year for crickets.

“Uh, nobody is curious?” Courfeyrac ventures.
Bahorel is the first to answer, his voice still cracked and tired from underneath his blanket. “Courf, you spent the day interviewing everyone about last night. I think it’s safe to assume that you’ve gathered us all here to do a big, detective style reveal and catch the criminal. Or whatever.”

Courfeyrac deflates a bit. “Yeah, that’s pretty much why I called you all here. So… I guess we’ll just do the thing. Watson!”

Combeferre steps forward and hands Courfeyrac a small black Moleskin notebook. The moment of slight disappointment has passed as quickly as it came on and Courfeyrac jumps back into his presentation with renewed fervor.

“Now, as most of you realized, the party last night got a little… um, out of hand. As your fraternity president, I take full responsibility for both the awkwardness and the awesomeness that occurred last night, but I would be remiss in my presidential duties if I failed to fill in the holes in our collective memory. There are several questions to be answered: who punched R in the face? Where did Enjolras spend the night? And, seriously, who the bloody hell is ‘Cosette Fauchelevent’?”

With the help of Combeferre’s notes, Courfeyrac runs through the known events of the night—the beer bong and tequila shot showdown, Courfeyrac’s own leap from roof to pool, the introduction of Musichetta—and then he pauses dramatically and cocks one eyebrow. “But now we get to the parts unknown. Grantaire was seen wandering the party, eye as of yet un-blackened, shortly before midnight showing off his sketchbook to various female party guests.”

Grantaire reddens at the reminder and chances a quick glance at Enjolras, who meets his eyes for a moment with a cold stare and then looks away. The momentary truce they’d drawn in Jehan’s bed seems to have faded as quickly as it had begun. Grantaire wonders if this means they are no longer going to brunch tomorrow.

“No, to the average party-goer,” Courfeyrac says, “It would have simply appeared that R was showing off his artistic skills in an attempt to get laid last night—“

“Courf, I swear that’s not what—” Grantaire interrupts, but he is shut down by Courfeyrac. Enjolras’ eyes are on the carpet and his mouth pressed in a thin, tense line.

“As I said, R, that is how it would appear to the ‘average partygoer,’ but I, sir, am not your average partygoer. Many people—“ Courfeyrac lets out a sharp, fake cough—“ahem, Enjolras,—“ another cough—“I think that you got yourself punched by one of the women you were allegedly hitting on or perhaps one of their boyfriends. But I don’t have the reputation as this fraternity’s greatest consulting detective for no reason.”

Every eye in the room rolls in perfect synchronization, but Courfeyrac is undeterred.

“Pontmercy!” he barks suddenly, and Marius jerks upright, looking dazed. “You’ve been gone all day and I didn’t get a chance to interrogate you yet.”

“Sorry,” Marius stammers. “I was out walking around looking for… um, someone.”

Eponine lets out a disgruntled huff from beside Grantaire. He looks at her, eyebrow cocked inquisitively, but she just shakes her head and continues pointedly not looking at Marius.

“Well,” Courfeyrac continues. “Do you have any light to shed on the subject of R’s face?”

“Um…” Marius is all wide-eyes and confused eyebrows. “I didn’t punch Grantaire.”

Courfeyrac sighs and scrubs his hand over his forehead. “No one is saying you did, pledge. But
you and Grantaire were locked up in his room for a while. Care to comment?"

“Um…” Marius’ deer in the headlights expression is just getting worse and Grantaire jumps in to help.

“It’s not like that,” Grantaire tries to explain. “We weren’t doing anything, you know, _illicit._”

“You weren’t doing any—?” From beside Grantaire, Eponine makes a lewd gesture with her fingers accompanied by horribly inappropriate squeaky sound effects. Grantaire hits her with his elbow. He definitely doesn’t want Enjolras to get the impression that he was hooking up with Pontmercy last night. Grantaire may not know what he got up to last night, but he knows he definitely didn’t get up to _that._

“Gross, ‘Ponine. That’s gross. I would _never._” Grantaire objects loudly. Possibly too loudly because he catches Enjolras frowning at him out of the corner of his eye. This talk is not going well. “Courf, could you please get to your point and fast? I feel like my rep is taking a beating here and I could use some help.”

Courfeyrac smirks. “Since you asked so nicely, R, yes. Yes, I will get to my point. Eponine?”

“What?” Eponine replies warily.

“Could you do that gross ‘Grantaire banging Marius’ thing with your hands again?”

“Hey!” Grantaire yelps, but Courfeyrac shushes him. Enjolras is scowling at the carpet so hard that Grantaire can’t believe it hasn’t spontaneously combusted with the intensity of his gaze.

“Um, sure.” Eponine repeats her phallic hand gesture. Grantaire sighs and buries his face in his hands, wondering what he ever did to Courfeyrac to deserve this.

Courfeyrac crosses to Eponine and gently takes her hands in his, stopping the in-and-out of her fingers. He holds her left hand out. The knuckles are covered in light red bruises and her hand is slightly swollen. “Eponine?” Courfeyrac asks triumphantly, “Anything you want to tell us?”

“Dammit,” Eponine mutters, pulling her hand away from Courfeyrac and burying it in a pocket of her sweater. “Busted. Sorry about that, R…”

“Eponine,” Grantaire looks up at her, his face full of disbelief and betrayal. “Did you seriously punch me in the face last night?”

“I said ‘sorry!’”

“Not better! Why? Why did you hit me in the freaking face?”

“Just, _reasons,_ okay?” She snaps at him, eyes darting toward Marius for a second and then back to Grantaire. “You came running up to me at like, two a.m., and give me this huge, sad hug and you’re all ‘Oh, Eponine, I _need you_’ and I’d just had enough. I’d had enough of guys saying that to me last night and I just snapped, okay? I’m sorry, R, I really am. I didn’t mean to hit you it was just… bad timing.”

Eponine takes Grantaire’s hand in her unbruised one. “I’m really sorry,” she repeats for the benefit of the room. Then softer, so only Grantaire can hear, “Can we talk later? About—?” her head jerks subtly toward Marius. Grantaire nods and squeezes her hand back. It’s going to take more that a single left hook to break up his friendship with Eponine.
“What happened after you punched R, Eponine?” Combeferre takes over the questioning, since Courfeyrac is too busy collecting high fives from the assembled company.

“He, um, stumbled to the couch and passed out,” Eponine continues, refusing to let go of Grantaire’s hand. “I covered him with a blanket and then went to sleep on the other part of the couch. That’s it.”

“That’s one! One mystery solved!” Courfeyrac has finished his victory lap around the room and settles onto Combeferre’s lap in the armchair. “Next up: Enjolras!”

Dammit. Enjolras had been so busy sulking at the reminder of Grantaire’s behavior at the party that he’d completely forgotten that he himself was on Courfeyrac’s docket of mysteries to be solved.

“Enjolras!” Courfeyrac is looking at him intently. “Care to tell us where you spent the night?”

“There’s nothing to tell,” Enjolras sits back and crosses his arms defiantly. “I was in my own bed.”

“Lying liar who lies,” Courfeyrac glares at him. “You were not in your room last night.”

“How do you know?” Enjolras shoots back at Courfeyrac, but Bossuet is the one who answers the question.

“Because that’s where Joly and I put Musichetta last night.”

“So that’s who that was!” Enjolras exclaims before he can stop himself. “Dammit,” he mutters when he realizes that he just confessed.

“So,” Courfeyrac continues. “You just admitted that you weren’t in your own room last night. Do you want to tell us where you were?”

“Nope.”

“He was in R’s room,” Bahorel suddenly speaks up. Shit. Enjolras is so busted.

Combeferre peers around Courfeyrac, who is still occupying his lap, looking skeptical. “How do you know that? You told us you didn’t remember much before you passed out last night.”

“I don’t,” Bahorel shrugs. “But I woke up at, like, three in the morning and I really needed some water, so I went to go downstairs. But there was this trail of clothes scattered around the common area leading into R’s room, so I looked to make sure he was okay. But R wasn’t in there. Enjolras was passed out on his bed, all naked.”

Enjolras closes his eyes. Fuck. This could not get more embarrassing.

“Dude, E, you seriously need to hit the gym with me because you are fucking skinny.”

And now his physique is getting criticized. Somehow, the situation actually did manage to get more embarrassing.

Bahorel wraps up his story. “Anyway, E’s lying there all skinny and pasty and I’ve got no idea where R is. There’s this plaid shirt on the floor and, for some reason I grabbed it and took it with me when I went downstairs to get some water. R’s asleep on the couch and I was like ‘oh, his face is gonna get cold’ so I put the shirt on his face.”
“What?” Grantaire finally speaks up. “Why did you do that, Bahorel?”

“I have no idea, dude. I was still drunk. Anyway. That’s where Enjolras spent the night. The end. Can I please go upstairs and go back to bed now?”

Courfeyrac throws both of his arms in the air. “That’s two! Two mysteries solved! Oh my god, I am amazing. Now let’s figure out who ‘Cosette Fauchelevent’ person is and put this case, and Bahorel, to bed. So, who’s got a lead on this Cosette thing?”

Everyone is silent.

“Does anyone remember meeting a Cosette last night?”

No response.

“Nobody saw her writing her name on R’s arm?”

“Has anyone ever even met someone named Cosette at this school?”

Silence. Courfeyrac looks crestfallen.

“Oh my god, you guys,” Eponine finally snaps. “Do none of you know how to use Facebook? Jesus fucking Christ…”

Oh yeah. Somehow over the past twenty-four hours, it hadn’t occurred to anyone to simply type “Cosette Fauchelevent” into Facebook. Stupid. But now everyone is on board with that idea and every face in the room is buried in their smartphone as they race to find the girl’s profile. Everyone except Grantaire—he has an ancient flip phone that can barely send a text, let alone access apps—who is intently picking at the name Sharpie’d on his forearm; Enjolras, who is surreptitiously studying Grantaire, and Marius, who seems to have given up on life and continues to lie facedown on the rug.

“I’ve got her!” Joly squeals, holding up his phone. “This has to be her. Her profile pic is a flower, but she’s the only Cosette Fauchelevent I could find. It says she’s a student here… she’s a pledge in Tri-Phi and she’s—“

“Standing in your foyer?”

Every head in the room whips around to look at the front entrance, where a small blonde girl is nervously shifting from foot to foot. She wears a knee-length floral dress, ankle boots and a blue cardigan that sets off her enormous blue eyes. Enjolras thinks she looks nothing like Grantaire’s type. Not that he has any idea what Grantaire’s type is, but it certainly isn’t something so delicate and ethereal.

“Sorry to just walk in,” she continues, as the entire room gapes at her. “I knocked but nobody answered and the door was unlocked so I just kinda came in.”

More staring.

“I’m Cosette Fauchelevent,” she adds uncecessarily. “One of my sorority sisters was at a party here last night and said someone was looking for me? She said she wrote my name on someone’s arm? Is that person here?” Cosette looks around the room hopefully. Enjolras’ stomach tightens. She is lovely. If this is who Grantaire spent the previous night searching for, then Enjolras can’t really compete. He hates her so much right now.
Grantaire pulls himself to his feet and raises his forearm to show Cosette her name, faded but still visibly inked on his skin. “Uh, yeah. That was me. Hey.”

This is the moment that Enjolras has been dreading. That romantic comedy moment when this Cosette Fauchelevent person sees Grantaire, runs across the room, throws herself into his arms, kisses him deeply and then they live happily, heterosexually ever after. Enjolras wants to leave the room before that happens, but an abrupt exit at this point would be far too noticeable. He settles for crossing his arms and frowning at her.

But Cosette does none of the things Enjolras expects. Instead, she takes one look at Grantaire and her face falls in disappointment.

“Oh,” Cosette manages. “You’re not… I mean, I didn’t… um, sorry. It’s just that you’re not what I was expecting.”

Enjolras’ hatred of her intensifies, for entirely different reasons. Who does she think she is? Is Grantaire not good enough for her? This Cosette Fauchelevent person is clearly terrible and Grantaire could do so much better. Enjolras is about to stand up and say these very things out loud, when another voice speaks up from the corner of the room near the fireplace.

“Oh my god.” At some point in the last few moments, Marius has finally removed his face from the carpet and risen to his feet. He’s standing shakily on the fringe of the room and gazes at Cosette with reverential awe. “It’s you…”

“It’s you!” Her face wears an identical adoring expression as she stares back at Marius. The two of them move slowly toward one another, meeting in a chaste embrace in the middle of the living room. The only thing that could have made the moment more perfect is if the theme from Titanic somehow started playing. But there was no music, just Cosette’s bright voice repeating, “It’s you.”

“Holy shit, it’s her!” Bahorel bellows suddenly. “The girl from the drawings in our room!”

“Oh my god!” Grantaire jumps up from the sofa, dislodging Eponine on one side and jostling Bossuet and Joly closer together on the other. “I remember! Marius ran into a girl last night, like literally ran into her, and then he couldn’t find her so he asked me to draw her. That’s what we were doing in my room! And why I was showing all those sorority girls my sketchbook! I wasn’t being creepy, I was being helpful.”

Grantaire turns to Enjolras and his green eyes are so relieved that Enjolras can’t help but smile at him. There was one small thing, however. “Why did that girl have her hands down the back of your pants?” Enjolras cautiously asks, not sure if he really wants the answer to the question.

It is Cosette who answers, ripping her gaze away from Marius long enough to offer Grantaire and apologetic smile. “That was Chloe, from my sorority. She can get a little handsy when she gets drunk. Sorry.”

With that (and one last clang of the bell), the meeting is broken up and everyone heads off in separate directions to wrap up their Saturday night. Marius pulls Cosette onto the loveseat and they begin a soft conversation, hands entwined. Jehan drags Bahorel and his blanket upstairs. Combeferre is pulling Courfeyrac out of the living room by the lapels of his trenchcoat. Joly and Bossuet are talking about destinations for their first date with Musichetta later that week. As Bossuet stands up, his foot connects with something solid and sketchbook-sized and knocks it further under the sofa.

Enjolras lingers at the base of the staircase and watches Eponine give Grantaire a long hug before
she leaves. Grantaire turns to come upstairs and stops when he sees Enjolras, his expression tentative. Enjolras smiles at him. “So, I still owe you brunch.”

###

R

The good part about sleeping through his alarm is that Grantaire doesn’t have time to agonize over what to wear to brunch with Enjolras. When an inquisitive knock sounds at his door, followed by Bahorel’s rough voice asking him if he was up “because Enjolras is wondering if you’re ready to go to brunch with him and also what the fuck?” Grantaire manages to leap out of bed, pull on some pants, dash to the bathroom to brush his teeth and hope that he looks decent. He briefly considers showering, but doesn’t have time to maneuver in the shower with his broken wrist. Deodorant will have to do the trick.

He jams a grey knit beanie on top of his tangle of black hair, zips his green hoodie over the shirt he’d slept in and bolts downstairs to meet Enjolras, only a few minutes after the appointed time. And if the shirt he slept in happens to be the *Avengers* t-shirt that Enjolras had returned to him the previous night that possibly still smells like Enjolras, well… then so be it. Although Grantaire isn’t entirely sure this is appropriate brunch attire. Enjolras is dressed in slim grey jeans, a red cardigan over an undoubtedly clean t-shirt and a pair of new-looking red Chuck Taylors. He looks nice, much nicer than Grantaire, who realizes belatedly that his jeans are spattered with white paint. But then again, Grantaire always thinks that Enjolras looks nice. He could be dressed entirely in bubble-wrap and Grantaire would still find him breathtaking.

Enjolras nods a greeting, or tries to, as he wraps a thick plaid scarf around his neck. “Are you going to be warm enough in that?” he asks. “The restaurant is maybe half a mile away.”

“What restaurant? Where are you going?” Courfeyrac is sprawled out on the living room couch watching something animated on the enormous television with Combeferre and Jehan. Grantaire hadn’t even noticed them when he came downstairs.

“Nowhere. It’s none of your business.” Enjolras replies curtly, pulling a flatcap out of his pocket and yanking it over his curls.

“Liar. You’re going to brunch. You’re going to brunch and you didn’t invite me.”

“No, I didn’t.” Enjolras starts to head toward the door and Courfeyrac jumps up from the couch to trail behind. “Courf, I don’t have to invite you everywhere.”

“But you’re going to *Stove & Spyglass*, aren’t you? I love *Stove & Spyglass*!” Courfeyrac is now in between Enjolras, Grantaire and the door.

Grantaire adores Courfeyrac, he really does, but if Courfeyrac does anything to derail his brunch date with Enjolras, Grantaire might have to lock him in a closet.

Courfeyrac is still pouting when Joly and Bossuet join the group in the living room, clutching mugs of coffee and each wearing opposite halves of two different sets of pajamas. “Enjolras is going to *Stove & Spyglass* without us, you guys,” Courfeyrac complains at them. “I’m gonna make a decree that no one is allowed to go to *Stove & Spyglass* without inviting the whole frat.”

“Babe, you can’t do that,” Combeferre, still on the sofa, chimes in.

“I’m pretty sure I can. *Stove & Spyglass* has amazing chicken and waffles—“
Suddenly, the whole room is loudly vocalizing a desire to go to brunch at this *Stove & Spyglass* place and Grantaire is working himself up into a panic that his brunch for two is about to turn into a rowdy group outing until Enjolras puts his foot down.


“So, what exactly is *Stove & Spyglass* and why am I the only one who’s never heard of it?” Grantaire asks as they head down the porch, both he and Enjolras ignoring the dissenting shouts (and a couple of catcalls) that follow them out the front door.

Enjolras heads left down the sidewalk, toward the Hill, and explains that the place is kind of off the beaten path: a former auto shop renovated into a restaurant where all the decor is either recycled or repurposed.

“And all the food is locally grown or raised,” Enjolras tells Grantaire. “You’ll love it: it’s all organic and farm-to-table and it’s absolutely fantastic.”

Grantaire actually thinks it sounds a bit douche-y and pretentious, but doesn’t voice his opinion on the matter to Enjolras. They’re finally on solid footing after the epic shit-show that been Friday and Saturday, and Grantaire is thoroughly enjoying the cease-fire. He’s positive he’s going to fuck it up sooner or later, but is determined to ride out the peace as long as he possibly can. Ergo, he’ll keep his opinions on organic, hipster restaurants to himself. Except for one thing.

“Uh, they serve bacon, right?” he asks, as Enjolras leads the way to the location of this underground, yet strangely popular restaurant. They turn onto 13th Street and the brisk, early Sunday morning air is still tinged with the smell of Saturday night vomit. Grantaire’s stomach twists a bit as his brain punishes him for thinking about food while walking down the acid-smelling, partied-out street, but he forces his digestive system to calm down. The bacon question is a very important issue.

“Yes, R. They serve bacon.” Enjolras smiles indulgently. He’s wearing a pair of tinted, expensive-looking aviator sunglasses that completely block his eyes from Grantaire’s view. It’s horribly unfair that Grantaire can’t see those blue eyes when Enjolras is smiling at him. Enjolras’ eyes are dazzling when he smiles. It is tempting to simply snatch the sunglasses off his face so Grantaire can see those eyes, but, again: *not* trying to get into a fight.

Grantaire simply pulls his own sunglasses—a cheap pair of knock-off Wayfarers—down over his green eyes and smirks back. “Good. Bacon is the corner stone of a solid brunch. Especially an ‘I’m sorry for unceremoniously kicking you out of bed’ brunch.”

“Oh,” Enjolras replies, raising one light eyebrow above the rim of his sunglasses. “Do you go to a lot of those kind of brunches?”

“Uh…” Grantaire stammers for a moment, trying to figure out if Enjolras had just flirted with him but his train of thought is derailed when Enjolras makes a sharp right turn down a discrete alley. Grantaire hurries after him toward a nondescript door with a small wooden sign—*Stove & Spyglass*, it reads in tiny, hand-painted letters-- as the only distinguishing mark that this was a dining establishment and not just a random door in a brick wall.

The brunch place is bustling when Enjolras and Grantaire arrive. Wall-to-wall people—adorable couples are wrapped around each other for want of space, groups of hung-over students in sunglasses and hats slouch against anything that will hold them up—are crammed into the small lobby area helping themselves to free coffee as they wait for a table. The interior of the restaurant
is hipper than Grantaire had expected. How has he never heard of this place? Probably has something to do with his long-standing habit of never being awake on a Sunday morning during typical brunch hours.

Enjolras gives the hostess his name and, miraculously, they are immediately escorted to a cozy table for two, tucked into a corner under a piece of wall art that looks like it’s made of old wooden palate pieces and vintage magazine ads. Grantaire is a little bit in love with it.

“Did you make a reservation last night?” Grantaire asks as he settles into his chair.

“No.”

“Then how did we get seated so fast?”

“I come here a lot,” Enjolras answers, shrugging. He asks the hostess to bring over some coffee and, based on her doe-eyed expression as she hands them the menu and scuttles away, Grantaire has a feeling that Enjolras’ face might have something to do with their rapid seating. Enjolras turns his attention to the menu, oblivious to the fact that he practically gave the girl a heart attack by simply smiling at her.

“You have no idea, do you?” Grantaire asks.

“What to order?” Enjolras is still focused on the menu. “No, actually I do know what I’m going to have. I always get the same thing, every time. I don’t know why I even bother opening the menu.”

“No, I mean your face. You have no idea what it does to people.”

Enjolras sets the menu aside and frowns. “What are you talking about?”

The hostess is back with a large silver French press full of rich-smelling coffee. She sets it in front of Enjolras, smiling nervously, and then blurts out an awkward string of words as she backs away. Grantaire waits until she is far enough away before he lets out the laugh he’s been holding. He doesn’t want to make her feel bad about turning into a stammering idiot in the face of Enjolras’ beauty. He knows exactly how that feels.

“What’s funny?” Enjolras looks genuinely confused.

“It’s just…” Grantaire sighs. “You have a great face. You have a face that could launch a thousand ships, Apollo.”

“You’re getting your Greeks and gods all mashed together, R,” Enjolras chastises as he begins to pour coffee from the French press that the hostess dropped off. “Also, I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“You saw that hostess. And those waitresses—“ Grantaire flicks his eyes over toward the server station, where a small cluster of female staff members are gawking at their table—“And every girl at the party on Friday night.”

“Please don’t bring that up,” Enjolras groans as he tops off the second mug. “How do you take your coffee?”

“Black, please,” Grantaire replies and Enjolras slides a coffee across the table. Grantaire begins to thank him and then gets completely lost watching Enjolras’ hands stir cream and sugar into his own cup of coffee. Grantaire momentarily reconsiders his choice of black coffee, if taking cream and sugar meant that he could watch Enjolras pour and stir that much longer.
“That was really nice of you to help Marius find that his girl the other night,” Enjolras begins and then takes a sip of his coffee.

“I thought we weren’t going to talk about Friday night,” Grantaire counters.

“We can talk about the nice parts,” Enjolras informs him and then pauses, considering. “Although that might be the only nice part. That party was terrible. If that is what every Greek event is going to be like—”

“Change of subject!” Grantaire jumps in before Enjolras can get himself worked up about the failings of the Greek system. Grantaire hates the Greek system as much as the next guy, but he doesn’t want this brunch to turn into a rant. “I’m going back to class tomorrow.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Yep, my week of doctor-excused absences has come to an end, so back to class I go.”

“Has it really been a week?” Enjolras asks, sounding surprised.

“Yeah, I broke my wrist a week ago today. Holy shit, so, like, at exactly this time last week, we were in the emergency room and now here we are: sitting at brunch like a couple of civilized adults. We’ve come a long way, baby.” Grantaire is quoting that last line from… something, but it makes Enjolras turn red. He hopes that he didn’t go too far. He doesn’t think he has, because Enjolras manages a smile through his blush.

“We should be celebrating.”

“What are we celebrating?” Their server has ninja’d up to their table and smiles that vacantly pleasant smile that is a staple for anyone who works in the service industry.

“It’s our one week anniversary,” Grantaire grins at Enjolras, curious to see what his reaction will be.

“I prefer ‘week-iversary,’” Enjolras counters, returning the grin and Grantaire’s heart suddenly feels too big for his chest. This is going well. This is going extremely well. Grantaire has spent most of the previous week scrutinizing Enjolras’ behavior for clues about his sexual preference and the scales are starting to tip in favor of gay. Grantaire resolves to bring it up when they get back to the house.

“Well, happy week-iversary then,” says their server, her smile becoming more genuine. “Have you decided what you’d like for brunch today? The usual for you, Enjolras?”

Enjolras nods, but does not elaborate as to what “the usual” actually is, leaving Grantaire to his own devices to order the restaurant’s signature omelet with a side of bacon.

“So, what time is your first class tomorrow?” Enjolras asks after the server leaves.

“I’ve got an art history lecture at one,” Grantaire answers and then immediately regrets it as Enjolras’ face scrunches in disappointment.

“Oh, that sucks. I’ve have class and ten and I thought we could walk to campus together.”

“BUT,” Grantaire interrupts, his brain improvising frantically, “I do need to go in early to work in the studio. Which happens to open up at ten. So, I could totally walk to class.”
“Great, it’s a date.” Enjolras might actually kill Grantaire with his phrasing. Is that just a saying? Is it an actual date? Is this an actual date? Grantaire begins overthinking all the possible ways that Enjolras could have meant that sentence as Enjolras blithely talks at him about his Monday class schedule until their food arrives. The server slides an omelet and pile of crispy bacon in front of Grantaire while Enjolras receives a plate of… white.

“Um, what exactly is that?” Grantaire asks, peering cautiously at Enjolras’ breakfast.

“It’s a tofu scramble. It’s amazing,” Enjolras informs him, shoveling a forkful of squishy white goo into his mouth.

“Enjolras, I read the menu,” Grantaire whispers in mock horror. “There are plenty of vegetarian options. You don’t have to do this to yourself.”

“It’s really good,” Enjolras responds, loading up another forkful. “And I’m not even that strict a vegetarian. I usually just don’t eat meat because you can never really know the conditions in which the animals were raised or if they were given hormones or—”

“So wait,” Grantaire points a crispy strip of bacon at Enjolras. “You’d be willing to eat a piece of my free-range, cruelty free, farm-to-table bacon?”

Enjolras regards him cautiously. “Maybe. I would be willing to eat a piece of your bacon if you try my tofu scramble.”

“Ew,” Grantaire over-exaggerates a grimace of disgust. “That’s a pretty big ask, E. I’m gonna need to raise the stakes on my side of the bargain. I’ll try your gross pile of tofu mush, if you eat a piece of my bacon… Lady and the Tramp style.” Grantaire places one end of the crisp bacon in his teeth and smirks.

“You want me to eat bacon off your face? Here?” Enjolras reddens and glances around. The restaurant is packed.

Grantaire shrugs and replies as best he can around the strip of bacon still clenched in his front teeth. “How badly do you want to change my mind about your tofu pile?”

“I really, really like being right about things,” Enjolras leans forward, his eyebrows furrowed. His mouth is almost at the edge of the bacon. “Fuck it,” he says and eats his end of the bacon strip. Holy shit, there was no way Grantaire thought he would actually do that. Or, if he did do it, Grantaire expected Enjolras to maybe to take a tiny nibble from the edge, but no. Enjolras puts almost the entire strip of bacon in his mouth, the his tip of his perfect nose almost touching Grantaire’s. Then, with a quick snap of teeth, the bacon is gone.

“Wow, you just ate, like, my entire piece of bacon.” Grantaire is impressed.

Enjolras chews thoughtfully and then swallows. “Don’t underestimate the lengths to which I’ll go to prove a point, Grantaire. Now open.

Grantaire obeys and Enjolras slides a heaping forkful of tofu into his mouth. It is shockingly good.

“Dammit. You’re right. That is fantastic.”

Enjolras smiles and takes a sip of his coffee. “Told you. I’m pretty much right about everything. Want some more?”

Grantaire nods and Enjolras feeds him another forkful of tofu.
People are staring at their table, but neither of them care. Grantaire is fed more tofu. Enjolras ventures to eat another piece of bacon, although in a more conventional manner. In their little corner of the restaurant, under the recycled-material wall art, everything is perfect. Grantaire loves brunch, he loves this hipster restaurant and he thinks he might just love Enjolras.
Two Do Not Make a Couple

Chapter Summary

In which Grantaire and Enjolras argue (in a good way), plastic cutlery is discovered to be hazardous, Courfeyrac gets a new toy, and Grantaire and Enjolras argue (in a bad way) about everything and nothing all at once.

E

It takes Enjolras a good thirty seconds of staring bleary-eyed at the occupied shower stall to realize precisely what the problem is. He’s just stumbled out of bed, his head is still thick with sleep and he can’t quite comprehend why the small community bathroom is so steamy, why the curtain on his favorite shower stall is drawn, and why a green and white striped bath-towel hangs from the wall where Enjolras normally hooks his own.

He’s been living in the Alpha Beta Chi house for a week now and he never runs into anyone in the bathroom in the morning. No one ever gets up up for class at the same time that he does. Why is today different? It isn’t until a pale arm snakes out from behind the shower curtain and gropes unseeingly for the towel that Enjolras realizes the truth of the situation: Grantaire is going back to class today, which means Grantaire is currently occupying the shower. And people tend to shower naked.

Enjolras sees two choices: beat a hasty retreat back to his room or jump into one of the two other unoccupied stalls before Grantaire sees him. The option to simply take off his clothes, get into a different stall and proceed with his shower like he would do if the person in the bathroom with him were any one of this other friends doesn’t even enter his mind. His brain is still waking up and it takes him too long make a decision between the two absurd options.

By then it’s too late. Grantaire has stepped out of the shower and the only choice that is available to Enjolras now is to stay where he is and try not to gape at the wet, dripping, barely-covered boy in front of him.

The green and white towel is slung low on Grantaire’s hips and the damp terrycloth clings to every curve and angle, as if to tease Enjolras with a chaste preview of the landscape of Grantaire’s nether regions. His black curls hang in wet, lank tendrils almost to his shoulders and the drops falling from them descend in achingly slow trails along lithe, muscular pathways. Pathways that Enjolras desperately wants to trace with his finger. Or lips. Or tongue.

Grantaire is facing away from Enjolras and he hasn’t yet realized that he has an audience. This might be awkward in a moment, but for now, Enjolras just bites down hard on his lower lip and enjoys the view.

Not even the fact that Grantaire’s injured arm is wrapped tightly in a white plastic shopping bag and secured with duct tape can take away from the sheer glory of his wet, nearly naked beauty. He clutches a plastic shower caddy with the fingertips of his injured left hand and bends over to pick up his pile of discarded clothing from the floor with his right. The edge of Grantaire’s towel is sloppily tucked into itself and it slips lower when he bends down, exposing the set of dimples on his lower back. Enjolras lets out a sound that is somewhere between a squeak and a moan, finally
revealing his presence.

Startled, Grantaire straightens back up hastily and whips around to face Enjolras, his arms full of clothing and bath products. The bath towel, already precarious in its simple tuck, gives up the good fight and lets gravity have its way; the towel becomes a pile of terry cloth pooled around his ankles, leaving Grantaire quite naked.

Naked, wet and close enough to touch.

Enjolras forces his eyes to stay on Grantaire’s face, locked onto those green eyes, which are enormous as Grantaire stares back at Enjolras. They stay like that--trapped in a mutually embarrassed visual stalemate--for what feels like an eternity. Enjolras wills himself to stay looking at Grantaire’s face and only at his face, but an expanse of pale limbs swim in and out of focus at the bottom of his peripheral vision and there is a patch of darkness between Grantaire’s thighs that Enjolras can’t not notice.

“Um,” Enjolras finally manages.

“Um,” Grantaire echoes. He is the first one to move, bending at the knees and trying to recover his dropped towel, but his arms are too loaded down and clumsy with his cast to manage the task. “Crap, I can’t… dammit——” He straightens back up in frustration.

“No, here let me—“ Enjolras makes the offer before he realizes what exactly it would entail. Bending down in front of naked Grantaire. Stepping closer to naked Grantaire. Putting his face dangerously close that that intriguing patch of darkness that still floats at the bottom of his eye line.

Well, the offer is out there, Enjolras can’t back out now. Setting his jaw and rapidly flicking his eyes down to the towel—trying not to accidently ogle the unintentional nudity directly in front of his face—Enjolras quickly steps forwards, crouches down and snatches the towel off the floor. As he ascends with his prize, he can’t help but notice the wiry black hair that covers the top of Grantaire’s muscular thighs; he catches a glimpse a heretofore unseen tattoo etched in the smooth white skin at the juncture of hip and leg; and, despite a refrain of don’t look at his dick don’t look at his dick don’t look at his dick looping through his brain, Enjolras’ eyes disobey those direct orders and rest on Grantaire’s cock for a second. Just a brief second.

And Enjolras likes what he sees. A lot.

He steps back gingerly, forcing his eyes back up to more neutral territory, and offers the recovered towel to Grantaire, holding it at arms length. Enjolras is afraid that if he gets any closer, he’ll toss the stupid thing back to the floor, knock the other objects out of Grantaire’s arms, press the other boy back into the still-steaming shower stall and let his hands explore what his eyes had just glimpsed.

That simply won’t do.

Grantaire accepts the offered towel with his right hand, cramming it into the fist that is already full of his discarded clothes. “Thanks,” he mutters, his cheeks a bright shade of pink. Enjolras isn’t sure if it is from the embarrassment of the situation or the shower, but the shade suits Grantaire. It would be interesting to see what else makes his face color like that. “See you downstairs in a few? For class?”

Enjolras nods in ascent and backs up another step to give Grantaire room to pass. Grantaire lets the towel dangle from his right hand, covering his junk and exits the bathroom. Enjolras isn’t sure if he is unaware that his ass is still exposed or just doesn’t give a fuck, but Enjolras can’t resist a glance
as Grantaire is leaving. What a view.

Right before he reaches the bathroom door, Grantaire turns back around and shoots Enjolras a sideways grin. “Hey, E? Just so you know? I’m a grower, not a show-er.” And then, with one last flash of his bare ass before he hits the doorway, Grantaire is gone.

What the fuck did that mean? A grower not a—Oh. Oh, God. Enjolras gets it now. His own dick, already roused into semi-hardness from the whole naked encounter, twitches with interest and hardens even more at the implications of Grantaire’s statement. Enjolras thought that he was showing quite well, actually, and is suddenly obsessed with the idea of what that might grow into.

He drops his pajama pants and underwear on the bathroom floor and steps into the shower, his hand already on the shaft of his own cock. Enjolras really doesn’t want to be that guy, the shower masturbation guy, but the situation really can’t be helped. He makes a mental promise to Lysol the hell out of the shower stall when he’s done and then, with the image of naked Grantaire fresh in his mind, Enjolras takes care of business.

Grantaire saunters down the hall away from bathroom because, really, what other choice does he have? After that epic display of full frontal nudity and his bravado-filled comment, he kinda has to strut back to his room. Hold his head high. Pretend that he’s actually as confident as his bare-assed stride and boasting statement seemed to indicate. So saunter he does, towel covering his junk, ass hanging out for all to see, and steps inside his room, closing the dark wooden door firmly behind him.

The second he hears the reassuring metallic click of the latch, however, Grantaire drops his towel, his armful of bath accessories and his suave façade. He flops facedown on the bed, not giving two shits about the wet outline his post-shower body leaves on the grey and green sheets. He shoves his face into one of his pillows and lets the goose-down stifle his moan of embarrassment. “What the fuck did you do?” he groans into the pillow. “Grow-er not a show-er?! Stupid stupid stupid…” The litany of stupid keeps pouring out of his mouth like a steady meditative mantra and, strangely enough, it calms him.

Because really, what’s the worst thing that can happen now? Enjolras might be offended and never speak to him again. Best-case scenario? He might be intrigued by Grantaire’s idiotically cocky statement and maybe want to see for himself if it were true. The most likely scenario, however, is that Enjolras will probably chalk Grantaire up as a total jackass, never take him to brunch again and probably leave for class without waiting.

Grantaire sighs a heavy, self-pitying sigh. There’s no use hiding in his bedroom, the damage has been done. He sucks it up, dresses in his least dirty outfit—Marius has been assigned laundry duty for all the brothers as one of his pledge tasks, but Grantaire isn’t in the frat and doesn’t feel right about taking advantage of the kid-- and heads downstairs to see if that awkward bathroom encounter frightened Enjolras away from their morning walk.

Miracle of miracles, Enjolras is in the kitchen, busying himself at the coffeemaker and presumably waiting for Grantaire. His golden hair tumbles perfectly over his forehead and he’s sharply dressed in a red sweater, white collar peeking out from underneath. Enjolras looks like an advertisement for absurdly expensive jeans that only come in weird European sizes.

Grantaire looks down at his own paint stained jeans and rumpled t-shirt and regrets not taking Marius up on his offer of laundry services. He contemplates taking some of his paycheck from the house-painting gig--although it’s more like guilt money from Feuilly. Grantaire barely painted
anything that day--and going to buy a couple of things to spice up his wardrobe. But, really, what would be the point? Grantaire could be dressed in a white tie and tails and he’d still look like a grubby street urchin standing next to Enjolras in his most casual outfit.

“Ready?” Enjolras holds out a mason jar coffee cup—it’s Grantaire’s, the embossed R standing out against the rich brown leather of the sleeve—and smiles tightly. Grantaire thinks he might be imagining it, but Enjolras’ face might be tinged with the slightest hint of red. “I’m not sure how far the art building is from here, so I figured we should probably leave with plenty of time. I don’t want you to be late for your… studio space thing?”

Grantaire has to contain a laugh as he swallows his sip of coffee—black, Enjolras remembered that he likes his coffee black, that is so fucking sweet—and shakes his head. “It’s not a timed thing. My studio space is mine pretty much whenever. But the natural light is better in the morning so I try to get in early as often as I can. Which, as you can imagine, is rare.”

Grantaire takes another sip of coffee and continues. “Actually, we could drop you by your class first, if you want?”

Enjolras shakes his head. “No, I want to see where the art building is. I don’t think I’ve ever actually been there.”

“Seriously? You’ve never been to the art building?” Grantaire finds this unfathomable. He’s lived in that building since freshman year; it’s his home away from home and, if Grantaire is being perfectly honest, his actual home on a couple of desperate occasions.

Grantaire continues to give Enjolras shit about his ignorance of the university’s fine arts programming as they head out the front door.

On the front lawn, Courfeyrac, Bossuet and Feuilly are cramming the remnants of another toilet papering into large black Hefty bags.

“Again?” Enjolras asks, incredulous.

“Yep,” Courfeyrac scrunches his nose up in annoyance. “And this time those fuckers forked us, too.”

“Excuse me?” Grantaire can’t have heard that correctly.

Bossuet comes limping over to shove his armful of toilet paper into the trash bag. “They forked us. They took those little plastic forks and jammed them into the grass, points up. So if somebody walked onto the lawn to pick up the toilet paper and wasn’t wearing shoes, they’d get stabbed in the foot by tiny little fork prongs.”

“And that shoeless somebody would be you, Boss?” Grantaire ventures a guess.

“Yes,” Bossuet replies, now smartly wearing thick-soled running shoes but still limping from his earlier fork-stabbing. “Joly had time to disinfect the billion little puncture wounds before he went to class, but still. Hurts like hell.”

Enjolras is glaring at the house across the street, but Montparnasse and company are absent from their porch. “So what do we need to do, Feuilly? Call the police? Set up security cameras in the front of the house?”

“I don’t know yet, E,” Feuilly answers, tying off the last bag of ruined toilet paper and tossing it
onto the pile, which is at least ten trash bags deep. “Courfeyrac said we’d talk about it tonight at the weekly meeting.”

Grantaire didn’t realize that fraternities had meetings every week. Apparently, neither did Enjolras, judging by his frustrated groan.

“We have another meeting tonight, Courf?” Enjolras isn’t quite whining, but it’s close. “Does that mean that we can’t do our Monday night les Amis planning this week, either?”

Courfeyrac very gently explains that there is a weekly meeting every Monday --“That’s why it’s called ‘weekly,’ Enjolras”-- but that he and Combeferre would sit down with Enjolras after they adjourned that evening and plan the agenda for Thursday at the Musain.

“You know, Enjolras, there is a really simple solution to this problem,” Courfeyrac says, setting one hand on Enjolras’ shoulder and squeezing gently. The softness of the gesture surprises Grantaire. He’s never seen Courfeyrac be this subdued and sincere before, especially not around Enjolras. Interesting. “The frat needs to do a Philanthropy event this fall. If we combine our event with one of the causes that we are working on with les Amis—“

But Enjolras pushes Courfeyrac’s hand away, turns sharply and strides down the front walk. “No thank you, Courfeyrac,” he snaps over his shoulder. “I don’t want mix our politics in with your parties.”

Courfeyrac sighs and kicks one of the full trash bags littering the lawn beside him. Grantaire hurries after Enjolras, but thinks he hears Courfeyrac mutter something that sounds like “stubborn jackass.”

Enjolras’ is all the way down the block, almost to the street lamp at the corner, by the time that Grantaire catches up to him. “Easy, E! I’m still working with a limited lung capacity here;” Grantaire huffs.

“Sorry,” Enjolras slows down, unclenching his hands and forcing his steps to fall at a reasonable pace. “It’s just—it’s a midterm election this year, yeah? And we really need to be getting young people educated about the issues on the ballot this November. Younger voters always miss the midterms and the lack of their voice fucks everything up royally. It’s really important that we raise awareness about this election and I don’t see how we can do that if Courf and ‘Ferre have their focus on fraternity party bullshit.”

Before he even realizes that it’s happening, Grantaire’s mouth has opened and words have started to come out. Words that directly contradict Enjolras. Words reminding Enjolras that fraternity boys and sorority girls are actually the “young people” that les Amis are trying to reach.

Apparently this concept never crossed Enjolras’ mind. “R, you can’t possibly be suggesting that we focus on getting the Greek student population—“

“Why not? They’ve got the right to vote—“

“But frat boys are idiots—“

“You’re a frat boy, Enjolras—“

“Not fair, R—“

The argument builds as they walk down the Hill and through the wide stone tunnel that leads to campus. Enjolras’ rails against Grantaire’s hypothesis as their feet crunch through the piles of fall
leaves littering the tree-lined sidewalks winding between the ivy-covered buildings; Grantaire rebuts as they pass groups of students playing Frisbee golf on the large, grassy quad in front of the library. Enjolras is still speechifying when they reach their destination and Grantaire finally, reluctantly has to silence him.

“E, E!” He practically has to shout in Enjolras’ face. “This is me. We’re here. This is the art building.”

Enjolras’ mouth freezes mid-syllable and then snaps shut. “Oh. Well, then. The art building is very… nice?”

“Nice” is one way to describe it. The building itself isn’t terribly special: a long, low-profile hall made of the same Italian sandstone as the rest of the old part of campus. But the building has character. Its exterior is practically covered with installation pieces, bits of sculpture and chalk murals. At some point over the last week, some artist had erected a six foot-tall Eiffel Tour made of salvaged computer hardware in the patch of grass and flowers next to the front steps. “La technologié guidant le peuple!” reads a small sign staked into the lawn beside the sculpture.

Grantaire grins. Artists are so weird. He didn’t realize how much he missed being here.

Enjolras stares at the Eiffel Tower statuette, a frown creasing his brow as he appraises it. “I like that,” he finally declares with a decisive nod and then shuffles a bit awkwardly beside Grantaire. His eyes flick down the path, in the direction of the central part of campus and the humanities building, but he makes no move to leave.

“So, I guess I’ll see you later?” Grantaire is uncertain. He thought he’d run through every possible scenario as to how this walk to school was going to go, but he’d never envisioned one in which he and Enjolras had engaged in a heated debate the entire time. Enjolras was pissed and they’d practically been fighting and… it was really fun. Grantaire had enjoyed the hell out of riling Enjolras.

The color is high in Enjolras’ cheeks and his blue eyes are shining as he gazes inscrutably at Grantaire. “I still have a couple of points to make,” he complains. “What are you doing for lunch?”

E

Lunch extends into coffee. Coffee turns into Enjolras escorting Grantaire to his afternoon lecture, which leads Grantaire to return the favor and pick Enjolras up outside of the humanities building (“This is the humanities building, huh? It’s very… nice?” “Shut it.”) at the end of the school day. Apart from ordering lunch items and coffee drinks and Grantaire’s brief jab at the humanities building, the conversation completely consists of the voter registration debate. Amazingly, Grantaire has an argument to every objection Enjolras introduces into the discussion. It is a thing of irritating beauty: for each point Enjolras raises about not directing their voter registration toward students in the Greek system, Grantaire smashes it with an incisive counterpoint. Enjolras isn’t sure if the facts that Grantaire is spewing are actually real, but they are convincing.

And Enjolras is beginning to see the value in Grantaire’s idea.

Maybe it would be good to combine ABX and les Amis forces to reach the reluctant voters in sororities and fraternities. Enjolras resolves to talk to Courfeyrac and Combeferre as soon as he can. They can put together a plan, set it in motion, cause some real change with college-aged voters. Just because his two best friends have been behaving like idiot frat boys (one more than the other) for the past week doesn’t mean they aren’t the same guys that Enjolras has known for almost his whole life. They’ll jump at this new strategy to give power to the people.
He pulls his phone out of his pocket and taps out a quick text message.

To Courfeyrac and Combeferre: Need to talk to you guys. Time before meeting?

Grantaire is still going in his counteroffensive, apparently citing a satirical article in *The Onion* as proof that this over-looked sector of the student population could actually be motivated to get out and make a change in the elections. “I mean, yeah, they’ll probably have to be promised beer,” Grantaire concedes, his argument apparently wrapping up, “but I think that if we look at the whole ‘carrot/stick’ parable, then—“

“Okay, R, okay!” Enjolras cuts him off, smiling. “You’ve made some very good points and I’ll consider everything carefully—“

“You didn’t even let me get to my examples based on *Animal House*!” Grantaire complains. “I had some really great comparisons tying the end sequence of that movie to the whole MTV “Rock the Vote” initiative and the flawed 1840 election that caused William Henry Harrison to be—“

“Seriously?”

Grantaire’s mouth twists into a smirk. “Maybe. But you interrupted me, so now you’ll never know.”

“Damn. Well, if I need more persuading, I’ll be sure to ask about it.”

“Do. I’ll spend the rest of my afternoon illustrating it into an easy-to-follow comic for you.”

This is how the whole day has been. They argue, joke, and then argue again. Grantaire keeps throwing Enjolras off balance and it is infuriating. And amazing. Infuriazing? That’s not a word, but it should be. Someone needs to coin a brand new word to describe the feelings that Grantaire elicits in Enjolras. There is no way that any other human in history has experienced this. Enjolras never wants Grantaire to never stop talking, and also wants to grab him by his black curls and shut him up completely.

Maybe that will be part of his agenda for the rest of the day. After he reconciles with Courfeyrac and Combeferre, and they activate their Wonder Triplet powers on this whole voter turnout thing, Enjolras will finally venture to ask Grantaire about his sexuality. And then, if the answer is on the appropriate side of the Kinsey scale, Enjolras will ask him out. Or just grab him and kiss him.

Apart from the lawn-forking, this has been an incredibly good day.

Enjolras and Grantaire have arrived back at the Alpha Beta Chi house. The lawn appears to be free of both toilet paper and plastic dining utensils. Grantaire trots up the steps in front of Enjolras, flings the front door open with his good hand and gallantly waves him through with his cast… then Enjolras freezes directly inside, almost causing Grantaire to crash into his back.

There is an enormous cork bulletin board on the wall just inside the front door and Enjolras does not like the look of it. Not one little bit.

There are already several multicolored pieces of paper with new rules and regulations written on them, some in Courfeyrac’s signature scrawl, some in Combeferre’s neat printing and one written in what Enjolras recognizes as Jehan’s looping script. A placard hangs above the enormous board, reading:

*Courfeyrac’s Board of Presidential Decrees*
“Oh my god, Courfeyrac actually got a board. He’s going mad with power,” Enjolras grumbles, dropping his messenger bag on the floor and flopping onto the sofa.

“Nah, Courf’s just having a good time. He can’t seriously expect us to—“ Grantaire ambles over the to the board and peers in for a closer look, ‘Spank Marius Pontmercy on the ass with a paddle every time he forgets to address a brother as Your Awesomeness’ or ‘Compete in the weekly beer pong tournament.’”

“He doesn’t expect you to do anything. You have the luxury of not actually being a member of this fraternity.” Enjolras scowls, his momentary goodwill toward Courfeyrac quickly evaporating.

“I don’t know E, I kinda like the sound of—“ Grantaire reads another card, ‘—‘Unlimited Kegerator Privileges.’ I might have to consider membership.”

“Don’t even joke, R. You’ve mentioned how much you hate frat boys, like, a thousand times. Don’t feel like you need to assimilate into the mindless Greek herd just to get some free beer.”

“Unlimited free beer, Enjolras. There’s the difference.” Grantaire replies.

“Did somebody just say ‘unlimited free beer?’” Courfeyrac bounds down the stairs, his entrance impeccably timed. Sometimes Enjolras wonders if Courfeyrac lurks around corners, just waiting for a good line to enter on. He wouldn’t put it past Courfeyrac. The guy has a dramatic streak a mile wide.

Courfeyrac slings an arm around Grantaire’s shoulders and ruffles his black curls in greeting. “Damn, kid, you’ve got some soft-ass hair,” Courfeyrac says. “Enjolras, have you felt R’s hair? It’s like petting a baby bunny rabbit… but, like, hotter. A really hot baby bunny rabbit. Is that weird?”

Enjolras is glaring at Courfeyrac. No. No, he has not touched Grantaire’s hair, although that particular activity is practically at the top of the list of things that he wants to do. And now he’s been beaten to the punch by Courfeyrac and his ridiculous lack of respect for personal space. It’s horribly unfair.

“No wonder Jehan has been obsessed with playing with your hair. ‘Ferre! You need to come feel Grantaire’s hair. It’s the best.”

Combeferre has only managed to get one step inside the front door, his heavy backpack still strapped to his shoulders, but he gamely heads toward Grantaire and pats his hair. “You’re right, babe. R has amazing hair.”

“We should probably make ‘petting Grantaire’s hair’ one of my presidential decrees.”

Enjolras officially hates Courfeyrac’s board. Hates it. Has a sudden desperate need to pull it off the wall and set it on fire.

Combeferre, in true Combeferre fashion, steps in to save the day. “You can’t make any decrees about non-members, Courf. And I feel like that is an invasion of R’s personal space. He probably doesn’t want everyone running their grubby mitts through his hair.”

“Well, if everyone had to do it…” Grantaire begins, looking hopeful until he catches Enjolras’ gaze, which is off the charts in its level of displeasure. “Yeah, no. That’s a terrible idea. Please don’t decree that.”
“Fine,” Courfeyrac pouts. “Hey! Enjolras, what’s up with that text? What did you need to talk to us about?”

Shit. Enjolras had forgotten that he’d texted the two C’s. The irritation of the last ten minutes had managed to completely undo Grauntale’s case for combining _les Amis_ with ABX to work on a voter recruitment project. Enjolras is no longer in the mood to play nice with the Greek system.

“Uh, nothing.”

“Nothing?” Combeferre peers at Enjolras over the top of his glasses. “You sent an important sounding text to the both of us and it’s nothing?”

“I just… wanted to ask if you guys could ask Feuilly to put veggie burgers on the shopping list. I didn’t know the proper channels for grocery requests, so… I just thought I would text both of you.” Enjolras knows his lie is lame, but it’s the best he can come up with.

Combeferre assures him that they can bring it up at the meeting tonight. And then he invites Grantaire to attend. Grantaire says yes. Enjolras almost does a spit take, even though he’s not drinking anything.

Grantaire doesn’t know why he agrees to attend the fraternity meeting. But it isn’t like he has anything else to do that night. And Combeferre assures him that non-members and pledges are only banned from upper-level frat events--initiations, Executive Board meetings—and that he’s more than welcome to join tonight. Pontmercy and Feuilly will be there, too.

And Enjolras.

If Grantaire gets to spend an extra hour or so with Enjolras, he’ll gladly endure a fraternity meeting. Although it’s not like this is a real fraternity full of meathead assholes. It’s just a room full of his new friends that happens to have Greek letters painted on the wall. This will be another incarnation of hanging out with his friends, only they’ll be sitting on folding chairs, not lying on couches.

“And we’ll be voting on what kind of beer to get for our next keg!” Courfeyrac’s enthusiasm is infectious. Grantaire is so in.

###

Courfeyrac bangs his President’s Gavel and the meeting is officially adjourned. Most of the members mill about the room, finishing up various side conversations about some of the issues from the meeting, but Enjolras can’t stomach another second of the sycophantic fraternity babble and he dashes out of the Member’s Room to escape upstairs. Grantaire follows and joins him on the couch, wordlessly handing him a video game controller. That is exactly what Enjolras needs right now. To kill aliens.

The meeting hadn’t been unbearable, it had just been… irritating. They’d talked about grocories and house stuff; a possible ski trip to Marius’ grandfather’s mountain house over the Thanksgiving break; decided what kind of beer to buy. Other than a brief discussion about what their Philanthropy event should in in the fall--during which Enjolras kept pointedly silent-- it wasn’t so different than a _les Amis_ meeting. They just discussed stuff that they would have talked about if they were sharing a normal house. But it still got underneath Enjolras’ skin.
He wasn’t sure if having Grantaire there made it better or worse. He’d provided a nice distraction, sitting next to Enjolras and occasionally leaning over to make a snarky remark or crack a joke. Enjolras was grateful for the company. But why would he come to a stupid fraternity meeting if he didn’t have to? Especially for a guy who claims to be completely anti-Greek system?

Enjolras can’t think too hard about that right now. This day has made his brain hurt.

They spend the next twenty minutes or so slowly making their way across the flight deck of an abandoned space station, Grantaire following Enjolras’ orders and covering him. They’re getting better at this. The others finally emerge from the Member’s Room. Courfeyrac and Combeferre settle into a table behind them, a stack of ABX books spread out in front of them. Even though Enjolras is still irritated with them, the three of them have a job to do.

“I should probably go, R,” Enjolras sets down his controller. “Courf and ‘Ferre and I need to plan our les Amis meeting for Thursday—“

Snippets of the two C’s conversation make their way over to Enjolras and Grantaire. Enjolras hears words like “initiation,” “hazing,” “membership,” and “philanthropy;” he does not hear anything that remotely sounds like social justice issues. They are tucked close together at the table, heads bent over the volumes, Combeferre’s hand resting on Courfeyrac’s back, lightly tracing circles as they read together. They would be adorable, if they weren’t busy furthering the antiquated agenda of a patriarchal, boorish fraternal organization that, the more Enjolras thinks about it, needs to go the way of the dinosaurs.

This has everything to do with the inherent evil of fraternities and nothing to do with Enjolras feeling slighted because his best friends in the world refuse to help work on the social justice group that they all started together. Nothing at all to do with that.

Enjolras frowns hard. Grantaire notices and his eyes trace Enjolras’ gaze back to Comberre and Courfeyrac. “Something wrong, E?”

“They two,” Enjolras mutters. “It’s just… upsetting.”

He is upset about their immersion in the fraternity and their consequent neglect of les Amis duties, but he does not vocalize that part to Grantaire. It’s complicated and, frankly, he’s doesn’t quite have the right words to describe this situation.

“I think it’s nice.” Grantaire replies, an edge of challenge creeping into his voice.


“I don’t think it’s your prerogative to approve or not approve, Apollo,” Grantaire sets down his own controller and turns to face Enjolras, his expression strange. “It’s their life, they can do what they want.”

“I can still love my friends and disapprove of their… I don’t know what to even call this thing? ‘Chosen lifestyle?’”

“Again,” Grantaire snaps. “It’s none of your business.”

“That’s not who they are.”

“People change, E. You can’t expect things to stay the same just because you want them to.”

“Well, it’s new and it’s uncomfortable and I don’t need to be around it. Or around you, if you’re so
eager to join their fucking team.” Enjolras surprises himself with his own vitriol. But he’d really expected Grantaire—with all his shit talking about the Greek system and big speeches about evils of frat guys—to be on his side in this. He slams down his controller and wordlessly stomps up the stairs to his room, leaving Grantaire on the couch.

Grantaire's stomach churns as the sound of Enjolras boots fade up the staircase. What the hell had just happened? He closes his eyes, takes a deep breath and tries to puzzle out how that conversation had escalated so quickly. Enjolras glaring, his gaze practically burning holes in the cuteness that was Combeferre and Courfeyrac snuggling at the table while they studied. It’s wrong… life-style choices… it’s not who they are.

Grantaire goes further back. The party. The harem of women gathered around Enjolras. The day he met everyone at the frat. Enjolras’ cold reaction to the news that Combeferre and Courfeyrac were in a relationship.

But they’d gone to brunch. Enjolras had eaten bacon practically out of Grantaire’s mouth. But they’d never touched. There was no easy affection between them the way there was between practically every other member of the fraternity. Enjolras had never ruffled Grantaire’s hair the way Courfeyrac had earlier that day. In fact, hadn’t he glared particularly hard at Courf for that affectionate gesture? And the look on Enjolras’ face when Grantaire’s towel had fallen down in the bathroom that morning; he’d looked like he was going to have a stroke.

Fuck fuck fuck. Grantaire had been reading things all wrong, trying to justify all those signs to mean that Enjolras might actually be into him, into dudes. It was like that picture that initially looks like a rabbit, but when the viewer changes their perspective, they see that it can also be a drawing of a duck. Grantaire has been trying to see Enjolras as the rabbit, the gay, gay bunny rabbit, when in actuality, he’s been a duck the whole time.

Grantaire’s brain is starting to hurt from the shock, the disappointment and the extended metaphors.

“Bahorel!” Grantaire shouts, hoping that he’s within earshot.

“’Sup?” Bahorel emerges from the kitchen, a full pint class in each hand.

“What time’s your first class in the morning?”

“Noon.”

Grantaire grins grimly. “Wanna get drunk?”

###

Grantaire gets shit-faced downstairs with Bahorel. He still can’t forget that awful conversation with Enjolras.

Enjolras sits upstairs on his bed, trying and failing to read an essay on the flaws in the Occupy movement and how they should be addressed in future protests. He can’t stop thinking about his argument with Grantaire.

Although both of them agonize over their fight for the rest of the night, neither of them realize the truth of the matter: at no point in that argument were they ever talking about the same thing.
How From a Squatter One Becomes a Brother

Chapter Summary

In which Enjolras holds on for dear life, Courfeyrac throws an 111st birthday party, a hot tub becomes the enemy of relaxation, a style of pants causes much conflict, a plan comes to fruition, and Grantaire is touched.

Chapter Notes

I'm so happy to get this chapter done. The end scene is actually one of the first things that I wrote for this fic and I'm thrilled that I've FINALLY gotten to it in the story.

Thanks to everyone who is still reading and an extra big thanks to people who have commented or written asking when it will be updated. Those nice comments make me sit my ass down and write. So thank you. You are the loveliest people ever. I'm grateful for you.

E

The rest of September is a roller coaster for Enjolras. Fast, full of unexpected twists and flips, and it occasionally makes him want to vomit.

The two days following his fight--if it could even be called that--with Grantaire are an agonizingly slow uphill climb dragging him to the zenith of the coaster track. He and Grantaire have been avoiding one another for two days now, somehow managing to dodge the other in the hallways and bathroom, and there have been only terse, brittle words exchanged when they do come within the other’s presence. It is tense, but not explosive. Awkward, but bearable.

And then, without warning or planning, it’s over. Grantaire is just there one morning, no longer avoiding Enjolras or silently skulking away when he catches sight of him. Instead, he is standing in the middle of the sunny kitchen, wearing a worn denim jacket and grey infinity scarf, green beanie pulled over his curls and canvas messenger bag slung over one shoulder, smiling shyly and holding out a jar full of coffee--cream and sugar; Grantaire has been paying attention.

With that simple gesture, the rollercoaster that is now Enjolras’ life crests the summit of the track and takes off, plummeting down from the peak of that painful ceasefire, speeding forward and all he can do is hold on. They are walking to class together again, Enjolras laughing at Grantaire’s jokes, Grantaire pausing on the crowded sidewalk and lending his scarf when Enjolras complains about the unexpectedly chilly fall morning—

--The way Grantaire’s slender neck is revealed as he unwinds the soft grey wool is so unbearably alluring, a chastely erotic striptease, and Enjolras’ heart starts beating so rapidly that he is positive Grantaire will feel it as he gently wraps the scarf around Enjolras’ own neck. But Grantaire doesn’t
touch him, he keeps the wool between the two of them. The wool that is already warmed from his own body, soft wool that smells richly like the scents Enjolras has come to associate with Grantaire—sandalwood and salt and smoke and a deep, musky odor that could only be described as “R”--

They are walking and teasing and good-naturedly arguing again, barreling full-speed toward the inevitability that Enjolras had sensed on Monday. The undeniable fact is that they weirdly click. It’s like the argument hadn’t happened. Like Grantaire had never lost his damn mind and started voraciously defending fraternities when all Enjolras had needed was a friend to be on his side, one last scrap of sanity among his Greek system-addled friends. Their bizarre fight is now just a barely a blip on the radar of their friendship, a meaningless accident that couldn’t possibly derail this electric thing between them. Grantaire is smiling up at him, open and unguarded. Enjolras seriously considers just reaching over and grabbing Grantaire’s hand and then--

The coaster of his life takes an unexpected turn, twists through several loops and throws him back in the opposite direction. Enjolras has no idea what had just happened. Because Grantaire, out of absolutely nowhere, nods his chin back toward a passing blonde girl carrying a yoga mat and clad in skintight pants and says, “That ass, am I right?”

Wait, what?

Not two seconds ago, he’d been gazing up at Enjolras through those thick dark lashes, looking for all the world like he wanted press him up against the stone wall of the underpass and teach the passing student body a few things about public displays of affection. And then… that? A leering gaze and totally sexist comment.

Enjolras is apparently really bad at reading people. Or maybe just reading Grantaire.


“That girl,” Grantaire nodded again at the blonde, who is disappearing into a coffee shop. “Has an amazing ass.”

“You can’t just say things like that about random women, Grantaire.” Enjolras has his bearings again and he’s starting to get mad.

“I wasn’t cat-calling her, E. I just can’t let a thing of beauty like that pass by without recognizing it. It would be a disservice to gorgeous women everyone to let form and symmetry go unremarked.”

Grantaire has point. He wasn’t harassing the poor girl, he was just commenting on her um, “amazing ass,” to his friend. But Enjolras has no desire to be the kind of friend to whom Grantaire vocalizes his appreciation of women in tight pants.

“Let’s go,” he snaps, his mouth tensing. Grantaire follows him through the tunnel and on to campus, mercifully silent.

###

This is now Enjolras’ life. Everything seems to be going fine, and then Grantaire throws him for another loop.

They play videogames like they used to and then—**twist!**—Grantaire ditches him to go hang out with a couple of sorority girls that Bahorel invited over for hot tub time.
Later that same evening, Grantaire sits quietly in Enjolras’ room and sketches while Enjolras types up an Ethics paper. The soft scratching of pencil on paper is a peaceful soundtrack and they stay this way late into the night, neither realizing how quickly the time passes.

Enjolras comes home the next afternoon and — turn! — Grantaire is designing Alpha Beta Chi tattoos for Bahorel and Courfeyrac. He’s inking the end of the “X” on Bahorel’s shirtless chest with a black Sharpie when Enjolras enters the living room.

“No homo, bro,” Grantaire informs him, putting his hands up for a second, then returns the pen to Bahorel’s skin.

Enjolras frowns. Who even says “no homo?” Gross.

*Twist!* Grantaire and Courfeyrac stay up all night on Thursday inventing a game they call “Beer, Beer, Revolution,” which involves draining an entire keg, stacking up all the furniture in the living room and drunkenly bellowing the lyrics to *Uptown Funk*.

(“Do they have to be so fucking loud?!” Enjolras practically screams at Combeferre around 4am. Combeferre just shrugs and points to a new slip of paper pinned up on *Courfeyrac’s Board of Presidential Decrees*: “The president can be as loud as he wants at all times.”)

*Twist!* Grantaire, Courfeyrac, Bossuet and Bahorel spend all of Friday night mixing horrifying combinations of liquor in a quest to come up with an official “Alpha Beta Chi” house shot. Marius is the official taster. There is vomit. A lot of vomit.

(“They’re being idiots,” Enjolras complains loudly to Joly in the upstairs hallway right outside of the bathroom where five heads take turns emptying the contents of their stomachs into the three available toilets. Enjolras hopes they can hear him over the sounds of used liquor being forcibly deposited in the toilet bowls.)

But on Saturday morning, Grantaire drags himself out of bed and makes breakfast for the whole house. He’s even whipped up a skillet of scrambled tofu for Enjolras. “I googled the recipe,” he admits and Enjolras’ frown melts away. “I hope you like it—” and then adds “—bro.” Enjolras’ frown is back with a vengeance.

Two weeks pass in this manner. Two weeks of unexpected twists and turns, drops and loops. Enjolras isn’t quite sure why he stays on the ride.

**R**

Grantaire frowns at Courfeyrac, positive that he had misheard. Courfeyrac grins and repeats the party theme, louder and slower, like he’s talking to an especially dim child and, yep, Grantaire had heard correctly.

“Courf, are you seriously telling me that you’re throwing a *Hobbit*-themed birthday party for Combeferre and Jehan?”

Courfeyrac grins. “I knew you’d catch on sooner or later. ‘Ferre’s birthday is September 22nd and that day is, get this, ‘International Hobbit Day.’ I shit you not.”

Turns out that that date is both Frodo and Bilbo Baggins’ birthdays in the *Lord of the Rings* books. How Courfeyrac came by that information is a mystery to Grantaire, but, as Combeferre is a total nerd and Jehan loves all books equally, it is now the official theme for their birthday party.

Okay. Grantaire can handle drawing *Hobbit*-y illustrations for the party flier. In addition to
currently being in the closet about his sexuality, he’s also a very closeted super-fan of Lord of the Rings. He saw The Fellowship of the Rings a dozen times in the theater when it first came out, he used to listen to the DVD cast commentaries while he painted, and he read the shit out of The Silmarillion.

He’s got this Tolkien thing on lock, he can totally handle attending the party. What he’s not sure he can handle, however, is the sight of Enjolras dressed in a (mandatory, by presidential decree) LOTR costume. Enjolras would make a perfect elf: all blonde and hot and stone-faced.

Grantaire is definitely not positive that he can keep his hands, both his good hand and his broken one, off of an Enjolras who is decked out as a hot elf.

Fuck. It isn’t like his brilliant crush-control plan is even working. Sometimes he thinks it could be a success—there are moments, there have definitely been moments, when he and Enjolras seem okay. And then Grantaire will do something dumb, like gaze at Enjolras as if he wants to strip all his clothes off and devour him, and it will bring on that glare. That ice-cold, glacier-blue glare that Grantaire both fears and masochistically craves. At least Enjolras is looking at him.

He knew the plan was kind of dumb when he thought of it on the night after their fight. But he didn’t really see a better option.

Grantaire is nothing if not persistent in his pursuit of terrible life choices. It was either try this tactic or walk away from Enjolras and the Alpha Beta Chi house forever. Grantaire isn’t that brave.

When they’d had their fight, he’d only known Enjolras for about a week and a half, but Grantaire was already addicted, and addicts are known to do stupid shit in order to get their fix. And if Grantaire’s drug of choice happens to be a tall, blonde ball of indignation and, apparently, homophobia, then so be it.

So, lying in bed that night after the fight, more than slightly buzzed and still stinging from the sharpness of Enjolras’ words, Grantaire had come up with a plan.

The facts in the matter were quite simple: Enjolras was put off by Courfeyrac and Combeferre’s relationship. Put off enough to be all pissed at the sight of the two of them snuggling at the table while looking over frat books. Put off and pissed off enough to snap at Grantaire when he’d tried to defend them, sparking their sudden, vicious argument.

Ergo, Grantaire decided to pretend to be straight.

It’s not like he was going to go out and get a girlfriend or anything crazy like that, but he figured he could just tone down the pining stares and maybe crank up the appreciative comments toward the female half of the population. Prove to Enjolras that he had nothing to fear from Grantaire. They were just… friends. Two dudes, being buddies.

It’s been almost two weeks of Operation: Act Like a Straight Boy and the going has been rough.

Grantaire almost blew it on the first morning, when he was caught staring at Enjolras on their way to class with a gaze could only be described as “adoring.” He thought that he managed to salvage the situation quite nicely by loudly appreciating the yoga-sculpted ass of a girl passing by. But it still wasn’t enough to make Enjolras stop frowning at him.

He’d been more careful since then. Sticking to bro-only behavior. Trying to fit in around the frat, with very calculated participation in dude-style activities. Some were easier than others: getting wasted with Courfeyrac? Super easy. Hanging out in the hot tub a couple of sorority girls in order
to interrupt a suspiciously over-long session of one-on-one time with Enjolras? Much harder.

And Enjolras’ responses are totally up and down. Sometimes he's cool, sometimes he's pissed. Grantaire is having a really hard time keeping it up.

The party will be a good opportunity to prove his mettle.

On the night of the *Hobbit*-y birthday bash, Grantaire decks himself out in a black-leather doublet and dramatically-tattered cape that Courfeyrac had magically produced from the freakishly large stock of costumes that filled the extra room of Combeferre’s suite. Grantaire still isn't sure why Courfeyrac doesn't keep all that stuff in his own gigantic Presidential Suite, but he's gotten tired of asking and Courfeyrac’s answers about his living situation are always cagey.

Grantaire shakes out his dark curls and checks his reflection. He makes a passable Aragorn. And if there is any character in the *Lord of the Rings* that is one hundred percent manly and super-hetero, it’s Viggo Mortenson as the heir to the throne of Gondor.

Grantaire can totally do this.

The party is in full swing by the time Grantaire makes it downstairs. He pauses at the bottom the staircase, his non-broken hand clutching at the bannister. He’s just got to play nice with the ladies, be appropriately interested and have platonic bro time with Enjolras. It’s easy. People do it all the time. People who aren’t in love with their friend. People who aren’t him.

Bahorel is doing it right now, in fact. Grantaire can spot his suitemate’s head from across the room: Bahorel is almost a foot taller than anyone else in the crowd and he’s pulled a shoulder-length, reddish wig over his own closely cropped hair. There are a couple of fake arrows sticking out of his chest. *Nice touch*, Grantaire thinks.

Other ABX brothers are scattered throughout the crowd, a sprinkling of friendly islands in treacherous sea of sorority sisters in tight corsets. Combeferre is full-on Frodo Baggins and Courfeyrac is, naturally, his Sam. A very fit Samwise in a waistcoat that is unbuttoned far enough to expose his toned chest and abs; if it wasn’t for the frying pan that Courfeyrac is wielding, Grantaire would have written him off as a particularly sexy Merry or Pippin.

Nope, Bossuet and Joly have claimed Merry and Pippin. Musichetta is in a lace-up bodice with a flower crown in her hair. Grantaire guesses that she’s dressed as Rosie Cotton, and he resists the urge to remind her that Rosie was Sam’s love interest, not Merry and Pippin’s. Now is probably not the time to out himself as a huge *Lord of the Rings* fan. Or a huge Enjolras fan. He needs to keep his head in the game.

Feuilly has set up a table in the corner and is DJing from his laptop, Jehan fluttering over his shoulder, pointing out songs and brushing wisps from his long blonde wig out of his face. The fake red beard and helmet on Feuilly give him away as Gimli, but Jehan’s outfit is a little harder for Grantaire to decipher. The long blonde hair could be any of the prominent elves from the movies and the flowing, pale robe is too generically elvish to definitively point to any one of them. Jehan could easily be dressed as Celeborn, Thranduil or even Galadriel. Knowing Jehan, however, he probably likes the mystery of his costume. The kid plays the typical gender binary like a xylophone; no one knows which note he’ll hit on any given day.

Grantaire is actually impressed that Jehan is down here at all, considering he spent the last ABX party tucked away on the rooftop, smoking weed and writing haiku. But it is his birthday bash, he should probably put in an appearance as the guest of honor. And, now that Grantaire thinks about it, Jehan did say something about making some pot brownies for the party and Joly’s on the record
as saying that Jehan’s brownies are incredibly potent. Jehan’s probably so chilled out right now that he could endure a crowded football stadium full of screaming sports fans and still write a sonnet about the beauty of the moment.

The idea of asking Jehan for a brownie briefly flicks through Grantaire’s brain, but he pushes it away. He needs his wits about him. He can’t go all “I love you, guys” tonight. Not when he’s got to step up his bro-act with Enjolras. If he let himself get high, he’d probably spend the whole night petting Enjolras’ hair and comparing him to Grecian statues.

Grantaire sets his shoulders and takes a huge gulp of air. “It’s the deep breath before the plunge,” he quotes to no one in particular. He steels himself and steps off the bottom stair.

A small ball of blonde highlights crashes into him almost immediately. “Omigod, R!” the hairball trills. Grantaire may have seen her before. She certainly seems to know him. God, how drunk was he at the Initiation Party? Too drunk. “This party is so awesome! Right? Omigod!”

Grantaire grins down at her, determined to play his part tonight. “Omigod, I know right?” The words feel heavy in his mouth; thick, foreign and vapid. He presses on. “And damn, girl. You look fine as hell.”

His eyes flick quickly to his periphery. No Enjolras in sight. Balls. His effusive bro comment has been wasted on an audience of no one.

The girl beams up at him as she twirls around to show off her costume, a short fluffy skirt and a corset straining at its laces. “I’m a hobbit!” she giggles, looking up at him from under her pile of blonde hair topped with a wreath of flowers. “Do you like it?” A seductive lip bite as she reaches a hand up to stroke his leather doublet. He has to get out of her vicinity immediately. Grantaire passes the girl off with a side hug and pushes his way further into the throng of writhing partygoers. Courfeyrac appears at his side, pressing a pewter tankard full of cheap beer into his hand.

“He’s over by the fireplace,” Courfeyrac yells into Grantaire’s ear. His voice is barely audible over the din of the party.

“What?”

“HE’S OVER BY THE FIREPLACE!”

Oh. Grantaire plays dumb. “Who?!”

“Don’t be stupid, R. Go over there and make nice,” Courfeyrac shoves Grantaire in the direction of the fireplace. He’s pretty shrewd under all those hobbit-y curls.

Grantaire allows the momentum of the push to propel him through the crowded living room. The partygoers part in front of him and, yeah, Courfeyrac was right: leaning against the mantelpiece is Enjolras, casually holding a bottle of beer and looking disinterestedly down at a girl chattering away at his elbow.

Just as Grantaire predicted, Enjolras is dressed as an elf and Grantaire’s heart skips a beat. He can only imagine the herculean effort it took Courfeyrac to get Enjolras into his Lord of the Rings costume, but the result is fucking perfect. Enjolras is decked out in a green velvet doublet, knee-high brown boots and pants so form-fitting that Grantaire is convinced they must just be really thick tights. A leather strap crosses his chest, connecting to a quiver on his back and a large wooden bow is slung across his shoulders.
Grantaire really needs to check out the true extent of Courfeyrac’s costume closet one of these days, because Enjolras’ Legolas ensemble is a thing of beauty. The only fault, as far as Grantaire can tell, is that Courfeyrac didn’t manage to force Enjolras into a long wig. His own blonde curls frame his sharply angled face, but the result is still perfection. Had Peter Jackson’s costume designers seen Enjolras in this get-up, they’d probably say fuck it to the whole long-hair thing and recreate the character to look precisely like this. Stupid hot elf.

The party surrounding him is gyrating enthusiastically to the rhythm pounding out of the sound system, but Enjolras stands resolutely still, a small island of restraint. Even the girl talking at him is bouncing slightly, unable to resist the thumping bass, but Enjolras is a statue. Antisocial as Enjolras’ posturing is, Grantaire is intensely grateful that he doesn’t deign to dance. Grantaire isn’t sure he could stand the sight of Enjolras and the girl with whom he’s talking—she looks vaguely familiar, is she in Cosette’s sorority?—grinding in the middle of the mass of bodies crowding the living room.

Enjolras spots him as he breaks through the crowd and lifts the beer bottle in greeting. “Hello, beautiful,” Grantaire drawls as he sidles up. Well, that was dumb. Only one sentence into the night he’s already blown his cover.

“Omigod, shut up, thank you,” the sorority girl replies, saving Grantaire from his own stupidity. Grantaire will totally take that accidental win. She wraps her arms around him in an aggressive hug and tugs him closer to the mantelpiece and Enjolras.

“Glad you could join us. We were just having the most fascinating conversation, R,” Enjolras says dryly, playing with the label of the bottle in his hand. He’s almost picked the whole thing off.

The girl—what is her name? Grantaire can vaguely remember her from the last party when she kept sticking her hand down the back of his pants—lights up at this. “Omigod, your timing is perfect, Grantaire!” she cries, tightening her grip on his bicep and reaching over to rest her other hand on Enjolras’ shoulder. “We were just talking about threesomes!”

Wait. They were talking about what now?

“That’s right, threesomes,” Enjolras repeats, his tone inscrutable as he arches one eyebrow and takes a deep swig from the bottle.

Grantaire’s world screeches to a halt. The party goes silent around him. All he can hear is the pounding of the blood in his ears. His eyes are suddenly hyper aware of Enjolras’ mouth fitting around the tip of the bottle, his throat working as he swallows down a sip of beer. The redness of his mouth as he finishes his drink. The small drip of moisture resting on his full lower lip.

The combination of these things right after Enjolras said the word “threesome” might just give Grantaire a stroke.

He rushes to make a mental copy of the shape Enjolras’ mouth made as he formed the word. Grantaire wants to burn it into his brain forever. Tongue gently caressing his teeth as he formed the “T-H”, lips pursing for the “R” sound. The “E-E” made Enjolras bare his front teeth in an almost predatory snarl. The “S” was a gentle hiss, the “O” an invitation and the final “M” a sensual hum that Grantaire felt vibrate through his entire body.

Enjolras just said threesome. And he said it while looking directly at Grantaire. Holy fucking shit.

“Yeah, Grantaire,” the girl breaks through his reverie and Grantaire is back at the party. “What do you think about threesomes?” Her eyes flick back and forth between Enjolras and Grantaire, a
smirk twisting the corner of her mouth. Grantaire proceeds carefully, vowing not to fuck this up.

“Uh, I think that is the best idea I’ve heard all night,” Grantaire’s eyes lock onto Enjolras’, trying to read the expression their blue depths. Seriously, though, this girl is a freaking genius. He is one hundred percent behind the idea of a threesome with Whatever-Her-Name-Is and Enjolras.

And if, say, Whatever-Her-Name-Is was to get an important phone call and had to urgently leave once they’ve all gotten their clothes off… well, too bad. It would be a shame to waste all that nudity. Enjolras couldn’t possibly object. The whole thing would have started with the most hetero of all intentions. It wouldn’t be their fault that the girl had been taken out of the equation. Maybe Enjolras would realize that he prefers the rough slide of Grantaire’s hands over his body, the feel of stubble against his cheek as their mouths meet in a fervent first kiss, the hot press of Grantaire’s hips against his own…

Grantaire is coming up with a half-baked plan to find Cosette and orchestrate the phone call that would take this sorority girl out of the picture when he realizes that he’s just been staring at Enjolras as his imagination takes him to filthy, hopeful places. Grantaire cracks a crooked grin at him and shrugs his shoulders as if to say *Hey, when a pretty girl offers you and your best bro a threesome, what are you gonna do?*

“That’s so awesome!” the girl shouts, pulling Grantaire into yet another rib-crushing hug. “I’m glad you’re into it, R, because your friend was just saying that threesomes are totally exploitative and—“

“What, what?” Grantaire’s fantasy bubble explodes.

She babbles on, oblivious. “Me and my friend Claire totally want to have a threesome tonight—“

“Who?” This is getting worse by the second.

Grantaire’s arm is almost yanked out of its socket as the girl pulls him into the crowd, away from Enjolras. No, no, no. Grantaire tries to dig his heels in and stay in the living room, but she is incredibly strong for a tiny little drunk thing. Maybe beer and the promise of group sex give sorority girls some sort of superpowers or something.

“I can’t believe you’re doing this,” Enjolras’ voice hisses in Grantaire’s ear. He’s trailing close behind as Grantaire is forcibly led to points unknown.

Grantaire hazards a look over his shoulder, trusting for just a second that the girl won’t run him into a wall… although that might be preferable to her intended destination. Enjolras glares at Grantaire, even as he shoulder-checks a party guest out of his way. “Hey, you’re the one who brought up *threesomes*, Enjolras,” Grantaire shouts back at him.

“Yeah, I was saying that they were a sexist construct that objectifies women—“

Grantaire shakes his head so hard his spine actually pops a few times. “Who’s the one being objectified here, E? Huh?!“

“Oh please, Grantaire. Don’t act like you didn’t talk your way into this.” They’re in the kitchen by now, passing by Courfeyrac and Bahorel, who are both knocking back shots. Grantaire shoots them a desperate look that he hopes conveys *Save me!* Courfeyrac grins and shoots him a double thumbs-up. Message clearly not received.

Grantaire’s friends are having a great, drunken time while he’s being yanked into a threesome with a girl whose name he doesn’t even know and Enjolras trails him like an indignant shadow. Things
cannot get worse.

Finally, they screech to a halt and Grantaire has a moment to take in his surroundings. They are at the hot tub, which is surrounded by piles of hobbit, elf and dwarf garments, and packed with practically naked sorority girls.

It just got worse.

The rollercoaster is going downhill and fast. Enjolras knows that he should get off, step away from the crazy-train and abandon the party. Go upstairs, read a book, allow Grantaire to do whatever he wants with whomever he wants. If Grantaire wants to go full-on frat boy tonight, who is Enjolras to stop him?

He’s Enjolras. That’s who he is. And he’ll be damned if he just sits there and lets this go down (literally) on his watch.

They’ve ended up at the hot tub and Enjolras watches in mute horror as the sorority girl--Chloe, he remembers her from the Initiation Party when she kept sticking her stupid hand down the back of Grantaire’s pants; it’s highly unlikely that he’d ever forget that particular image--efficiently strips down to her bra and panties. She starts fumbling with the elaborate silver hook-and-eye closures on Grantaire’s leather vest while giggling into his dark curls. Enjolras can’t quite make out her words. He isn’t sure he wants to.

“Uh, I don't know if the hot tub is the best idea. I should probably not get this wet,” Grantaire says loudly, holding up cast-clad right arm.

Chloe just giggles and slides his vest off. “You can keep that hand out of the water. That hand.” She grins mischievously up at him and traces her fingers over the elaborate tattoos that cover Grantaire’s left arm.

That is horribly unfair. Enjolras has spent more hours than he cares to admit thinking about running his hands over the colorful lines and swirls that decorate Grantaire. And now this girl thinks she can just do it now? Without taking him to brunch first? Without walking to class or playing video games or spending countless hours building a foundation of friendship that would support such a gesture. Enjolras is calling shenanigans.

But before he can call anything, though, Chloe and Grantaire have plunged into the human soup of the hot tub. Chloe pulls over a girl—yet another blonde who, judging by the bare expanse of shoulders visible above the bubbling water, is definitely not wearing a bra. Enjolras hopes, for both propriety and the sake of Joly’s sanity, that she is still wearing her underwear. This one starts playing with Grantaire’s curls and, yeah, Enjolras has had enough.

Without even realizing it, he’s started to take off his clothes. Leather trappings, green doublet, boots, tights; they’re quickly stripped off and tossed in the general direction of the bushes along the back wall of the house. Enjolras hopes for the briefest of moments that they don’t get wet or muddy and then he realizes that he doesn’t really care. If Courfeyrac’s borrowed costume gets a little damp… well, it’s a tiny bit of payback for throwing yet another disastrous party.

Enjolras is down to nothing but his red briefs but that seems to be the accepted dress code for the hot tub right now. And, frankly, he is fresh out of fucks to give.

A small wave splashes over the side of the hot tub as Enjolras unceremoniously plops into the
warm, bubbling water. Every set of eyes are instantly on him. The people nearest to him scoot away, as if they are aware of the electric fury running just below his skin.

“E?” Grantaire’s green eyes are wide. “What… what are you doing?”

“This is a party, right?” Enjolras grits his teeth. “When in Rome…”

A few giggles erupt around him and Enjolras can see girls start whispering to one another. Grantaire says nothing, but stands in the waist deep water and takes a step toward him, reaching his non-broken hand out as if to take Enjolras by the shoulder. An unfamiliar, feminine-feeling foot emerges from the tangle of underwater limbs and runs up the inside of Enjolras’ leg.

“Don’t,” he snaps at the anonymous owner of the intruding foot, and whips his whole body a step back.

Grantaire freezes in the water, arm still outstretched. His expression hardens. “Jesus, E. If you wanted to be a judgmental dick, you could have done it inside with your clothes still on. You didn’t need to strip down to your panties to deliver a lecture on the evils of, I don’t know, whatever it is you’re pissed about right now.”

“Sorry, Grantaire,” Enjolras retorts. “You seemed to be having a great time getting naked and making questionable choices. Thought I’d give it a try—“

And then they’re off. There is yelling and there are words, so many words. Grantaire calls Enjolras uptight and Enjolras tells Grantaire that he’s being an ass. Things are said, things are shouted: things about impropriety, about objectifying women, about having a stick up one’s ass, about behaving like a Neanderthal. Enjolras’ brain goes on autopilot, automatically retaliating against whatever insult Grantaire throws his way and tossing a fresh retort into the fray.

Honestly, Enjolras tracks very little of what they are saying as they stand nose to nose in the middle of the steaming, bubbling water. His mouth is running unchecked and his head feels a little light, like the blood isn’t properly flowing to his brain. As the fight escalates, Enjolras notices how close he and Grantaire are standing. He tracks the way Grantaire’s damp curls cling to his neck, how the drops of water skate over his pronounced collarbone. Grantaire’s chest rises sharply as he spits words back at Enjolras, but Enjolras can barely hear them. He can only focus on the shapes that Grantaire’s mouth is making, on the fire behind his deep green eyes as they stay locked on Enjolras’ own.

It is unfair, it is truly fucking unfair, that someone else (or multiple someone’s) gets to take him to bed tonight. That thought unlocks a fresh wave of anger and Enjolras steps further into Grantaire’s space, their noses practically touching as the fight redoubles.

Enjolras doesn’t give two fucks that they are in a hot tub full of frat boys and sorority girls. He can barely hear or see the other people at this point. The only things that matters are Grantaire and winning this argument about… whatever the argument is about.

“Ahem!” A sharp cough finally breaks through to Enjolras. Bahorel looms over the side of the hot tub, gazing incredulously down at Enjolras and Grantaire who are, now that Enjolras can take a breath and be aware of his surroundings again, completely alone in the middle of the bubbling water.

When did everyone leave?

Enjolras takes a step back. Grantaire does the same.
Bahorel raises one eyebrow under the strands of his wig. “Hey, guys. Whatcha doin?”

Neither Grantaire nor Enjolras have an answer to this.

“It’s crazy,” Bahorel continues. “I was in the living room, chatting up this cute little elf girl and suddenly her friend comes up—she’s dripping wet and only wearing her undies—and grabs my girl, tells her they’re leaving. Apparently, the party isn’t fun anymore because there are two naked dudes in the hot tub screaming at each other. So…”

“So?” Enjolras manages to look at Bahorel, who is wearing the biggest shit-eating grin ever.

“So,” Bahorel says, “are you guys naked?”

“No!” Enjolras and Grantaire shout in unison. At least they can agree about something tonight.

“Whatcha fighting about?” Bahorel presses on. “Are you guys fighting about being naked?”

Enjolras just drops his head and shakes it miserably.

“Bahorel, please go away,” Grantaire groans.

“All right, but you guys should stop yelling and come inside. ‘Ferre and Jehan are gonna cut their birthday cake. Get some while the gettin’s good, boys.” Bahorel heads back to the house, shooting them one last grin over his shoulder.

Enjolras has one foot on the cement step of the hot tub when he realizes why he was feeling so light-headed during their argument. Turns out the blood actually wasn’t flowing properly to his head, because it was needed... elsewhere. Maybe it was the act of arguing with Grantaire, maybe it was the sight of wet Grantaire, but whatever the cause was, Enjolras is fully hard. And, considering that he’s only wearing a small pair of red briefs, it is going to be incredibly obvious once he steps out of the water.

Enjolras sinks back down into the hot tub.

Grantaire is still standing there, waist deep in the water.

“Uh, go ahead,” Enjolras waves him away, not trusting himself to look Grantaire in the eye. “I’m just gonna hang out here for a little bit.”

But Grantaire doesn’t get out of the water either. He just sinks onto the cement seat opposite Enjolras, slouching down so low that his chin brushes the foamy bubbles. “No, you know what? I think I’m gonna… stay here for a bit, too. It’s a nice night, the water's warm and… uh, yeah.”

They sit in silence. The sounds of a raucous rendition of “Happy Birthday” drift out of the house.

Enjolras tries to relax, tries to get his body to calm down. It is incredibly difficult with Grantaire sitting right across from him, shirtless and wet. He tips his head and looks up at the sky. The fall wind tugs at his soggy curls and Enjolras shivers.

“Probably getting too cold for pool parties much longer,” Grantaire offers.

Enjolras shrugs. “Feuilly said we need to close the pool next week, but that they usually keep the hot tub going all winter.”

“Might be nice when it’s snowing?” Grantaire says, and Enjolras lifts his head back up to look at him. There’s that look again, that soft, fond look. “To be all warm when its freezing out and
there’re snowflakes falling on your head?”

It does sound nice. “Wanna try it? When the snow starts falling?”

“Depends. Are you gonna yell at me?”

“R—“

“Kidding. Yeah, I’ll sit in a snowy hot tub with you, E,” Grantaire says.

They are quiet again for a moment. This time, it’s Enjolras who breaks the silence.

“I’m sorry I called you a Neanderthal,” he says.

“I’m sorry I called you a judgmental dick,” Grantaire replies.

“I’m sorry I—“ Enjolras begins, but Grantaire cuts him off.

“But I’m not sorry for ruining your threesome,” he doesn’t say. Instead, he asks, “Do you want to go in and get some cake?”

“In a minute,” Grantaire says. “It’s nice out here. I want to enjoy being alone in the hot tub for a tiny bit.”

“Oh,” Enjolras gets the hint. His body has finally started to behave itself and he can probably get out of the water without embarrassment now. “Sorry, I’ll leave you alone—“

“No!” Grantaire shakes his head. “I meant you, too. It’s nice to be alone out here with you.”

Enjolras tries not grin. He fails. “Okay. But just for a minute. We should probably get in there and wish ‘Ferre and Jehan a happy birthday and get some cake.”

“Just for a minute.” Grantaire agrees and settles back into the bubbles. “They’ll save us cake.”

They stay out there for nearly two hours.

Neither of them gets any cake.

###

The next morning, Enjolras is abruptly awoken by a sorority a cappella group standing directly outside his bedroom door, singing a shrill arrangement of a song that he doesn’t know. Something about haters hate, hate, hating and then a bit about shake, shake, shaking. Enjolras slams his door in their face.

*Fuck you, Courfeyrac,* he thinks and falls back into bed.

###

“You look tense,” Feuilly is standing in Enjolras’ doorway, watching him pace back and forth across the small room.

Enjolras pauses in the middle of the carpet, his toes still twitching with the need to burn off his
agitated energy. He’d intended to get up this morning and see if Grantaire wanted to go eat at Stove & Spyglass, but apparently the a cappella wake-up call was some sort of singing telegram inviting them all to a brunch gathering at a sorority. Enjolras had slammed the door on his invitation, but everyone else had gone, leaving him alone to eat a solitary bowl of bran flakes.

If Feuilly is in his room, however, it must mean that everyone is back.

“What gave it away?” he asks, running a hand through his tousled gold curls and trying to force a genuine smile. Judging by the look on Feuilly’s face, his attempt failed.

“We can hear your thumping all the way down in the living room,” Feuilly says.

“But my room is all the way in the back of the house?”

“Exactly,” Feuilly smiles at him. It is genuine, if a little pitying. “Figured something must be up if you can shake the whole house using only the power of your feet.”

“Sorry, I’ll try and keep it down.” It’s a pretty empty promise. Enjolras is so inexplicably agitated that he doubts he’d be able to hold still for a minute even. He should really find an outlet for this nervous energy: running? Parkour? Stabbing himself repeatedly in the hand with a fork?

“Hey, E… um, don’t take this the wrong way,” Feuilly begins and Enjolras groans inwardly. If he’s managed to piss off Feuilly, the most easy-going of guys, he’s really crossed a line. “There’s this yoga class at the gym on Sunday afternoons that I always go to and, you know, it’s free with your student ID. And they’re always welcoming to beginners and, I don’t know, if you want to burn off some tension, or whatever, it’s a great way to get your mind off of things.”

Oh. “Um, I don’t have a yoga mat or anything,” Enjolras tells him. A deflection.

“I’ve got one you can borrow,” Feuilly replies. “Just put on a t-shirt and some comfortable pants that you can move in and you’re set.”

Well, there are worse things than yoga. Breaking through the floor of his room with his stressed-out stomping, for example. And he’s actually got a pair of yoga pants somewhere, a mail-ordered gift from his mother that had appeared at his dorm during freshman year. He digs through his closet and finds them folded and collecting dust on the uppermost shelf. The tags are still on.

He snaps the little plastic barb, tosses the tags into the garbage can, and pulls them on. The soft red fabric feels strange in its snugness. Whatever. It’s not like anyone is going to see him. Enjolras puts a pair of black track pants on top to camouflage them until he gets to the gym, and then trots downstairs to meet Feuilly.

R

“You look tense, man,” Bahorel sticks his head through the door of Grantaire’s bedroom.

It’s true. Grantaire is on his floor, hunched over his sketchbook, trying to draw something, anything, that isn’t Enjolras. His first portfolio review of the semester is due at the end of the week and he’s supposed to have an entire book full of diverse figure-drawings to turn in.

Well, he’s definitely got a book full of drawings, but there is nothing diverse about them. They’re all blonde-haired, blue-eyed and lithe-limbed. Professor Gros is pushing him to explore, as he calls them, “interesting” physical types, to draw people outside the traditional model of beauty. If Grantaire turns in dozens of sketches of the most physically perfect human being he’s ever seen, Gros will definitely fail him on the assignment.
Grantaire can’t afford to fail. Advanced Figure Study is required if he wants to graduate in the spring. Not that Grantaire is super eager to be out of school, but he certainly can’t keep racking up student loans.

So, yeah, he’s tense. He tells Bahorel as much, with many more expletives.

“Wanna go hit something?” Bahorel asks, lifting one thick eyebrow.

Why not?

###

The university gymnasium is on the far edge of campus next to the football stadium and Grantaire only vaguely remembers it from his tour at the start of freshman year. The whole place gave him flashbacks to high school gym class and Dodgeball and football player assholes who used to kick the back of his shoes when they ran laps. He gave it a wide berth.

“It’s not so bad, man,” Bahorel says as they swipe their student IDs at the front desk. Grantaire considers it a major victory that he even managed to find his ID. It was shoved haphazardly into one of his desk drawers, flecked with red paint and suspiciously sticky. He guesses that a lot of people find their student IDs useful for gaining admittance into university functions, checking books out at the library and random discounts at local businesses, but every since he turned twenty-one last year, the only ID he’s needed is his driver’s license. If his student ID gained him access to booze, Grantaire would probably give it more respect.

“Don’t you usually work out in the gym at the house?” Grantaire asks. The girl behind the counter has to scrape a few paint chips off of his ID’s bar code. She frowns at Grantaire as if it were his fault. Which okay, yeah, it kind of is.

Bahorel shoots a quick grin to the girl working at the front desk and her frown transforms into a shy smile, the red blush spreading up her neck clashing with the ugly gold of her work polo shirt. How does he even do that? Grantaire thinks. Bahorel turns back to him, tossing a scratchy white gym towel in his general direction. It hits Grantaire in the face.

“Yeah, but we’ve just got a weight bench and, like, a couple of treadmills. You gotta mix things up, you know? They’ve got some pretty rad classes here,” Bahorel replies. He leads the way down through the gym. It smells like sweat and chlorine and feet. “This place has better equipment and a pretty cool little boxing gym.”

“Are you sure it’s cool if I come in all, you know—“ Grantaire holds up his injured hand, still in its cast.

“Yep. You can hit some of the bags with your good hand and we’ll just shadowbox for a bit with both,” Bahorel pushes open a door and the scent of chlorine is stronger now. The hollow sound of splashing comes from somewhere to their right and Grantaire’s base detective skills deduce that that is the location of the pool. “Pool’s nice, too,” Bahorel says, as if reading Grantaire’s mind. Or maybe he just saw the way Grantaire’s nose scrunched up at the sharp chlorine smell.

Bahorel continues espousing the perks of the university gymnasium as he leads Grantaire past another weight room, through a forest of elliptical trainers, around the edge of a basketball court.

“They’ve got a bunch of intramural sports leagues, and classes and shit: kickboxing, martial arts, some dance and—oh, fuck yeah!” Bahorel screeches to a halt in front an enormous picture window that looks into a light, open studio space. The room is packed with fit students, all wearing rather form-fitting clothing and staking claim to their own little peaceful portions of the floor space with
variously colored yoga mats.

“Sweet!” Bahorel exclaims and then tugs Grantaire over to the drinking fountain opposite the window. He begins filling his water bottle, but keeps his dark eyes on the window to the yoga studio. “Sometimes, if you time it right, you get here at the end of yoga class, which is basically eye-candy Christmas. Look at that,” he shakes his head in appreciation and then turns to Grantaire. “Where else do you get to see that many hot people in tight pants bending over at the same time? I mean… damn, son.”

He has a point. The whole class is bending over, hands forward on their mats while their posteriors stretch up toward the ceiling. And yeah, every single one of them is wearing extremely tight pants.

Bahorel finishes filling up his bottle and then makes grabby hands at Grantaire’s, which is full. Bahorel dumps it out and then begins filling it up again. “Gotta have a cover, right? Don’t want to be a total creeper, just standing here staring at yoga butts.”

“I still kinda feel like a creeper, dude…” Grantaire tells him, looking up at the ceiling. There are weird yellow watermarks on the ceiling tiles. He looks down at the floor. The carpet on the floor is covered in patchy stains. Gyms are so gross.

“Drink this, fast, like you just worked out,” Bahorel shoves the water bottle to Grantaire. “Then we can refill. That should buy us a few more minutes of unobtrusive viewing.”

Grantaire follows the instructions and sips some water. Bahorel is adorable in his unabashed appreciation for hot female yogis, but Grantaire has spent a good chunk of the last few weeks feigning interest in girls’ physiques when Enjolras is around and, now that it’s just him and Bahorel, he finds that he’s really burnt out on the whole ordeal. It’s not like he needs to pretend to Bahorel. Grantaire had awkwardly come out to him weeks ago, when he was playing detective with Courfeyrac and Combeferre. Bahorel accepted Grantaire’s request to keep his sexual preference on the down low with no questions asked. He’s a pretty good suitemate, despite the current creeper status.

“God, I hope they do handstands today. It’s amazing when they all do handstands,” Bahorel rhapsodizes, still intent on the yoga class.

“Bahorel, buddy, I’m sure it’s awesome, but maybe we should get to the boxing gym? This yoga voyeurism isn’t exactly my thing. Not that into lady butts—“

“Get off your high horse, my gay little Padawan, and open your eyes: there are dudes in there, too. I’m an equal opportunity admirer.”

Oh. Bahorel is right. Scattered among the spandex tank tops and sports bras, are a few bare male torsos. It’s impossible to see anyone’s faces, since everyone is still bent over—they’ve moved into a forward-folded ragdoll position—but upon closer inspection, there are definite differences in the male and female forms.

Grantaire’s eyes linger on a pair of red pants in the back of the room, closest to the window. Maybe it’s just that they are the brightest clothes in the class—most everyone else is clad in black or gray bottoms—or maybe increased exposure to Enjolras’ wardrobe has created Pavlovian conditioning in Grantaire, but he finds himself drawn to those red pants.

It helps that the red pants cover a well-toned, if a little bit skinny, butt. Grantaire has spent so long focused entirely on Enjolras, that it's a little reassuring that he can appreciate another dude’s body. He’s not totally gone, after all.
The instructor’s mouth announces a cue that Grantaire can’t hear through the glass and the class begins to slowly roll-up in unison. A lower back appears above the red pants, then the spine curves up bit by bit, and then a broad set of shoulders squarely settles in a standing position. As in most spine roll-ups, the head is the last thing up and this one happens to be covered in slightly sweaty golden curls.

“Oh, for fuck’s sake,” Grantaire hisses. Bahorel shoots him a confused look and then sees where Grantaire’s gaze is settled.

“Hey! It’s Enjolras!” Bahorel’s glee is barely contained. “Oh my god, dude, out of all the yoga butts in all the world, of course you’d check out Enjolras…”

“I didn’t know! I swear—”

Bahorel just laughs. “No, I get it. You’re like a moth to a flame, kid.”

Grantaire’s face falls. He’s now doubly out to Bahorel. “Please don’t say anything to him. Please? He’d be so… I don’t know. Just don’t?”

The class has wrapped up and the yoga students are spilling out of the studio. Grantaire and Bahorel are swarmed by sweaty, half-naked students. Enjolras is heading right toward them, flanked by Feuilly, both of them with rolled up yoga mats under their arms. Feuilly spots them and waves. Enjolras’ eyes go wide at the sight of them, and then narrow.

“Please, Bahorel,” Grantaire hisses and Enjolras and Feuilly make their way over to them at the drinking fountain.

“Your secret is safe with me, R,” Bahorel whispers back in his rough voice, then turns up the volume to shout to their friends. “Hey, guys! How was the yoga-ing?”

Feuilly raises his fist in reply and Bahorel obliges with the requisite bump. Feuilly’s got a couple of cool-looking tattoos inked in black across his chest. Grantaire wants to ask him about them, but that will have to wait until after he talks his way out of this awkward detente.

“What are you doing here?” Enjolras demands, looking back and forth between Grantaire and Bahorel.

“Uh, Bahorel and I were heading to the boxing gym and we stopped to, uh, get some water—” Grantaire begins.

“And stare at the yoga class?” Enjolras finishes for him. Busted.

Bahorel steps in and earns Grantaire’s eternal gratitude. “Nah, we were stopping to get some water.”

“For five minutes?” Feuilly asks, running a gym towel over his sweat-soaked torso. Grantaire wishes Enjolras would do the same: he’s still drenched and the little beads of moisture on his collarbone are starting to do crazy things to Grantaire’s brain. “I saw you guys stop out here ages ago.”

Dammit, Feuilly.

“Well, yeah. We stopped to get water but then R got all distracted by yoga pants and demanded that we stay,” Bahorel’s eyes are sparkling. “I tried to stop him. Told him we needed to get going, but he wouldn’t be pulled away from the view.” So much for eternal gratitude. Grantaire is going
to pay him back so hard for this.

Feuilly just snorts, but Enjolras fixes Grantaire with a furious blue glare. “Jesus, Grantaire. That is so creepy.”

Grantaire has imagined confessing his feelings to Enjolras. In his fantasies, they’re standing together in a gentle snowfall, or gazing into one another’s eyes in front of a roaring fire, or side-by-side in the hot tub, under a star-filled sky. He’d never dreamed that his crippling infatuation would be revealed in a stinky, crowded gym hallway while Enjolras glares at him. This is not how this thing is supposed to go down. Grantaire scrambles.

“Uh, yeah, you got me, Bahorel,” he babbles, trying to salvage what he can. “You know me— I can’t resist the sight of an ass in yoga pants.”

Enjolras gapes at him.

Bahorel jumps back in gleefully. “Yeah, E, he’s a sucker for butts. In fact, there was one that he couldn’t look away from, it was adorable—“

“The girl next to you!” Grantaire refuses to let this get any worse. “She was wearing those, uh, black pants and I was like, ‘Damn! Look at that girl! So hot.’ I didn’t even notice that you guys were in there.” Enjolras and Feuilly stare at him. “Because of the hotness of that girl. Didn’t notice any dudes in there. Nope. Because that girl was so hot. Yay, hot girls in yoga pants.”

Not the smoothest cover ever, but at least Grantaire gave a plausible excuse for his staring that didn’t include a confession of how badly he wanted to run his hands over Enjolras’ ass, feel the fabric of those red pants, slide his fingers up the taut muscles of Enjolras’ back—

“Jesus, Grantaire, that is so inappropriate. Just when I think you can’t get any more—ugh,” Enjolras snaps and storms off. Feuilly trails behind him, looking confused.

Grantaire glares at Bahorel.


“Can we just please go to the boxing gym, dude? Please? I really, really need to hit something.”

E

“Have you seen Grantaire?” Enjolras barks as he stomps into the living room, slamming the front door behind him. Courfeyrac and Combeferre are sprawled across each other on the soft brown couch. But no Grantaire.

“I dunno, E?” Courfeyrac doesn’t look up from his script. “Have you checked in his room? That’s usually where he goes to pout after you yell at him.”

Enjolras hesitates. He wouldn’t exactly call their altercation in the gym that afternoon “yelling” at Grantaire. He was just speaking to him, in a serious tone that was slightly louder than may have been necessary. Grantaire had made a completely uncalled for comment about a yoga pants and Enjolras had simply corrected him. Loudly. In a sharp tone. In front of dozens of people.

“I didn’t yell,” he begins, clutching at the two cups of coffee in his hands. The coffee is a peace-offering, of sorts. It’s kinda their thing. They snap at each other and then make things better with coffee. But it’s hard to offer peace to someone who isn’t present.
Courfeyrac laughs. “Bahorel told us that you yelled at him in front of the entire gym for looking at yoga pants. He acted it out and everything. You should see his impression of you, E, it’s pretty great. He does this thing with his mouth that—“

“Do you know where Grantaire is or not, Courf?”

“Seriously, though, Enjolras,” Combeferre pipes up, setting aside his ipad. “What’s going on between the two of you lately?”

“Nothing, ‘Ferre. We’re just… nothing.”

Combeferre frowns. “You seem to be yelling at him a lot for ‘nothing.’”

“Yeah. Are we going to have to have a friend-tervention?” Courfeyrac adds.

“That’s not a thing, Courf.”

“Okay. A ‘boyfriend-tervention?’”

“God, Courf, no,” Enjolras frowns. “We’re not even… R’s not… you know.”

“No, I don’t, E. Please explain it to me.”

“I can’t.”

“Yes you can. Dumb it down if you have to. Talk to me like a fucking five year old. Just help me understand what the hell is going on with you two?”

“He’s… not interested in me. Not like that. You’ve seen how hard he hits on anything and everything female at our parties?” Enjolras’ voice is starting to rise.

“I’ve seen how hard he tries to make you jealous.”

“Bullshit.”

“Well, whatever it is, it needs to get resolved. You two are driving everyone insane with your constant break-up/make-up shit.”

“We’re not like that—“

“I KNOW, Enjolras. But that’s what it feels like. And it’s making everybody feel weird. So just… fix it.”

“It’s not like it’ll even be a problem much longer. He’s moving out, anyway.” Enjolras says. It’s true. Grantaire is just a house guest.


“I didn’t do anything, Courf. That was always the plan. He’d stay here while he got better and saved up some money and then he’d move out,” Enjolras explains. “He’s not a brother, he doesn’t have to stay.”

“Enjolras, that is brilliant!”

“What’s brilliant?”
But Courfeyrac is already ringing his president bell, and bellowing up the stairs. “House meeting! Emergency house meeting RIGHT NOW!”

Everyone comes tumbling down the stairs, looking concerned.

“Is there a fire, Courf?”

“Is the kegerator broken?”

“Psi Mu attack?”

“Nope, everything is fine,” Courfeyrac assures them. “Where’s R?”

“He doesn’t usually respond to your presidential summons, Courf,” Feuilly says, setting aside the fire extinguisher he’d been wielding.

“And he doesn’t have to,” Enjolras insists.

“Well, he does now.” Courfeyrac informs them and then he shouts for Grantaire, who joins them in the living room a moment later, eyes wary. “Grantaire, when do you get your cast off?”

“Um, I don’t know. Couple more weeks?” Grantaire replies, confused.

“Fifteen days,” Joly helps out.

Courfeyrac nods. “Okay, cool. Cool. And do you already have a new apartment lined up?”

“Uh, no. Not yet. Sorry, I kinda forgot that I’m supposed to be moving out…” Grantaire trails off nervously.

“You don’t have to! You can stay here as long as you want!”

“Wait, what!!” Enjolras has lost control of his voice. “He can’t stay here as long as he wants, he’s not in the frat—“

“He is now,” Courfeyrac is triumphant. “What do you say, R? Wanna live here, for free, with access to all the beer you can drink?”

“Uh…” Grantaire hesitates and looks around the room. All of the guys are grinning, except for Enjolras who stares like a befuddled goldfish, his mouth open. How is this even a possibility for Grantaire? A guy who, within moments of meeting Enjolras, declared his hatred for fraternities. There is no way that Grantaire wants to join the house, there is no possible way.

“Sure,” Grantaire finally answers, pointedly looking away from Enjolras.

“Awesome!” Courfeyrac crows. “Guys! Emergency initiation ceremony tonight!”

###

The house, with the exception of Feuilly and Marius, assembles in the Members Room an hour later, decked out in the requisite togas. Grantaire looks amazing in a toga, his tattoos and wild black curls turning him into a modern day Dionysus. Enjolras may be pissed, but he isn’t blind. Unpleasant as the idea is, it is becoming apparent that fraternity life suits Grantaire.

On his way to the basement, Enjolras sees a fresh piece of paper pinned on Courfeyrac’s Board of Presidential Decrees. “Grantaire is granted instant membership and all its privileges,” reads the
To be honest, the initiation ceremony didn’t quite live up to Grantaire’s expectations. They just stood around in togas while Combeferre read some stuff out of a thick leather book, then Grantaire was taught the secret handshake, and they concluded by drinking cheap red wine out a plastic “Chalice of Brotherhood” that was obviously purchased at a Party City. Grantaire had kept trying to meet Enjolras’ eyes, to see if he was as amused by the tackiness of the whole thing, but Enjolras refused to look at him.

Grantaire is so done trying to read him. Trying to track Enjolras’ moods is like following the footsteps of drunk bear through a snowstorm: impossible, incomprehensible and with the likelihood of a mauling at the end.

The buzzer on the washing machine dings and Grantaire begins to load his wet clothes into the dryer. The initiation last night was so low-key that Grantaire is completely un-hungover this morning and feeling good enough to do laundry. God knows he needs it. His clothing situation is getting desperate.

It’s Monday. On a good Monday, he’d be walking to class with Enjolras right now. Drinking coffee, making jokes, trying not to gaze adoringly at the way the fall sunshine sets off the gold in Enjolras’ hair or the satisfying crunch that the dead leaves make under the soles of his black combat boots.

But this is not a good Monday. He and Enjolras fought about yoga pants and fraternity initiations yesterday, and this morning, Enjolras’ room was empty by the time Grantaire woke up. Not that Grantaire woke up in plenty of time to meet Enjolras in the kitchen to walk to campus together. Not like he checked Enjolras’ room on his way to the shower. Not that the dim, empty bedroom with its neatly made bed felt like a punch to the gut or anything.

This is a really bad Monday.

Grantaire has his arms full of wet clothes and is about to shove them into the dryer, when he notices something already in there. It’s red and plaid. He drops his soggy stack of clean clothes on the floor of the laundry room and snatches the garment out of the dryer. It’s Enjolras’ red plaid shirt. Without even thinking, he lifts it up to his nose and inhales. Even freshly washed, it still smells like Enjolras.

He sinks down onto the cold cement floor next to his pile of damp clothes, buries his face in the soft flannel of the shirt and starts to cry. He's not even one hundred percent sure why.

This is the worst Monday.

Enjolras walks through campus alone and tries not to glare at every single girl walking around wearing yoga pants. He fails.

“Grantaire, can I talk to you for a sec?” Courfeyrac asks, from behind the couch where Grantaire is sprawled playing videogames, shirtless and despondent.
Grantaire sits up, pauses his game and turns to look up at Courfeyrac. Playing videogames alone, he’s discovered, is exponentially less fun than playing with Enjolras, but it beats getting dressed and going through class. Walking through campus solo would be much worse than playing videogames alone, and Grantaire doesn’t have the personal strength to tackle that today. He barely had the wherewithal to put on pants, but he managed to suck it up. Grantaire’s been camped out on the couch all day, sulking and shooting aliens.

“What’s up, Courf?” he asks. Courfeyrac doesn’t look mad. Grantaire’s only been an official member of the fraternity for less than twenty-four hours. He doubts he could have fucked up too badly in that short time frame.

Courfeyrac glances around the room and then back down to Grantaire. “Can you meet me upstairs in the President’s Suite in a couple minutes? It’s kind of… sensitive.” He leaves, giving Grantaire a suspiciously clandestine glance over his shoulder as he goes.

Nothing like a mysterious summoning to pique Grantaire’s curiosity and shake him out of his lethargic funk. He quickly saves his game and follows Courfeyrac up the two flights of stairs to his room.

Grantaire has never been in the President’s Suite before, he realizes as he softly pads up the private staircase that leads to the door of the suite. He’s been to Jehan’s tower room on the other part of the third floor, he’s hung out in Bossuet and Joly’s suite and he’s hovered in Enjolras’ door more times than he cares to admit. But every time Grantaire has hung out with Courfeyrac, it’s always been in Combeferre’s suite at the top of the main staircase. As far as Grantaire can tell, Courfeyrac keeps most of his stuff in Combeferre’s room. And sleeps in there a lot, too.

The door of the President’s Suite is dark varnished wood and sits on a little landing at the top of the staircase. Brass doorknobs and an old-timey lock make it look all private and official, like this part of the house is desperately clinging to the last vestiges of an old-fashioned brotherhood.

Generations of Alpha Beta Chi brothers have stood at this door, knocked on the shiny wood. Grantaire imagines a fresh-faced kid in a raccoon coat coming up to ask the president if he can borrow the jalopy to take his best girl to the football match one town over. A young man in a new, short haircut meeting the president to tell him he’s got to drop out of the frat because he’s just enlisted in a war that he doesn’t understand. A bespectacled brother, toting a laptop, warning the president that they’ve got to update all the computers in the house before midnight on December 31st, 1999, or else the dreaded Y2K virus will knock them all out of commission.

At the initiation the previous night, Combeferre had announced that this Alpha Beta Chi chapter was founded in 1914. Hundreds, if not thousands, of boys have probably stood on this landing, knocking at this door. And now Grantaire stands here and tries not to be struck by the enormity of this situation, of the long-standing brotherhood that he sort of, kind of accidentally pledged himself to. He knocks.

“Enter,” Courfeyrac’s voice sounds strangely formal coming from behind closed door. Grantaire turns the knob, pushes the door open and steps inside.

He’d expected a lot of things from the President’s Suite. He expected it to be large, he expected the private fireplace, he actually expected piles of Courfeyrac’s belongings to be scattered about. The one thing Grantaire had not expected was for it to be empty.

Well, it isn’t exactly empty. There is furniture—a large, four-poster bed, a sofa, a desk and chair—but everything is covered in drop clothes and plastic sheeting, as if Courfeyrac had never moved in. The walls are bare, the fireplace cold. An area rug lays rolled up in the corner, propped against
something that looked suspiciously like a brass stripper pole. There is no sign that anyone had lived actually here in months.

The desk chair swivels suddenly as Courfeyrac turns around dramatically. “Close the door,” he asks. Grantaire does.

“I suppose you’re wondering why I summoned you here, Grantaire,” Courfeyrac drawls, and leans back in the leather desk chair like a tiny monarch. Freaking drama nerds.

Grantaire glances around at the bare room. “Uh, I really hope it’s not to murder me, dude. Because this place is decorated like a well-planned kill room.”

“Nope. Murder is not on my agenda.”

Well, there goes Grantaire’s best guess. His others are equally as far-fetched. “Are you moving out? Bedbugs? You really like sleeping on crinkly plastic?” Each suggestion earns a solemn head shake from Courfeyrac. Grantaire is officially out of ideas.

“I’m not moving out, R,” Courfeyrac tells him. “In fact, I never even moved in.”

“But you brag about this awesome room all the time.”

“Subterfuge, my friend.”

“But this is the President’s room, Courf, and you’re the President.”

Courfeyrac just smiles grimly at him. “Grantaire, do you remember what you said to me on the day we met?”

“Aw man, I probably said a bunch of stupid things. I was on a lot of painkillers that day.” Grantaire remembers finding out Courfeyrac and Combeferre were dating. He remembers giving Enjolras shit about being naked and making him fall off a ladder. But he doesn’t remember anything that would explain why Courfeyrac left the best, fanciest bedroom in the house abandoned and full of plastic-covered furniture.

“You told me that you thought Enjolras was the President.” Courfeyrac explains, rising and crossing the room. He pulls a dusty sheet off of a plush armchair and gestures for Grantaire to sit. Grantaire does. “You said he seemed really presidential, like he should be in charge. And you weren’t wrong.”

Now they’re getting somewhere. The air in the room feels stuffy and Courfeyrac is strangely serious. Grantaire has never seen him like this.

“Enjolras should be the president of this house, Grantaire,” Courfeyrac tells him, still standing.

“But, Courf, you love being president—“

“I love having parties, R.” Courfeyrac begins pacing, his seriousness graduating into full-on agitation. “I love doing stupid shit and being loud and acting like an idiot. And I love, love, living in this awesome house with my best friends. I do not love being the boss or, or planning meetings or running this frat. I absolutely hate being in charge of Enjolras. That’s not how things are supposed to be.”

Courfeyrac flops down on the bed, a cloud of dust rising from the plastic sheet. “I thought that if I fooled around enough, or made things really ridiculous, Enjolras would eventually step up and
take command, like he always does. But he hasn’t. He’s just pulls further away and I have no idea what to do.”

“Courf, what are you--?”

“I’m not usually this much of an asshole, R. I mean, yeah: I’m goofy, I fuck around a lot. But all of this—the Board of Presidential Decrees, the constant stream of sorority girls, hazing Marius—it’s all a bit much. It’s supposed to provoke Enjolras. Show him how much the house needs his leadership. I’ve asked him to be the president so many times and he won’t. You’ve known Enjolras long enough to realize that he won’t do anything that he doesn’t want to do. If we all kept trying to force him into it, he’d just dig in his heels and refuse.

"So I’ve tried to make him want to be the president. I figured that if things got bad enough, frat-y enough, he’d finally realize that it would be better if he was in charge and he’d step up and take over. It hasn’t worked yet, so we’re gonna have to take things up a notch."

Courfeyrac’s brown eyes are deadly serious.

“Grantaire, I need your help.”

E

Enjolras is done. “Courfeyrac, that’s enough!” he snaps, rising to his feet. His hands are clenched tightly at his sides. Jehan reaches one hand up to steady him, but Enjolras pulls his arm roughly out of his reach.

It’s been almost two weeks since Grantaire initiated and the fraternity has lost its damn mind. Enjolras has stood idly by while loud music blares late into the night. He looked the other way when Marius spent one afternoon wearing an adult diaper. He’s ignored multiple mornings of finding random bras on the kitchen counter. But he’s not going to sit here and watch these assholes—these assholes who he considered, until very recently, some of the smartest, kindest, most passionate people in the whole world—send Marius Pontmercy to the hospital.

“That’s enough,” Enjolras repeats.

Courfeyrac gazes back at him over the heads of their friends—all still seated but some craning forward to look at Pontmercy’s prone figure, still hunched over the trashcan—the color is high in his cheeks as he stares defiantly back at Enjolras. “Do you have something to say, E? Do you finally have something to contribute in a meeting?”

“Stop it, Courfeyrac, just stop,” Enjolras pushes his way forward. “This has gone far enough and someone is going to get hurt.”

Courfeyrac grins back, almost a snarl that pulls up one side of his mouth. It was nothing like the shining, buoyant, sanity-be-damned grin that Enjolras had known and loved since they’d been kids. “I’m not sure it’s gone far enough, Enjolras,” he says. “Grantaire?” Grantaire follows Courfeyrac’s order and pours another shot of clear liquid into the glass. “Pontmercy, you’ve still got five more to go, pledge.”

Marius’s pale face lifts up from the trashcan for a moment. “Yes, sir,” he manages to splutter out before he dry heaves again, his shoulders shaking with the effort. Marius has already taken ten shots. And that is about nine shots too many. Five more may actually kill the kid.

“Grantaire, put the bottle down.” Enjolras covered the last bit of distance between himself and Grantaire in two swift strides and snatched the vodka bottle out of his hands. “I said, that’s enough,
Courfeyrac,” he said. “Someone is going to get hurt.”

“Pontmercy disobeyed a direct order, E. I’m the president, it’s my job to keep him in line.”

“You’re out of line.”

“I’m the president, Enjolras, I do what I want.”

“Maybe you shouldn’t be,” Enjolras snaps.

“Sorry,” Courfeyrac shrugs and turns back to the room. “You had your chance. It’s too late, Enjolras.”

“Actually—“ A voice rises out of the crowd from the back of the room. Feuilly. Thank god, someone with a scrap of sanity left. “According to the ABX constitution, amendment 14, a president can be recalled if a willing nominee receives a unanimous vote from the membership.”

Enjolras bites his lip. He doesn’t want to be president. He doesn’t want any part of this. He could just turn and walk away. Be done with every thing. But he can’t just abandon his friends. He can’t just leave poor Marius to the mercy of Courfeyrac’s inflated, strangely sadistic ego.

“Okay,” he says after a long pause. “Okay, let’s put it to a vote.”

“Are sure you want to do this, Enjolras?” Combeferre asks from his chair at the front of the room. Enjolras can’t believe that Combeferre, level-headed Combeferre, has let things get this bad.

“Yes, ‘Ferre,” he replies. “Someone needs to pull your shit together before you guys explode. And since I’m the only sane person in this whole house, it appears to be up to me.”

“That’s a pretty amazing campaign speech, Enjolras,” Courfeyrac says, “I’m sure you’ll be able to pull off a unanimous election by telling all your constituents that they’re idiots.”

“They’re not idiots, Courf,” Enjolras turns to the room, full of his friends. They are all listening intently. “They’ve just been following you and shit’s gotten out of control. Guys, you know me. We’re maybe gonna have fewer parties. We might not play as much, I don’t know, beer pong or whatever. But we are definitely not going to give poor Marius alcohol poisoning. We’re going to stop behaving like immature children. I’m going to pull us back together, make us a family again and get us back on the right track.

“Combeferre, you’re the secretary. Take a vote.”

Combeferre calls the room to order. Bossuet and Joly raise their hands, followed by Jehan and Bahorel. Feuilly can’t vote; he’s staff, not a member. Grantaire smiles grimly at Enjolras and raises his hand, too.

Enjolras doesn’t know whether or not to be surprised by that. They’ve been getting along better and worse over the past few weeks. Grantaire has started waiting for him after class on most days. They walk together more often than not. But they also end up fighting almost every other night after Grantaire does something particularly inappropriate. Enjolras has lost track of his infractions by now: drunken dance parties with Courfeyrac, inventing a game that involved stabbing a butcher knife into a phone book, painting the back patio to be a giant Twister board and playing “Strip Twister” with a gaggle of girls from Cosette’s sorority.

It is very unclear as to which side Grantaire is actually on.
Almost every hand in the room is up now. Only one vote to go and that’s Combeferre. Enjolras doesn’t know what will win out, Combeferre’s levelheaded pursuit of sanity or his unwavering devotion to his boyfriend.

It had to be unanimous and, for the first time, Enjolras is worried. His friends have always stood behind him. Perhaps the fissures had grown too deep. Maybe they were too broken. Maybe his friendship had gone past the point of no return—

Combeferre raises his hand.

“It’s unanimous!” Enjolras exclaims, releasing the breath he didn’t even realize he’d been holding. He turns to Courfeyrac, expecting a challenge.

But Courfeyrac’s expression is strange. His eyes are still glittering madly, and his mouth is pulled into a small, tight line. But he doesn’t look disappointed. In fact, he looks… triumphant. What the hell?


The room is clapping. Even Marius has pulled his head out of the trashcan and is applauding. He's stopped dry-heaving and the color seems to be returning to his face.


“Enjolras, I would never,” Courfeyrac pulls back to arms length, grins at Enjolras for a moment and then plants a big kiss on his mouth. Enjolras barely registers a shocked look from Grantaire as he pries Courfeyrac off his face. “You are my hero.”

“Courf, were you faking all this?” Enjolras asks, still trying to process.

“No! Not at all, E,” Courfeyrac says. “I’d gone mad with power and you’ve stepped up and saved us all.”

“What about Marius?”

“I’m fine.” Marius has risen to his feet and holds up the vodka bottle. “It’s just water.”

Courfeyrac claps Marius on the back. "You're a natural actor, kid. That fake puking? Brilliant. You should probably audition for the fall musical with me. They're doing Pippin--"

Oh god. Enjolras knows he should be mad. He should be furious that his friends have just manipulated him into taking charge of the frat. But he doesn’t feel any of those things. He feels strangely light. Like things have snapped back into place and he’s stepped into the role he was always meant to play.

“You know that I’m going to be the strictest president ever, right, Courf?” Enjolras asks, trying to keep the delight out of his voice.

“I know, E.”

“And the first thing I’m going to do is tear down that stupid Board of Presidential Decrees—“

“Awww!” Shouts of disappointment fill the room. Enjolras isn’t sure if they are genuine or sarcastic and he finds that he doesn’t really care.
"I’m taking down every single one of those slips of paper and presidentially vetoing all of those decrees."

"So I don’t have to get hit with a paddle anymore?" Marius asks.

"Your ass is safe, Pontmercy."

"Yay!" Marius grins. Courfeyrac looks disappointed for the first time since ceding his office to Enjolras.

"You’re even nixing the kegerator and unlimited beer privileges?" Bahorel whines.

"Everything! Every single thing on every piece of paper on that board is toast. I’m gonna build a fucking bonfire out of them." The thought of lighting Courfeyrac’s power trip on fire makes Enjolras strangely giddy. *Bye, sorority a cappella groups! “Everything Courfeyrac decreed is null and void.”*

"Everything?" Grantaire has stood up and is looking intently at Enjolras. Enjolras stares levelly back. He isn’t quite sure what part Grantaire played in this whole charade, but he’s not quite sure he’s ready to grant him forgiveness.


"*Everything, E?*" Grantaire repeats, his voice brittle. There is something in his tone, an undercurrent, that makes Enjolras’ chest clench. What is he missing here.

"Oh my god, Grantaire. Did I stutter? Yes, every single thing on that board is reversed. Effective immediately."

The room goes quiet. Enjolras isn’t sure what happened, what line he crossed, but everyone is staring at him.

“Okay,” Grantaire looks down at his feet and then continues, sounding defeated. “Okay. Well, then. I guess, uh… it was nice knowing you guys.”

And Grantaire is gone, the thud of his feet on the steps echoing through the silent Member’s Room. After a beat, Jehan slips out, presumably in pursuit of him.

No one is speaking. No one is looking at Enjolras.

“What just happened?” Enjolras asks quietly. No answer. There is no way that unlimited kegerator privileges meant that much to Grantaire. Enjolras crossed a line somewhere and he has no idea where, why or how.

Jehan is back, crossing to Enjolras and and holding something in his outstretched hand. A small slip of paper from Courfeyrac’s board.

Enjolras takes it gently. It is a lime-green posted note that reads, “Grantaire is granted instant membership and all its privileges.”

Oh shit.

R

Grantaire hears the thump of boots racing down the sidewalk after him and he speeds up his walk. Enjolras. Of course it’s fucking Enjolras. Grantaire would know the sound of those stupid sexy
boots anywhere. He just needs to keep moving, make it around the corner and down the block and he then can take refuge in the Corinth, where underage Enjolras can’t enter. He’ll be safe there. Grantaire speeds up his walk but he doesn’t break into a run. He doesn’t want to give Enjolras the satisfaction of watching him run away. Walking away is humiliating enough, but there is no way he’s going to run like a frightened dog.

He makes it all the way to the streetlight just around the corner before a hand closes vice-like on his right bicep and whips him around. It’s Enjolras, all right, the soft yellow light drifting down from the street lamp setting his hair aglow. It hurts Grantaire to look at him, physically hurts him, so he drops his gaze to the ground, where his scuffed up grey Converse stand in stark contrast to the brightly shining toes of Enjolras’ black combat boots.

“What do you want, E?” Grantaire asks the toes.

“What are you doing?” Enjolras questions back, his voice sharp.

Grantaire is used to the tone. He’s heard it enough over the past month whenever they’d really gotten into it with one another. He likes the other versions of Enjolras’ voice better: the soft, playful timbre that teases him about his shirt or the bossy sound that issues commands when they play video games. But it figures that their final conversation is going to be a cold one.

“I’m leaving, obviously,” Grantaire tries to sound icy, but his voice involuntarily wobbles. “You got what you wanted. Congratulations, Mr. President, I’m out of your house and your life. No more unwanted strays lying around. You win.”

Grantaire attempts to walk away, but the hand on his arm tightens and pulls him slightly closer.

“What are you talking about, R?”

“You never wanted me here, Apollo. You just let me hang around for so long because you felt bad about the window thing. I’m not an idiot; I know what you think of me. I’ve heard you complaining to Courf, to ‘Ferre, to just about anybody who will stop and listen: I drink too much, I get too loud, I do stupid shit. This makes so much sense. You never liked me, it was all ‘Keep your friends close and your enemies closer,’” Grantaire is babbling, but he can’t stop. “Of course, of course, your first act as president is to get rid of me. Handled like a true politician, sir. Bra-fucking-vo. Kevin Spacey should play you in the TV version of your life.”

“Grantaire, that’s not—“

“Let me go, E.”

“No.”

“I said, let me go.” Grantaire tries again to jerk his arm away, but Enjolras hangs on and the tussle only manages to yank them closer together. The toes of their shoes are almost touching now and Grantaire can feel Enjolras’ warm breath, still heavy after his short sprint, on the top of his head. If he looks up, he knows his mouth will be in line with Enjolras’ chin and from there, it’s just a matter of centimeters standing between his own lips and something catastrophic.

When an uptight, homophobic frat boy kicks you out of his house, kissing him isn’t a proper response. Grantaire knows this, he really does, but his body pulls towards Enjolras despite the increasingly frantic stream of warnings from his brain.
“I didn’t mean to kick you out,” Enjolras says softly. “Just look at me, R.”

Grantaire is unable to turn down a direct order from Enjolras, so he does. Those eyes are incredibly blue in the soft twilight and they look so... sad. This is new.

Enjolras continues, the words coming more steadily now. “I just wanted to get rid of the ridiculous, terrible things that Courfeyrac did: Toga Tuesdays, the hazing, the sorority a cappella groups. It didn’t even occur to me that you were one of Courf’s presidential decrees. Honestly, I’d forgotten all about that. I’d forgotten that you haven’t always just been here.” He pauses and then pushes on, “You’re a part of us and we need you.”

Grantaire exhales the breath that he wasn’t aware he was holding and then everything that isn’t Enjolras disappears from his perception. The chilly October breeze, the sounds of bar-hoppers shouting from one block over, the flap of moths against the street lamp above, they’ve all faded into background noise. The only things that exist are Enjolras’ face in front of him and the hand clamped electrically to his arm.

Enjolras has never touched him before, Grantaire realizes. The ferocity of the grip on Grantaire’s cool skin feels wonderfully intense, albeit slightly painful; he would happily enjoy and endure this sensation for an eternity. Grantaire’s brain wildly pictures carbon being put under unbelievable pressure and then turning into diamond. Enjolras’ hand has catalyzed some sort of irrevocable process and Grantaire will never be the same again. And he doesn’t want to be.

He doesn’t know how his free left hand makes its way up to the back of Enjolras’ neck, but suddenly it’s there. The cast rests heavily against Enjolras’ shoulder and Grantaire’s fingers do their best to wind their way through the curls that brush against the taller boy’s shirt collar. Another new expression flickers through those blue eyes, but Grantaire is unable to catalog it.

“So I should come back?” He asks Enjolras, barely having to raise his voice above a whisper to be heard.

“Yes.” That word on Enjolras’ breath ghosts across Grantaire’s face and his skin tingles from the heat of it.

“Because the fraternity wants me to come back?”

“Yes.” That word again.

“What about you?” How Grantaire has mustered up the balls to ask this question, he’ll never know.

“What about me?”

“Do you want me to come back, too?”

“I already said that.”

“No, you didn’t. You said the frat wants me back. But do you want me to come back?”

Enjolras’ eyes are locked with Grantaire’s and he takes a deep breath before he answers. “Yes. I want you to come back.”

“You have to say the magic word.” Grantaire’s words are teasing, but neither of them laugh. They drift dangerously close together as Enjolras’ lips start to form the word.

“Plea—”
“Hey!” Courfeyrac’s voice booms out from just around the corner and they both spring apart, Enjolras dropping Grantaire’s arm like it’s hot. Pale white marks from Enjolras’ hand stand out against the pink of his un-tattooed bicep, but they rapidly grow more livid as the blood flow returns. That’s going to leave a mark, Grantaire thinks, just before Courfeyrac dashes around the corner and crushes him into a hug.

“I’m so sorry, R.” Courfeyrac gushes into his shoulder. “Please don’t leave. Enjolras was just being stupid.”

Grantaire hugs him back and it feels good. Not as good as what he had been doing about four seconds ago, but good nonetheless.

E

Enjolras watches Courfeyrac and Grantaire walk back around the corner toward the frat, arm in arm. It almost looks like Grantaire glances back at him once or twice, but Enjolras can’t be sure. The unreliable dusk light could just be messing with the shadows of Grantaire’s face and curls, giving the illusion the he’s turned his head.

He lingers under the slice of light from the streetlamp, letting his friends disappear around the corner. Enjolras’ fingers are electric, still buzzing from where they held on tightly to Grantaire’s arm. Where his skin had finally met Grantaire’s for the first time. Where Grantaire’s pulse had raced under the tight grip of Enjolras’ hand.

The moths start to spiral back toward the light above his head. The drunken shouts drift over from the busy student bars around the corner. The light breeze picks up and sends a skitter of dried leaves against Enjolras’ black boots.

The world is the same as it was five minutes ago.

But Enjolras isn’t.
Chapter Summary

In which (almost) everyone gets tattoos; Enjolras remembers a promise; Courfeyrac is content to have outlasted William Henry Harrison; Grantaire receives several favors; Grantaire's stories are not as happy as Enjolras had hoped.

Enjolras assumes Courfeyrac is joking about the tattoo thing. *That* was a mistake; he should really know better than to underestimate Courfeyrac by now.

The living room of Alpha Beta Chi is blissfully peaceful on Tuesday afternoon and Enjolras is taking advantage of the momentary calm to pore over frat rulebooks. The pages are many and the typeface is small. Enjolras definitely has his work cut out for him before he runs his first official meeting as president in less than a week. He’s only been in charge for one day so far but, in true Enjolras fashion, he is determined to do the thing right. And that means getting to know this whole fraternity thing inside and out, backward and forward.

There is a slam at the back door, an explosion of footsteps stomping through the kitchen and then Courfeyrac, Grantaire and the others noisily burst into the living room, heading in the direction of the front door.

“Where are you guys going?” Enjolras asks, barely lifting his eyes from the thick, leather-bound volume in front of him.

“We’re gonna to do a bunch of tequila shots and get some tattoos,” Courfeyrac says. “Wanna come?”

Enjolras declines. If Courfeyrac wants to be a smartass and *not* tell him where they’re actually going, Enjolras isn’t going to press the issue. He’s got way too much work to do to get sucked into any of Courfeyrac’s reindeer games. It isn’t until everyone returns several hours later—staggering slightly and every single one of them sporting freshly inked skin—that Enjolras realizes that Courfeyrac was totally telling the truth.

They’d all gone to get tattoos.

Courfeyrac had gotten a variation of his family’s crest (Enjolras had seen it hanging on a tapestry in Courfeyrac’s parents foyer for years: the family had descended from French nobility and Courfeyrac’s parents were eager for everyone to know it) over his heart, with a cursive *les Amis* mixed in there, along with the fraternity’s letters. There is also a small moth on the crest, one that matches a larger moth that Combeferre has inked in thick black lines along his right forearm.

While he excitedly shows Enjolras the design, Combeferre confesses that it might be the first part of a larger tattoo, maybe even a full sleeve. Enjolras is surprised: this is a far cry from the buttoned-up kid he’d known since elementary school. It strangely suits him. Enjolras may enjoy giving Combeferre and Courfeyrac shit about their relatively new relationship, but he has to admit that he’s never seen Combeferre happier or more at ease. “Courferre,” despite the silliness of the
celebrity couple name that Courfeyrac had coined, is definitely a good thing.

Bahorel has gotten an ABX tattoo of Grantaire’s design on his chest. Feuilly’s new tattoo is an infinity symbol inked on the back of one muscular calf. Bossuet and Joly have each tattooed what look like asymmetric parentheses on the inside of their right and left wrists, respectively.

“Look!” Joly grins, entwining Bossuet’s hand through his. “When you put them together, they make a heart.” It’s disgustingly adorable. Enjolras’ chest tightens briefly. He’d never thought he’d be envious of a cute couples tattoo.

Jehan gently rolls up his sleeve and shows off his new tattoo: three new flower blossoms have been added to the vine that runs down his arm. “They’re for Feuilly, Marius and Grantaire.” Jehan has a flower on his vine for every person in his life that he’s loved. He’d gotten ones for Enjolras, Combeferre and Courfeyrac a few months after they’d all met in the fall of freshman year: three pale blue Columbine blooms on a single stem, one outlined in red, one in white and one in darker blue. Jehan is perfect.

“What did you get, Marius?” Enjolras asks. Out of all the people he’s met in his life, Marius Pontmercy is the least likely candidate for a tattoo. Enjolras is secretly hoping for a dolphin or Winnie the Pooh or a Chinese symbol that doesn’t mean what Marius thinks it means.

Marius flushes red and pulls up his t-shirt sleeve to bare his bicep. Enjolras can’t see anything, although the skin is a little red in one place. Enjolras squints. There is the tiniest of black ink lines on Marius’ arm. “I um, was going to get this heart design with Cosette’s name but, uh—“

“He kinda freaked out when the needle touched his skin,” Courfeyrac helps out. Marius grows even redder. “But he’s gonna do it one of these days, aren’t you, little buddy?”

Marius nods eagerly, looking completely unconcerned by Courfeyrac’s term of endearment. His dynamic with Courfeyrac has changed completely since the meeting last night, more like friends and less like a pledge being tormented by his fraternity president. Enjolras wonders if this is what they’d been like the entire time—good friends—when they weren’t putting on their frat boy personas for his benefit.

Enjolras wonders what else he’s missed in the last month or so.

What he’s missing right now, however, is Grantaire’s new tattoo. It isn’t visible, even though Grantaire is wearing short-sleeved grey t-shirt. His left arm is still as colorful as ever, but nothing seems freshly done, and his right arm still only has the two tattoos: a small set of letters along the wrist bone and a line of text running up the soft, white skin of Grantaire’s forearm. Enjolras doesn’t spot anything new and he should be able to. He’s been surreptitiously studying Grantaire’s tattoos for almost six weeks now. He’s practically an expert on the complicated mural of Grantaire’s body.

He plays it cool. “So, R,” Enjolras says. “What did you get?”

“Wouldn’t you like to know, E?” Grantaire grins, but offers no further information.

“No, I wouldn’t like to know. That’s why I asked.”

Courfeyrac is smirking at this exchange. That doesn’t bode well. When Courfeyrac looks this smug, it can only mean that some shit is about to go down.

Not that Enjolras has a thing for Grantaire’s tattoos. He doesn’t. He’s merely curious and when he doesn’t get answers to his questions, he gets… aggressively curious.
Grantaire shrugs this off. “Actually, E, it’s kind of red and puffy right now, so probably not the best time to show it off.”

“Everyone else showed me theirs and they were all red and puffy, too,” Enjolras reminds him.

“Yeah, but everyone else’s are small. Mine… isn’t,” Grantaire says.

Enjolras raises an eyebrow. “Bahorel’s tattoo covers, like, his whole left pec. It’s huge. Is yours bigger than his?”

Courfeyrac butts in. “Oooh, are you saying size matters, E?”

Grantaire smacks him. “Shut up, Courf. Yes, Enjolras, my tattoo is bigger than Bahorel’s.”

Enjolras is now extremely curious. He needs to see this tattoo right the fuck now.

“Where exactly is it?” Enjolras tries to sound nonchalant, but it still comes out as a growl.

Grantaire is about to answer, but Courfeyrac jumps in yet again. “See, E, you get weirdly aggressive and that’s why he’s all shy about telling you,” he says, tugging at the hem of Grantaire’s t-shirt while Grantaire swats at his hand. “Grantaire doesn’t want to admit it, but he got a butterfly tramp stamp.” Courfeyrac succeeds in yanking up Grantaire’s shirt in the back, revealing… nothing.

Well, not nothing, exactly. The t-shirt lift does reveal Grantaire’s lower back and the set of back dimples that Enjolras is so enamored with.

“If you don’t tell me, I’m going to have to find out for myself,” Enjolras tells him.

“And how exactly do you plan on doing that, E?” Grantaire asks.

“Like this,” Enjolras replies, tapping him lightly on the chest with his index finger. Grantaire flinches, but it’s the kind of flinch from being unexpectedly poked, not from freshly tattooed skin. Enjolras tries the other side of his chest, both sides of his ribcage, his shoulder blades.

Grantaire grins, his ears turning a bit pink. “Jesus, E, if I’d known you were going to get all handsy, I would’ve gotten this tatt in a total different spot—ow!”

Enjolras finally hits the jackpot: Grantaire’s right bicep, high enough to be hidden by his t-shirt sleeve. Interesting. Grantaire had told him that, while his left arm is covered in whatever tattoos Grantaire had felt like randomly inking on his skin, his right arm is reserved for things that mattered. Things he doesn’t want to forget. Enjolras is dying to know what’s under that bit of grey cotton.

Grantaire smacks his hand away and pulls his shoulder out of Enjolras’ reach. “Ouch, E. You’re an invasive little thing, aren’t you?”

Shit. Enjolras is worried that he’d gone too far. Last night had been the first time he and Grantaire had ever even touched (Grantaire’s arm had been warm and firm; electric under Enjolras’ hand; pulse racing beneath the skin) and now he’s totally invading Grantaire’s personal space at the first opportunity. What is wrong with him?

Enjolras begins to apologize but Grantaire cuts him off. “Don’t worry about it, E. I kinda asked for it.” He still doesn’t let Enjolras see the tattoo, though, claiming that it is too raw and red to be viewed properly. “Wait a couple days, okay? I’ll let you see it when it’s all healed and pretty.”
There really isn’t any answer for Enjolras to give but a complacent nod. It isn’t like he can presidentially order Grantaire to show him his tattoo, although he does consider that option for one brief, mad moment. Enjolras is a patient person. He can wait.

R

“Let me see your new tattoo,” Enjolras demands first thing the next morning when Grantaire meets him in the kitchen to walk to class.

“No, it’s still gross,” Grantaire deflects, although that’s really only part of his reasoning. It’s not like he regrets getting the new tattoo—he actually had to do it immediately if he was going to do it at all—but he is definitely reluctant to show it to Enjolras. Because the second Enjolras sees Grantaire’s upper arm, the cat will definitely be out of the bag. The cat will be so out of the bag, that the cat might as well be wearing a giant neon sign around it’s little cat neck that reads, “Grantaire is in love with you!” Grantaire’s not quite ready for that.

None of the others had picked up the significance of the design at the tattoo parlor the previous night. Some of that obliviousness was due the tequila shots they’d all had, some of it was because Grantaire had pulled his tattoo-artist buddy out of earshot of all his friends before describing his design concept, and some of it was because the tattoo was deceptively simple. To any of the ABX brothers, it just looked like Grantaire got an abstract, asymmetrical sun symbol wrapped around his bicep.

If they looked closely enough, they’d notice that the center of the red and gold sun wasn’t quite circular. They’d probably also see that the five sunbeams weren’t evenly distributed around the center: four of them wrapped around the back of Grantaire’s bicep and the fifth was on its own on the inside of his arm.

Last night at the tattoo parlor, none of his friends had commented on the uniqueness of the shape. Grantaire had received compliments on the abstraction, the vaguely Greek-looking influence, the bold swirls of red and gold within the dark burgundy borders of the sun.

No one had called Grantaire out on what it really was: a handprint.

But the second Enjolras sees it, he’s going to know exactly what it is and all of Grantaire’s secrets will spill out at his feet.

Grantaire doesn’t regret the tattoo. If he’d waited to get it, even for a single day, the light bruises that Enjolras had inadvertently left on his arm would have started to fade and the shape, the memory of that touch, wouldn’t be right. The instant that Enjolras had touched him, Grantaire knew that he needed to preserve that moment, the electricity of Enjolras’ hand wrapped around his arm.

He’d had a similar feeling with the other two tattoos on his right arm. He’d never doubted the inspiration for any of his important tattoos, there wasn’t that laissez-faire attitude that had accompanied most of the other designs that Grantaire had gotten inked on his left arm and torso. This was serendipity: Enjolras had touched him for the first time right over a big blank space on his right arm. Grantaire needed to commemorate the occasion.

That doesn’t mean that he’s ready to display it under Enjolras’ scrutinizing gaze, though.

“I’m not giving you your coffee until you show me your tattoo,” Enjolras informs him, holding Grantaire’s mason jar coffee cup out of his reach.
“That’s fine, E, keep it for yourself,” Grantaire begins, then his eyes dart out the back window and he points one finger toward the yard. “Holy shit, is that Montparnasse in our backyard?!?”

“What? Where?” Enjolras whips his head toward the window and Grantaire quickly steps forward to snatch his coffee mug out of his hand. Enjolras glares. “Dammit.”

Grantaire laughs and sips his coffee. Black. Enjolras is absolutely nailing this whole platonic-boyfriends thing. Man, it’s gonna suck if Enjolras freaks out about the tattoo and suddenly they’re platonically awkward.

“You can’t force it out of me by withholding coffee, E,” Grantaire says. “I’ve got lightning fast reflexes. I’m like a freaking mongoose.”

“What if I just ask nicely?” Enjolras pleads as they head out toward class. “I could just make this face”—he sticks his lower lip out and furrows his brow in what Grantaire assumes is supposed to be a puppy-dog face—“until you give in?”

“You look like you’re glaring at me, dude,” Grantaire says. “You looked like a pissed-off kitten that’s about to rip my face off. Not exactly pleading.”

“Dammit,” Enjolras’ expression returns to normal and he runs through a litany of other persuasive tactics, finally landing on a guilt trip. “You promised me that you’d tell me about your other right arm tattoos sometime and you never did. You. Never. Did.”

He does have a point. Grantaire vaguely recalls making a promise to tell Enjolras about his tattoos, but honestly, he didn’t think Enjolras had really cared. Grantaire is a little bit flattered that he does.

“Okay, E, I’ll make you a deal,” Grantaire finally agrees. Enjolras skids to a halt next to him and a passing duo of students have to quickly swerve to avoid running into him.

“Really? You’ll show me your new tattoo?”

“No, I said I’d make you a deal. If you want the stories that I promised you—“ Enjolras nods —“and if you want to see my new tatt, you’re going to have to do something for me. Three something’s, actually, one for each tattoo.”

Enjolras’ eyes narrow suspiciously. “What exactly do you have in mind?”

Grantaire hadn’t thought that far ahead. “I don’t know,” he answers, voice thick with false bravado. “Surprise me?”

###

E

“Great. So the vote is unanimous: we’ll be having an all-house ski trip to Marius’ cabin over Thanksgiving Break. Thank you for offering, Marius. Next order of business—” It’s the following Monday and Enjolras is leading his first Alpha Beta Chi weekly meeting and, he’s not gonna lie, he fucking loves it. His voice echoes beautifully in the wood-paneled Member’s Room, his friends are paying close attention to everything on the agenda and he even has cool antique podium. Being the president doesn’t suck nearly as bad as he’d thought it would.

In the week since Enjolras’ presidential coup, he’s spent every free minute (well, when he wasn’t otherwise occupied with obsessing over Grantaire’s new tattoo) holed-up in the Member’s Room with Courfeyrac, Combeferre and Joly going over frat business, planning the weekly ABX meeting
and, miracle of miracles, laying out an agenda for *les Amis* at the Musain on Thursday. It feels so natural to be gathered around a table with his two best friends, planning and arguing while Joly helpfully rattles off numbers and figures from the fraternity’s banking account and annual budget.

Joly, as new official house treasurer, is a brilliant addition to Enjolras’ restructured Executive Board, relieving poor Combeferre of one of his three previously held positions.

(“Jesus, Courf, you were making him be your vice president, secretary and treasurer?” Enjolras had shouted when they’d first sat down together to look over the structure of fraternity’s governing body.

“He’s the only person I trusted, E! I told you, I was mad with power and needed to keep my friends close!”)

Now Combeferre is simply the secretary, while Courfeyrac graciously accepted the office of vice president. Mainly, Enjolras suspects, because the Vice President doesn’t really have any duties except to stand next to the President and look good. That’s actually unfair of him: Courfeyrac, now that he’s shed his persona of power-mad dictator, is sharp as hell and super-charming. His charisma is going to be necessary in the upcoming year, as they navigate the uncharted waters of the Greek system together. Enjolras knows that he’s going to rely heavily on Courfeyrac to be their house representative at the all-Panhellenic Council meetings, help recruit new pledges and play nice with the other frat boys. Enjolras simply doesn’t have the tact and people skills to handle that. Courfeyrac does.

Courfeyrac has actually handled this transition out of power with surprising aplomb. He’d mock-sighed heavily as he’d handed over the key to the Presidential Suite on the night of Enjolras’ election. “Well, at least I lasted longer than William Henry Harrison,” he’d said morosely, and then clapped Enjolras on the shoulder and dragged him up to the third floor to show off the suite. “Look, E! You’ve got a stripper pole in here!”

The new bedroom is great, planning meetings with his best friends is even better and running his first meeting is amazing. Things are going brilliantly. Enjolras scans the room, trying to gauge the group’s reaction to his meeting. So far, so good. Courfeyrac, Combeferre and Joly are all seated with him at the front of the room and they seem happy enough so far.

The rest of the group is clustered into a small audience and everyone looks engaged and content in their new fraternity positions. In addition to making Joly the treasurer, Bossuet has been promoted to Member Development Chair, Jehan is the Director of Communications and Bahorel is now the Pledge Educator. Marius had looked slightly green at that last appointment, but nothing could possibly be worse than Fake-President Courfeyrac. Everyone has a job now.

Except Grantaire. And Enjolras has plans for that.

Grantaire wanted a favor and this is his first one. Enjolras smirks and listens to Jehan begin his presentation about a fraternity newsletter. He can’t wait to get to the next order of business.

Enjolras wants to get this tattoo thing out of the way so he can finally clear his head and talk to Grantaire about a totally different matter. Unfortunately, he’s spent so much of his time this week on fraternity business that he’s barely had a chance to talk to Grantaire one-on-one, knock out those favors and get the tattoo stories. He’s a little obsessed with those tattoos. And he’s *more* than a little obsessed with the other topic that he and Grantaire need to discuss.

There just hasn’t been time.
Courfeyrac has taken to hijacking their morning walks to campus and, with his endless, nervous chattering about his upcoming audition for the fall musical, Enjolras and Grantaire can barely get a word in edgewise. Let alone a private word. And Enjolras definitely doesn’t want to say what he needs to say to Grantaire in the presence of Courfeyrac.

He needs to talk to Grantaire about what happened on the night of the election, find out if Grantaire also felt that electricity between them as they stood under the street lamp. Enjolras can still feel the weight of Grantaire’s cast on his shoulder, the gentle tug of fingers in the curls at the back of his neck, the warmth of Grantaire’s breath against Enjolras’ skin as they’d moved closer together.

There was something there last night. Enjolras is sure of it. Yes, Grantaire has made it perfectly obvious over the past several weeks that he was interested in women, but there is something deeper there. Grantaire is a little too adamant in his admiration of ladies, a bit overstated in his dude-bro behavior. Something is off with him, but that something had completely disappeared when Grantaire and Enjolras were alone under the street light, holding on to one another and their faces separated by a bare inch of fall air. Enjolras had felt something shift between them, and there was no way that Grantaire hadn’t felt it too. Right?

But they hadn’t had time to address it, because Enjolras had business to attend to, agendas to plan and meetings to lead.

Jehan is wrapping up. “And, finally, the newsletter will have a spot for poetry. I’m happy to put my stuff in there, but if anyone else wants to submit their own work…”

The room is silent.

“Okay,” Jehan finishes. “Well, if you guys change your mind, you know where to find me. That’s it.” He bows slightly, his multi-colored waves falling into his face, and then scuttles back to his seat next to Grantaire, who is intently doodling on the instep of his grey Converse.

“Next up, Philanthropy,” Combeferre reads from the agenda. Combeferre has made the best agenda for this meeting. Enjolras is thrilled: everything is going great, they’re right on schedule and he’s about to earn himself one tattoo story. “Enjolras? You wanted to lead this part?”

“Thanks, ‘Ferre,” Enjolras stands and begins to explain the philanthropy situation. Until now, they’d been unable to come up with a good cause for their fall event. All the fraternities and sororities have to do one—the Lambda Chi house down the block is holding a canned food drive; Tri-Phi, Cosette’s sorority, is hosting a Powderpuff football tournament to benefit a local women’s shelter—but Alpha Beta Chi hasn’t settled on one. “Now we have,” Enjolras informs the meeting. “We’ll be doing a voter-registration drive for all the Greek houses on campus, culminating in a big party here for anyone who has their ‘I Voted’ sticker on Election night. It was Grantaire’s idea.”

Grantaire’s head snaps up, black curls bouncing for a moment. “What, now?” he asks. His hand is frozen by his shoe, the tip of the black Sharpie poised just above the grey canvas. “What was my idea?”

“The voter registration drive. You made a really good point a couple of weeks ago and I think we should implement it,” Enjolras beams at him, trying to keep his grin from being too triumphant. “Congratulations, R, you’re officially our Philanthropy Chairman.”

The room explodes into applause and Grantaire can’t back out. He shakes his head and tries to glare at Enjolras, but the tiniest of smiles peeks out the side of his mouth.

“All right, moving on to Finances,” Enjolras begins and then looks down at what Joly has actually
added to his agenda. “Why do we have a budget request for eighty dollars worth of ‘Acoustic Foam Egg Crate?’ Joly? This wasn’t on the agenda when we went over it last night.”

Joly pushes his glasses up his nose and shrugs. “It was a last minute request from Courf this afternoon right before the meeting.”

“Courf?” Enjolras looks to his right, where Courfeyrac has been occupying the Vice President’s chair and has been, now that Enjolras thinks about it, suspiciously quiet this whole meeting.

Courfeyrac looks up, eyes shining and one corner of his mouth twisting ever-so-slightly. Enjolras knows that look. Courfeyrac is up to something. “Right,” he begins mildly. “I asked Feuilly what we would need to turn that little supply closet in the basement into a sound-proof practice studio. And he said we would just need to get some egg crate foam stuff.”

Enjolras raises one eyebrow. “And why exactly do we need a practice studio in the basement, Courf?”

“I mean, we don’t need one,” Courfeyrac says, a full-fledged grin breaking out across his face, one cheek deeply dimpled. “But I thought building one might save you guys from hearing this all the time——” Courfeyrac takes a deep breath and then belts out, “Gotta find my corner of the skyyyyyyyy!”

“Does that mean what I think it means, babe?” Combeferre asks.

“Yes!” Courfeyrac’s grin widens. “I got the part! I’m playing Pippin, bitches!”

The room erupts in cheers and congratulations and Enjolras finds himself swept into a ten-man group hug. ‘Budget request approved!’ he manages to squeak out before the mass of limbs closes in over him. “Meeting ajorned! Meeting ajorned!”

Enjolras shuts his eyes as he’s jostled into the crush of bodies. Arms close around him, pulling Enjolras firmly into the group embrace. From the middle of the knot of bodies comes Courfeyrac’s voice reprising “Corner of the Sky;” someone he is pretty sure is Jehan presses a kiss to his forehead; a foot crushes his left toes, followed by a muffled sorry! from Bossuet. A shoulder crashes into him and Enjolras has to grab onto the shoulder’s owner to keep from toppling into the crowd. Enjolras ducks his head against the body as he holds on tighter. Soft curls brush against his nose as he inhales a familiar smell—tobacco, salt, sandalwood. Grantaire.

He squints his eyes back open the tiniest bit and finds Grantaire’s big green eyes staring back at him, startlingly close. Their foreheads are pressed together under the crush of the group hug and Enjolras is still clinging onto Grantaire for dear life. Grantaire tightens his arm around Enjolras’ waist and smiles up at him. “I’ve got you, E.”

“Thank you,” Enjolras breathes, as the death-hug finally breaks up around them. People are still giving Courfeyrac hugs and high-fives, but now the congratulations are much more civilized and less likely to result in trampling. “I’m pretty sure you just saved my life.”

“What can I say? I’d totally take a bullet for you, Mister President. Or protect you from a group hug. Whatever you need, I’m at your service.”

“Fantastic. Want to be my head of security?” Grantaire’s arm is still around Enjolras’ waist and Enjolras hopes that if he keeps Grantaire talking and distracted, he won’t remember to remove it. “Every president needs bodyguards, right?”

“I’ve already got a job, E,” Grantaire whispers into his ear. “I’m pretty sure you just conned me
Enjolras shrugs and it jostles Grantaire’s arm. Grantaire doesn’t move. “You can do two jobs, right? Courf is vice-president and Social Chair…”

Grantaire’s arm tightens. “Enjolras, it would be my honor to guard your body,” Grantaire says and Enjolras can’t be sure, but that sounds like flirting. Is that flirting? Enjolras is terrible at reading things like this, but he is quite sure that was a blatant attempt at flirting.

Grantaire pulls away and Enjolras only has a moment to be disappointed, because his next move is to spread his arms toward Enjolras and say, “Hop in.”

“What?!”

“I’m gonna carry you. I’m pretty sure that’s the signature move of a good bodyguard,” Grantaire smiles. “Haven’t you seen that movie, The Bodyguard? I can totally carry you around Whitney Houston/Kevin Costner style, E. All you need to do is sing “I Will Always Love You” while I hoist you up the stairs.”

Enjolras looks at him blankly. “Grantaire, I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“You’ve never seen The Bodyguard? Oh my god, E, what the hell have you been doing with your life?” Grantaire beckons to him with his fingers, arms still outstretched. “It’s not that complicated. Just jump in my arms and I’ll immediately carry you upstairs so you can see that movie.”

“I’m too heavy—“

“I’m stronger than I look, Apollo.”

“Besides, I don’t want to hurt your—“ Enjolras gestures to Grantaire’s broken wrist and then stops. Grantaire’s left wrist is as bare as his right and a swirl of tattoos peeks out from under the long grey sleeves. “You got your cast off!”

“Yes,” Grantaire grins. “Feuilly took me to the doctor this morning. Good as new.” He pulls up his sleeve and twirls his left wrist, demonstrating his complete range of motion.

Before he can stop himself, Enjolras’ hand shoots out and grabs Grantaire’s wrist. The skin is warm and smooth. Enjolras can feel Grantaire’s pulse under his thumb.

“Um, almost as good as new, anyway,” Grantaire says, not moving out of Enjolras grip. “The skin got kinda gross, being under that cast for six weeks. You should’ve seen what I loofah’d off in the shower earlier today.”

“Ew,” Enjolras replies. He still does not move his hand. Grantaire’s pulse feels like it is getting faster.

“Yeah, super ew,” Grantaire agrees. “Plus, check this out, the muscles have atrophied a little bit, so it’s smaller than my other wrist.” Grantaire holds up his right arm and Enjolras seizes both the opportunity and Grantaire’s wrist.

“You’re right,” Enjolras says, his hands circling both of Grantaire’s wrists. He isn’t able to touch his thumb and forefinger in the circle that spans the right forearm, but they completely touched on the left. “That is so weird.”

“I know, right? Does my skin feel gross?” ask Grantaire, his wrists pulling back slightly. Enjolras
ignores the cue and maintains his hold on Grantaire, thumbs now stroking the soft, smooth skin on the inside of his forearms. “Because when the cast came off, I felt like a freaking salamander. Does it feel amphibian-like to you?”

Laughing, Enjolras shakes his head. “Nope, you feel like a normal human being.” His thumbs continue exploring Grantaire’s wrists; there is a double set of the letter R—red typewriter style letters, outlined in black-- on the inside of his right wrist bone. Enjolras has never gotten this close to Grantaire’s “meaningful” tattoos—the ones on his right arm—before and his curiosity is piqued. He bends closer and peers at the tiny “RR” etched into Grantaire’s skin.

“Um, E?” Grantaire ventures. “Not that I’m complaining or anything but, uh, are you planning on giving me my arms back any time soon? I kinda need those for life stuff: painting, feeding myself, giving thumbs up, you know, important things.”

“Nope,” Enjolras tells him, thumb still stroking the letters. “I totally just gave you one of your favors, so I get the story behind this tattoo.”

Grantaire looks puzzled. “Uh, what favor was that, exactly? I feel like you gave me a job, not a favor.”

“I think you’re forgetting how hard you fought for this voter registration project—“

“Yeah, because I liked arguing it with you. I thought it would be a good idea for the house—“

“And now you’re in the house. It’s perfect,” Enjolras says.

Grantaire sighs and shakes his head, admitting defeat. “You’re right. I wanted the voter thing and I got the voter thing. You win this round, Apollo, but the next favor better not involve work.”

Enjolras mentally fist-pumps. He loves winning. And now he gets a tattoo story.

“You want pizza?” Grantaire asks, out of nowhere.

“Does pizza have to do with your tattoo?” Enjolras replies. “You better not be trying to distract me with food, because I won’t be swayed. I really want that story.”

“No, pizza has nothing to do with my tattoo. And I’m not trying to distract you. But I am starving and the story would probably be better with a snack.”

“Okay,” Enjolras gives in. Why would he say no to pizza? Pizza is awesome.

“Do you still want me to carry you up the stairs?”

“No.”

###

“So, did you get the tattoo because you really, really like your nickname?” Enjolras asks, mouth full of cheese and crust. Grantaire has taken him to a hole-in-the-wall pizza place on the Hill that specializes in cheap slices and inexpensive pitchers of watery beer. “Is there some super obscure French pun involving two R’s that I don’t know about?”

(“I could have carried you, Mr. President,” Grantaire teased him as Enjolras tripped over a crack in the sidewalk on the walk to the pizza place.

“No!”
“Room’s clear, sir, all threats have been neutralized,” Grantaire had declared, his hands making a finger gun as he swept the room.

“Enough.”

“The Eagle has landed, I repeat, the Eagle has landed,” Grantaire talks into a fake earpiece, his fingers up by his ear, as Enjolras slides into the vinyl booth at the pizzaria.

“Stop! I’m demoting you. You’re no longer Head of Security.”

“Nope,” Grantaire replies, pouring himself a glass full of foamy beer. “Believe it or not, it has nothing to do with my name.” He runs one fingertip along his nose and then dips it into his glass, stirring slightly. The excess foam disappears.

“Whoa, what did you just do?” Enjolras says, momentarily distracted from his line of questioning.

“Old drinking trick,” Grantaire informs him. “The oil from your skin makes the foam go down. You sure you don’t want a beer?”

Enjolras shakes his head. “I don’t have a fake ID. I’ll totally get busted if the bartender sees two glasses and comes over here to check.”

“You are the worst frat boy ever, Enjolras. We’ve got to get you a fake ID, dude,” Grantaire sticks his head out of the cracked red-vinyl booth and looks over at the bar. The bartender is focused on a football game playing on the ancient TV hanging from the ceiling in the corner. “He can’t see us in this booth, even if he was paying attention. You want to share my glass?”

“Why not?” Enjolras agrees. Grantaire slides him the beer. Enjolras takes a sip and then grimaces. It tastes like slightly bitter water.

“Bottoms up, E. We’ve got a whole pitcher of shitty beer to get through and the story isn’t that long.”

Enjolras takes another sip and then slides the glass back across the chipped linoleum tabletop over to Grantaire, who reaches for it with his right hand, double R tattoo in plain sight. Enjolras reaches out on impulse and grabs his wrist, thumb brushing back and forth over the matching set of letters. Grantaire does not pull his arm away, just reaches for the beer with his left hand, takes a sip and begins the story.

R

The whole thing is way too surreal for Grantaire. He’s sitting across the table from Enjolras, they’re sharing a beer and ( kinda) holding hands. It’s like a bizarro version of a quintessential 1950’s malt-shop date, except instead of a chocolate shake with two straws and a cherry on top, they’re sipping a watery beer out of a shared Pilsner glass. Grantaire is hyper aware of the marks that Enjolras’ mouth left on the rim of the glass after he took a drink. He wonders if Enjolras would notice if he put his own lips on the same spot.

Grantaire mentally shakes himself. Knock it off, he inner-monologues, don’t be creepy. Enjolras has been so much chiller lately, ever since he took over as president. He’s stopped glaring at Courfeyrac and Combeferre’s PDAs and he hasn’t snapped at Grantaire for inappropriate behavior in nearly a week. That’s a new record. They’ve reached this tentative common ground and Grantaire doesn’t want to fuck it up.
Enjolras’ improved attitude about his gay best friends doesn’t mean that he’s suddenly okay with it, doesn’t change the fact that he’s straight and a little bit homophobic. But at least he’s making an attempt to keep it under wraps.

Actually, Grantaire is a little surprised that Enjolras is holding onto his wrist. He must’ve done an excellent job with his fake-straightness, because Enjolras isn’t reacting to him as a threat anymore. He didn’t even freak out when Grantaire had offered to carry him up the stairs. Grantaire mentally pats himself on the back. Operation: Act Like a Straight Boy has apparently been a rousing success. Good for him.

Grantaire tries not to get distracted by the feel of Enjolras’ thumb sweeping over his wrist bone and gets on with the story.

“So okay,” he begins, “There used to be this art department outreach program…”

Grantaire had only been in college for a month when his mentor had pulled him into his office on his way out of his Art History lecture. He was more than a little hung-over and wasn’t thrilled to find himself face-to-face with a professor, particularly one as intimidating as Professor LeBlanc, who had a reputation for being made of steel underneath his absent-minded artist exterior.

“Grantaire,” Professor LeBlanc peered at him from over the tops of his horn-rimmed glasses, “You’ve already amassed four unexcused absences in my Studio One class…”

“Wait, wait, wait,” Grantaire protested. “I haven’t missed a single one!”

“You’ve shown up to class eventually, yes; but, if you recall from the syllabus, any tardy over five minutes in your required BFA studio classes counts as an absence.”

Oh. Grantaire did not recall that, maybe because he didn’t actually read the syllabus. He probably should have done that.

Professor LeBlanc continued on, “You’ll also remember that three unexcused absences is the absolute limit and any additional absence constitutes an automatic F in the course.”

“How many did you say I had, professor?” Grantaire asked. He was pretty sure he’d heard him say that he had—

“Four, Grantaire. You have four.”

Shit. Grantaire literally couldn’t afford to fail this class. If he failed his studio, he’d be kicked out of the BFA program and, if he got kicked out of the BFA, he’d lose his partial scholarship. He couldn’t make it on loans alone, and his parents firmly refused to help him pay for an art degree.

“Professor, if there’s anything I can do,” Grantaire began to babble, “Extra credit assignments, help out cleaning the studio spaces, I can wash your car, anything—”

“Normally, Grantaire, we don’t offer extra credit but, since this is your first semester, I’m inclined to make an exception,” Professor LeBlanc smiled at him, but there was something in his expression that was reminiscent of a great white shark. “We have a wonderful opportunity for you. How do you feel about children?”

And that’s how Grantaire wound up as a member of “Renaissance Revolution,” a not-for-profit outreach program, created and directed by Professor LeBlanc.

“It was tough at first,” Grantaire tells Enjolras when he comes back to the table bearing another
pitcher of beer two more slices of pizza, the grease already soaking through the paper plates. When Grantaire slides back into the booth, Enjolras immediately takes his wrist again. If Grantaire had realized that telling sad stories about his less-than-stellar academic history was currency that could be traded for physical contact with Enjolras, he would’ve started sharing his failures ages ago. “All the volunteers in the program had to go teach in schools a couple days a week in addition to taking our regular classes.”

“What was the program called again?” Enjolras asks, taking a sip of shitty beer.

“Renaissance Revolution,” Grantaire replied.

“That’s awesome.”

“Professor LeBlanc was convinced that, in this day and age, real social change can’t be affected by revolting in the streets and building barricades and shit. The real revolution would come when people were educated, when they had their minds open to the potential within themselves and can develop empathy for other people. And he thought that arts education would help. So, we’d go out to under-served schools and teach art classes to little kids. Some people did poetry, some people did dance. I did visual art.”

Enjolras is staring at Grantaire and something new flickers deep in his blue eyes. “That sounds amazing.”

“Honestly, E, it was really tough,” Grantaire replies. “Not the little kids, I mean. They were super easy and cute and stuff. But we also did classes for older kids at the Department of Juvenile Probation and those kids, the ones who’d been busted for pot or shoplifting or gang-activity or whatever, they didn’t give a fuck. They were pissed that they were there, they hated us and they sure as hell didn’t want to paint or dance or write poetry.”

“But you still went?”

“Yeah, I still went. It was either go and try to get through to those kids or fail my studio class and drop out of college. I didn’t really have a choice.

“Most of the kids just fucked around during my class, drew dicks or whatever. Balled up their drawings and threw them at one another. It was kind of a shit-show every week. But there was this one kid, Enjolras, there was this one fucking kid who always sat in the back of the room, never really talked, just kept his head down and drew. And then one day he comes up to me at the end of my class and goes, ‘Mister, I drew this.’ And then he sorta shoves this piece of paper at me and asks, ‘Do you think it’s good?’

Grantaire pauses for a moment and blinks a few times. He’d forgotten how much he’d felt that day when that kid, the quiet little burnout with too many piercings and bleached out hair, had looked at him for approval with scared, hopeful eyes.

“And it was good, E. The kid’s picture was really fucking good. And after that, I’d help him out in each class while the other kids screwed around and ignored me. Professor LeBlanc contacted the art teacher at his high school and got him into art electives. He even started doing graphic design.

“The kid got off probation and I didn’t see him anymore. But Professor LeBlanc kept in touch with his teachers at school and, last I heard anyway, he was doing okay.

“And that’s when it all clicked, E: most of those kids don’t care. Art’s not their thing, whatever, I get that. But we weren’t doing this for them. Renaissance Revolution was there for that one kid,
the quiet kid in the back of the room who didn’t even know that art was an option. If we can help one kid, just one out of a hundred or a thousand, find out that he has talent, a skill, that his voice matters, then we’ve won. The world is a tiny bit better because of art.”

Something warm trickles down Grantaire’s cheek. Oh for fuck’s sake, he’s crying. It’s been almost three years since Grantaire had worked with RR but it feels like yesterday that he saw that kid’s face totally light up when he’d said the drawing was good. Grantaire brushes the tear away with the back of his hand and then drains the beer.

“So you see, E,” Grantaire says as he refills the glass, only sniffing a little. “That’s why I don’t tell that story very much. Kinda defeats the purpose of having sexy tattoos if you’re going to start crying when you explain them.”

“That’s… incredible, Grantaire,” Enjolras says, his voice strangely tight. “Do you mind if I ask, um, why don’t you still work with them?”

Grantaire laughs harshly. “Funding was cut. The next semester, the University decided to use the money for other things, so… Renaissance Revolution was done. Professor LeBlanc didn’t get tenure and left the school. So, the whole thing was gone and forgotten. But not for me—“Grantaire holds up his wrist, pulling it reluctantly from Enjolras’ warm grip—“I got this tattoo so I’d never forget that kid and remind myself that, once upon a time, art did a little bit of good in the world, if just for one person.”

They walk home under a full moon. Fall has descended in earnest and the trees are bare. Enjolras won’t stop looking at him—tentative, sideways glances-- as they walk together, footsteps echoing along in tandem in the relative quiet of the Monday evening street. As they wait for a stoplight to change, Enjolras slides his hand into Grantaire’s.

“Is that okay?” he asks, blue eyes full of questions.

“It’s cool, E,” Grantaire tries to say nonchalantly, his fingers tightening around Enjolras’. “It’s a friend thing.” It’s true- their friends are always holding each other’s hands and hugging and snuggling. It was rare that Jehan wasn’t holding onto someone. If Enjolras and Grantaire hadn’t really been physically comfortable doing it until now, well… their relationship had been complicated. But now they’re good. “We are friends, right?”

“Yeah,” Enjolras answers after a moment. “We’re friends.”

E

Grantaire cashes in his next favor on Thursday afternoon. The October sky has opened up and is dousing the campus with a late-afternoon rainstorm. Enjolras barely makes it into the house, leaving damp puddles on the wooden floor as he shakes himself off, when Grantaire comes thundering down the stairs.


Grantaire pulls away, his green hoodie damp in patches from Enjolras’ wet shirt. “You’re wet,” Enjolras observes.

“Uh, because you’re wet, Apollo,” Grantaire retorts. “Can you stand to go back out in the rain for a bit? Please?”

It turns out that Grantaire’s favor is simple: he just needs a ride to the art supply store to pick up some new canvasses. He’d normally drive himself, Grantaire explains once they’re both safely
buckled into Enjolras’ hybrid, but his car is a pick-up truck and the canvasses would get soaked if he put them in the truck bed. The hatchback of Enjolras’ car would be big enough for a couple of big canvasses and keep them out of the torrential downpour.

“Is this the kind of favor that earns me another tattoo story?” Enjolras asks as he navigates his car through the rain-soaked streets.

“Dude, this is the kind of favor that earns you a tattoo story, a medal, and my undying love,” Grantaire effuses.

Enjolras keeps his eyes on the road, biting down hard on this lower lip. When Grantaire says things like that—things about “undying love”—it make Enjolras a little crazy. To the untrained ear, it sounds like flirting, it sounds like genuine affection, but Enjolras knows better by now.

Grantaire has been so adamant about them being “friends.” Enjolras gets it, he really does. Grantaire is cool with them hanging out, holding hands even, but just in a platonic way. They’re buddies. But it makes Enjolras’ heart ache when Grantaire casually drops words like “love.”

All during high school and their freshman year, Courfeyrac had loudly lamented the torment of being enamored with a straight boy and Enjolras didn’t really get it. Now he does. This is torture.

“There it is,” Grantaire points to a cinderblock building off to their right with a crackling neon sign that reads “Montmartre’s”. Enjolras parks close and they dash inside.

The art supply store is nothing like Enjolras had imagined. The outside was simple cinder-block and Enjolras had supposed that the inside would match: some utilitarian shelves crammed together and stocked with paints, pencils and whatever else artists used to make art. Clay? There would probably be some clay in there somewhere, too. That would make sense. Enjolras’ experience with art supplies was strictly limited to what was stocked in the cupboards of his elementary school classroom. Once he’d passed on to middle school and art had become an elective, he’d simply elected to not take it anymore. There were more important things to learn than finger-painting. Enjolras has low expectations as he dashes in after Grantaire through the simple glass door.

The interior of Montmartre’s however, is a whole new world. There’s nothing about this inside that suggests that it could possibly match with the drab, windowless exterior. Grey light pours in from rain-specked skylights all along the ceiling and filters down across warm wood aisles and shelves. A second floor wraps around most of the sales floor, a lofted horseshoe filled primarily with large canvases stretched onto wooden frames. The largest, leaning against the rail at the far side of the loft, appears to be taller than Enjolras. He really hopes Grantaire isn’t planning on choosing that particular canvas. There’s no way they’re going to get that into his car.

Grantaire veers off immediately to the right and disappears into the pen section. Enjolras can identify it as the pen section because it has a large sign over it that helpfully reads “Pens.” There are also signs reading “Pencils,” “Paints,” “Ceramics,” “Textiles,” and those are only the ones that Enjolras can see. The store feels like it goes on forever.

“Grantaire?” He whispers, ducking in among the pens. Enjolras doesn’t know why he feels the need to be quiet, but there’s something almost holy about this store. All the customers are reverentially selecting their supplies or speaking to clerks in low tones. It’s like there’s a creative energy crackling through the shop and no one wants to disrupt it. “Grantaire?”

“Over here, E,” Grantaire’s voice drifts from behind a tall shelf. He feels the need to whisper, too, and Enjolras instantly feels less dumb. “Professor Gros told me that he wanted me to start to work in ink, but I can’t remember which pens he told me to buy.”
Enjolras turns to face the shelf of pens… only to realize that it is actually *shelves*, multiple. The display he’s facing turns the corner into another shelf of pens and markers. Behind them, is yet another shelf and, Enjolras is quite positive, that there is still another aisle of pens beyond that. How had he ever thought this trip was going to be simple?

The pen selection is intimidating: there are fine tip, double-tip, watercolor; fat pens and thin pens; pens that are masquerading as pencils, some that look like paint brushes. Enjolras tentatively reaches out and plucks a thin green pen out of a display. It is vaguely hexagonal in shape and the writing on the label is in Japanese. The sign on the display is covered in ink scribbles, and Enjolras guesses that testing the pen on the sign is probably okay. He carefully removes the cap and scribbles a quick, tentative line on the paper. The ink leaves a bold, smooth slash of green across the white of the label.

“Oooh,” Enjolras breathes softly and scribbles again, this time, tiny green loops against the white paper. He’s been using pens for almost two decades and he’s never had one feel so smooth in his hand. Another scribble, this time it’s his name: a swooping E, followed by nearly indecipherable lowercase letters. If he’s being honest, there is a bit of flourish in the J.

“Signing your work?” a voice whispers, close to his ear.

Enjolras jerks his hand back, dropping the pen on the floor. Grantaire bends down to pick it up, shaking his dark curls. “You know you’re totally allowed to do that, right?” he quietly teases.

“I know, I just felt… I don’t know.” Enjolras says. “I don’t know what the rules of the art store are.”

“Uh, it’s the *art* store, E.” Grantaire says. “There aren’t a ton of rules. Don’t ruin anything, don’t steal anything and just, I don’t know, don’t be a dick.” Grantaire clicks the cap onto the pen and then realizes, “Hey! You found the pens Gros wanted me to get! Gold star, E.”

“Those are really good pens,” Enjolras informs Grantaire as he selects a few of the colors and tip sizes that his professor had recommended. Enjolras scribbled three extremely satisfying lines with the pen and that pretty much makes him an expert.

“You are correct, sir,” Grantaire tells him. “And for helping me locate them, I’m buying you this one as a reward.”

Enjolras goes a little pink. “I didn’t do anything, I just played with a pen.”

“And you doodled a little line on that sign. It’s your first work of art, E! We need to celebrate it.” Grantaire drops the green pen into a small shopping basket along with the ones that he’s selected. “Every time you write a note with it in a boring-ass poly-sci class, you’ll think of me and your first trip to the art supply store.”

Grantaire is mostly right about that. Enjolras is definitely going to think of Grantaire when he uses this pen. He doesn’t have too much time to dwell the gesture, though, because Grantaire is on the move again.

They ascend the narrow vertical staircase to the canvas loft and Grantaire breathes deeply, a slow smile spreading over his face. Enjolras follow suit: the loft smells amazing, like fresh wood shavings and another scent he doesn’t recognize. Glue? It’s sharp and tangy, but not unpleasant.

“I love this part of the store,” Grantaire tells him, running his fingers over a stack of plain white canvasses. “It’s empty and not super exciting but, I don’t know, I feel like it’s full of possibility.”
Grantaire moves from stack to stack, repeating the gesture with his hand over every single canvas, stroking the fabric-covered wooden frames as he’s trying to unlock some secret meaning in each one.

Enjolras copies him again, but they just feel like wood and rough fabric. He can’t tell what exactly Grantaire is looking for.

“Why do you touch each one?” he finally asks. “Can you tell something about the quality of canvas from the way it feels? Like fruit or something?”

Grantaire laughs. “No, they’re all pretty much the same,” he replies, stroking another canvas, this one tall and narrow. “I just like touching them all.” He looks shyly over at Enjolras, bright green eyes peeking out from under his still damp curls. “This is gonna sound so weird but I feel like, if I touch them all, then I may have—at some point—stroked a blank canvas that is someday going to be an amazing painting.

“One day, one of these will be a famous work of art, hanging in a museum or fancy gallery or something, and I’ll have touched it back when it was just a little blank canvas. There’s just so much potential up here, you know?”

“That one,” Enjolras declares, pointing to the canvas that Grantaire is currently touching. “It’s that one.”

“Oh yeah, you think this is the one that will have a great work of art on it someday, E?” Grantaire asks. “How do you know?”

“Because that’s the one you’re gonna buy,” Enjolras replies with certainty.

Grantaire buys it.

###

They get the canvas, along with a few more that Grantaire selected, loaded into the back of Enjolras’ car without too much difficulty. They’re both dripping with rain when they finally slide into the front seat. The windows are fogged up against the cool air outside. “One more quick favor, E,” Grantaire asks. “Can we swing by the art building to drop these off? I know it’s a pain in the ass, but I need to start working on this project tonight and there’s no where in the house to paint…”

“I’ve actually got a better idea,” Enjolras tells him and starts up the car.

###

The rear of the Alpha Beta Chi house has a sun-porch. It’s nothing special: just a little room off the kitchen, glassed in on three sides with huge windows. No one has used it for anything since they all moved in and the only items in there are a few bits of yard equipment- a rake, a shovel, some empty terra cotta flower pots— a couple of old lawn chairs and an inexplicable pair of dirt-crusted Wellington boots that appear to be older than most of the members of the house.

The windows are currently streaked with rain and the drops beat a heavy staccato on the corrugated metal of the roof.

“It’s yours if you want it,” Enjolras tells Grantaire after they load the canvasses in. “I don’t know anything about painting, but there’s a bunch of room and it looks like it gets good light and stuff. Is this okay?”
Grantaire positively beams at him. “It’s absolutely perfect, E. Are you sure it’s cool if I just, I don’t
know, commandeer this place?”

“It’s totally okay,” Enjolras declares. “I’m the president. I’m making this my first official decree.
*Grantaire gets the sun-porch for his studio.* It’s pretty tame compared to the shit Courfeyrac
decreed.”

Grantaire hugs him again. Enjolras could really get used to this. “You’re amazing,” Grantaire sighs
into his shoulder, tightening his embrace. He pulls back, green eyes shining up and Enjolras.
“You’re just—“ Grantaire hesitates. “You’re a really good friend, E. I appreciate it.” He pulls
awkwardly out of the hug and offers Enjolras his fist. Enjolras bumps it. That’s what dudes do, he
supposes.

“And hey! You just earned yourself the second tattoo story. Wanna hear it?”

Enjolras does.

**R**

Grantaire sets up the old lawn chairs and gestures for Enjolras to sit next to him. The porch isn’t
heated, and Enjolras pulls his coat tighter around him.

“Okay, next tattoo,” Grantaire wriggles his right arm out of his hoodie sleeve. His bicep is still
covered by his t-shirt, but his pale forearm is completely exposed. Two lines of dark black script
are etched into the skin there, running along the delicate tendon and nearly intersecting with the
crease of the elbow joint.

Enjolras takes Grantaire’s wrist- thumbing gently stroking the double R’s again- and peers in to
look at the other tattoo. It’s in French. There are two clusters of tiny five-pointed stars bracketing
the quote on each end.

*Nous sommes tous dans le caniveau , mais certains d'entre nous nous penchons sur les étoiles .*

Enjolras clumsily sounds the words out as the raindrop beat against the windows. He quit French
his senior year of high school, after he met the state-mandated three year requirement, a decision
he now deeply regrets.

“Do you speak French?” Grantaire asks.

“I can ask you how to find *la bibliotheque,*” Enjolras admits. “Or *la discotheque.* Other than that,
I’ve got nothing.”

“Okay, I’m not going to make you translate,” Grantaire says. “Although that would be hilarious. It
says, *All of us are in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars.*”

“Did you make that up?”


“Of course,” Enjolras tells him. *Importance of Being Earnest.*

“Exactly, so anything, when I was a sophomore in high school—“

“You got a tattoo in high school?” Enjolras asks.

“No, I got it when I turned eighteen. My parents were pretty awful parents, but I think even they
would’ve objected if their fifteen year old son went out and got a tattoo,” Grantaire’s words are light, but his tone is tense. His mother and father are far from stellar as far as parents go, and Grantaire doesn’t love talking about them. He presses on with his story, “So yeah, the story is from high school, but I got the tattoo later.”

Enjolras stays silent, his hand still on Grantaire’s arm.

“I was having a really shitty sophomore year. The other kids were being assholes and giving me a hard time about—” Grantaire stops abruptly. He was about to say ‘about coming out,’’ but that bit of information wouldn’t exactly fit into the straight façade he’d so carefully put together for Enjolras’ benefit.

Other people in the house know he’s gay, so it’s not like he’ll be able to keep it up forever, but Grantaire really doesn’t want to out himself in this very moment. Not when he’s sitting so close to Enjolras, with the other man’s hand on his wrist. They’re friends right now, friends who are totally comfortable companionably sitting together in a small, dimly lit room while a storm rages around them.

The rain beats harder against the glass and the wind picks up. Grantaire raises his voice in order to be heard as he continues. “They were giving me a hard time about, you know, art and stuff. And being a sarcastic little shit. Needless to say, I was not popular in high school.”

Grantaire had actually taken to eating lunch backstage in the high school’s theater to avoid the packs of jocks that roamed the cafeteria. The theater was empty during most of the day and he was usually able to eat his sandwich and lament his problems in relative peace. Until one day, after a particularly ugly incident in the locker room after gym class that resulted in Grantaire getting his face slammed into a locker by several members of the football team and his lunch dumped into one of the toilets.

Even though he didn’t need a place to eat lunch because he no longer had a lunch, Grantaire had still retreated to the back of the theater to curl up, knees pulled tight against his chest, and just cry.

“Hello,” an adult-sounding voice said from up above him. Miss Beauchamp, the drama teacher peered down at him. She was young--well, young-ish for a teacher--and dressed like stereotypical theatre teacher: lots of black on black, shorts skirts over tights, tall boots and unnecessary scarves. Grantaire made to get up but, surprisingly, she sank down next to him, ignoring the sawdust and dirt on the stage floor.

“What’s your name?” she’d asked. Of course she didn’t know it. Grantaire’s high school was huge, a sprawl of nameless students, and he wasn’t exactly a kid who stood out. He definitely wasn’t the kind of kid who would ever take her drama class.

“Grantaire,” he admitted and tried to wipe the snot off of his face with the sleeve of his sweatshirt.

“Well, Grantaire,” Miss Beauchamp said, “It looks like you are having a really shitty day.”

“And that was it,” Grantaire tells Enjolras in the rainy sun-porch. “She had me: I’d never heard a teacher curse before. Miss Beauchamp was the shit.”

She’d let Grantaire eat lunch in her office, introduced him to some of the other outcasts who flocked to her classroom during lunch and after school. Grantaire started to make some friends. He didn’t venture on stage, but he did help paint sets for the plays. Life in high started to suck less. If there was any place that was safe for outcasts, weirdoes (and gay kids, Grantaire doesn’t say), it was most definitely the drama department.
“This was Miss Beauchamp’s favorite quote,” he says, gesturing to the words on his arm. “She loved Oscar Wilde. Whenever a kid was having a bad time, she’d say this to them, sometimes in French, for emphasis or something. I don’t know why, Oscar Wilde wasn’t even French. But Miss Beauchamp liked to say it to us in French.”

Enjolras smiles and nods, his thumb gently running up and down Grantaire’s forearm. “I like it.”

“Yeah, me, too. It was like ‘we’re all equal, we’re all stuck in a shitty place sometimes, but you can still dream and try to get someplace else,” Grantaire says softly, voice barely audible over the pounding rain. “And maybe that makes you better than the other idiots who can’t fathom a life beyond the one they’re living.”

“Did she like your tattoo?” Enjolras asks.

“She died.”

“Fuck.”

“Yep, my senior year. She got into a car accident,” Grantaire is crying again. Why the fuck can’t he tell these stories to Enjolras without losing his shit? “I actually found out I’d gotten into school here, just got my acceptance letter in the mail that morning, and was on my way to her office to tell her—she wrote me letters of recommendation and pushed me to apply to the art BFA. One of the theater kids told me. That she’d been in an accident that weekend. It was… really fucking awful.

“As soon as I turned eighteen, I went out and got this on my arm. For her.”

A pause. The rain continues.

“Thank you for telling me,” Enjolras says softly.

“Yeah, well. You asked. And I told you that these tattoos on my right arm were important. Now you know.” Now you’ll know when you see yours, Grantaire thinks.

“Can I, um…?” Enjolras gestures lamely to his free arm. Grantaire nods and Enjolras wraps it around Grantaire, pulling his head into his shoulder. Enjolras’ coat is still wet. Grantaire doesn’t care.

The rain beats even harder on the roof. Enjolras doesn’t let go.

###

The voter registration drive goes brilliantly. Not that Enjolras expected Grantaire to fail or anything, but he certainly hadn’t expected the sheer number of students that are currently packed into the ABX house, every one proudly wearing the little oblong “I Voted!” sticker issued at the polling places.

The fraternity, along with a handful of volunteers recruited at the last couple of les Amis meetings and a surprising amount of Courfeyrac’s theater department friends, spent the day stationed at various points around campus, handing out flyers and directing students to the nearest polling station. The state law allowed last-minute voter registration through Election Day, so the Alpha Beta Chi crew was out in force until the polls closed at seven o’clock.

Feuilly and Jehan were exempt from street team detail, but that’s because Grantaire has assigned
them both to party prep. At first, it seems like a pretty easy job for the two of them—pick-up a few kegs of beer, hang an ironic “Mission: Accomplished” banner along the front of the house, order some pizza—but as the day’s registration effort prove more and more successful, Grantaire’s constant stream of text messages grow increasingly frantic.

To Feuilly: We r gonna need an xtra keg

To Feuilly: Make that 2 xtra

To Feuilly: Fuck it, buy all kegs they have

From Feuilly: ssssssshhhhhhhh. We got this.

Feuilly was right: he and Jehan managed to get the right amount of beer for the throngs of post-voting partygoers. Well, almost. The last keg is cashed at about ten o’clock and the party starts to break-up shortly thereafter. Enjolras and Combeferre are saying good night to the guests as they stream out the front door, a surprising number of them expressing interest in coming to the next les Amis meeting.

Jehan and Feuilly pull down the decorations as Bossuet and Joly collect assorted party garbage from the tables and countertops. Musichetta has materialized at some point in the evening and is currently helping Bahorel heft the empty kegs into the back of Feuilly’s Jeep to be returned to the following day.

Courfeyrac’s theater friends are the last group to stick around- they’re involved in a rousing game of Celebrity in the living room and Enjolras doesn’t see any sign of it ending anytime soon.

Grantaire is nowhere to be found.

“He’s out back, picking up in the yard,” Courfeyrac answers, once his turn is over.

Enjolras finds Grantaire out in the yard, bent over the hot tub and trying to pluck “I Voted!” stickers off the surface of the water. Feuilly finally closed the pool for the winter--the blue tarpaulin covering snapping and rustling in the cold breeze—but the hot tub is going to stay open all season.

“Hey,” Enjolras says. Grantaire glances back at him and smiles.

“Hey, yourself,” Grantaire snags the final floating bit of sticker out of the water and jams it in his pocket. “Pretty good turnout tonight, huh?”

“It was excellent.” Enjolras replies and hands Grantaire one of the bottles of microbrew that he’d secreted away in the mini-fridge up in the presidential suite. They clink their bottles together and sip. “You did a great job, R.”

“I know, right?” Grantaire shakes his head, running his hands through the black curls at the nape of his neck. “I was sure I was gonna fuck it up somehow, but this whole thing turned out pretty okay.”

“It was more than okay. It was a great idea and you totally pulled it off,” Enjolras insists.
“Man, it’s amazing what I can come up with when I’m just trying to fuck with you,” Grantaire laughs. “I never would of thought of trying to do voter registration for frat boys if you hadn’t been so against it.”

“Yeah, you’re pretty brilliant in your quest to be a contradictory dick,” Enjolras smiles, nudging Grantaire in the ribs.

“It’s a talent, really,” Grantaire replies. “I feel like maybe this is my purpose in life: to totally contradict you at all times. Be the yin to your yang, the alpha to your omega, the Harry Potter to your Draco Malfoy—“

“What?” Enjolras exclaims. “Why do I have to the Draco Malfoy in this scenario?”

“Look at you, E. You’re all blonde and haughty and ambitious. You’re a total Slytherin—“

“I’m not haughty,” Enjolras protests, looking over at Grantaire with the best wounded expression he can muster. It doesn’t work: he still looks haughty.

Grantaire just laughs. “God, you’re such a dork. Do me a favor and never make that face again, okay?”

“Okay!” Enjolras seizes on Grantaire’s turn of phrase. “I’ll never make that face again. That’s your last favor.”

“So? Can I see your new tattoo now?”

“All right, but that really seems like a waste of a favor…”

“I’ll give you another one, an extra bonus favor,” Enjolras promises. “Any place, any time. Just let me see your tattoo tonight.”

Grantaire takes a deep breath. “Okay, here goes,” he says and pulls off his black knit cardigan, but pauses before taking off his white undershirt. “Wait a sec, we’re right here: outside, nice night, right next to a hot tub, I’m about to get half-naked anyway. Wanna?”

Why not? Enjolras thinks and begins to strip down to his briefs. This is becoming normal behavior for the two of them, for everyone in the frat, really, and impromptu hot-tub parties are getting to be a regular occurrence. Enjolras shouldn’t be hyper sensitive to Grantaire removing his jeans right next to him—if it was Courfeyrac or Combeferre taking off their pants right now, Enjolras wouldn’t bat an eye—but he is.

We’re just friends, we’re just friends, we’re just friends, he reminds himself as he slips into the warm bubbling water. Enjolras finally glances up at Grantaire, who has paused at the edge of the hot tub. He’s stripped down to his snug black boxer briefs (Look at his face, goddamit! Not at his —Enjolras commands himself as he forcefully tears his eyes away from Grantaire’s underwear) but is still wearing his white cotton shirt. Grantaire nervously plays with the hem as he stares down at Enjolras, his expression strange, like he’s trying to work up to something.

“Okay,” he says finally, whips the shirt of his head and then slips into the hot tub next to Enjolras. “So? What do you think?” Grantaire tone is tentative and almost… fearful?

Enjolras doesn’t know what to say, exactly. Grantaire’s new tattoo is… well, it’s big, stretching around his right bicep in a splash of red and gold hues. The shape is vaguely celestial, but not quiet
symmetrical. Enjolras can’t put his finger on what exactly it reminds him of.

“Is it… a sun?” he finally ventures.

“Sort of?” Grantaire answers, holding perfectly still in the water, as if waiting for Enjolras to react. But Enjolras isn’t entirely sure what he’s supposed to be reacting to. He stretches on hand out and gently runs one finger around the dark burgundy border of the shape.

Grantaire stares at him as Enjolras studies the tattoo. “Is it, like, Greek or tribal or something?” Enjolras guesses again. Grantaire nods.

“Something like that, E.”

“It’s cool, I like it,” Enjolras says decisively, still caressing the lines etched into Grantaire’s skin. “So, what’s the story?”

“You don’t get the story,” Grantaire tells him, shaking his head.

“What? No. You promised me the story.”

“Incorrect, Enjolras. I promised you the story for the first two, but I only said I’d show you this one,” Grantaire shrugs. “Aren’t you pre-law? You should know to read the fine print.”

Enjolras’ face falls. “But…all the tattoos on this arm are meaningful to you. I want to know about this one. Please?”

“Sorry, Enjolras,” Grantaire says softly, his green eyes dark in the moonlight, their expression unreadable as Enjolras continues to slowly trace his finger around the edges of the tattoo.

“You’re gonna have to figure this one out for yourself.”
The Malicious Playfulness of the Snow

Chapter Summary

In which Bossuet makes an awkward declaration of love, Courfeyrac plays God with poultry, Grantaire deals with unwanted affection, a ringtone saves/ruins everything, the weather gets feisty, Enjolras develops an appreciation for baked goods, and Grantaire deals with very wanted affection.

“Okay, sounds great. Cool, cool. Thanks, love you,” Bossuet says, ending his phone call with a quick tap of his forefinger on the screen. It takes him a few moments to realize that everyone in the living room is staring at him. “Pizza will be here in about forty-five minu--what?”

Joly and Musichetta are entangled on the loveseat and Joly has to bury his face into her neck to stifle his laughter. His shoulders are shaking with the effort. Musichetta pats him gently as she bites down hard on her own lip. Jehan’s entire face is lit up with glee and Enjolras, positioned on the couch in front of him, is trying to mask his own enjoyment by pressing his lips together and furrowing his brow into a frown. Marius lifts his head out of Cosette’s lap, looking genuinely confused.

Grantaire is lying on his stomach on the floor and doesn’t even make an effort to hide his amusement: he snorts openly into his sketchpad and Bahorel, positioned over him on the sofa, kicks him hard on the shoulder. It does nothing to stop Grantaire’s laughter. It actually just makes it worse.

Bossuet glances around the room, baffled. “Seriously, what’s funny?”

“Bossuet, did you just tell the guy at the pizza place that you love him?” Musichetta asks, managing to keep her face straight long enough to get the question out, and then she collapses into giggles along with Joly.

“What! No, I didn’t…” Bossuet begins and then his face falls. “Oh, shit. I totally did. Oh, god.”

He flops morosely on the loveseat next to his boyfriend and girlfriend. They both immediately pull him into a dog-pile tickle fight.

“Bossuet is in love with the pizza guy!” Joly crows, attacking Bossuet’s ribcage with his deft little fingers.

“No! Shut up… I’m not… it was an accident,” Bossuet manages, through the barrage of hands assaulting his ticklish bits. He shoves Joly off. “Sometimes you just accidentally add an ‘I love you,’ at the end of phone conversation. Everyone’s done it, right? Right?”

A chorus of emphatic “No’s!” fills the living room.

“Seriously?” Bossuet asks, bewildered. “No one’s ever let a random ‘I love you’ slip out?”

Grantaire abandons his sketchbook and jumps onto the couch, landing directly on top of Bossuet. “Nope, Boss,” he says, reigniting the tickle attack. “That’s pretty much just a you problem.”
“Jehan, help me out here!” Bossuet cries.

Jehan’s response can barely be heard over the howls of helpless giggles coming from the pile of humans on the loveseat. “I’ve gotten really high and told everyone that I love them, but that’s because I actually love you guys.”

He resumes massaging Enjolras’ shoulders and Grantaire—despite the fact that he’s holding Bossuet in a headlock so that Musichetta can attack his underarms with her long, thin fingers—can’t help but notice the way Enjolras’ blonde head droops lower with relaxation.

“I’ve gotten pretty shit-canned in my questionable life, Bossuet,” Grantaire declares, keeping his focus on the wrestling match and away from Enjolras and Jehan’s massage chain. “But I’ve definitely never accidentally added an ‘I love you’ to a total stranger.”

“Aw man,” Bossuet groans, pushing Grantaire off him and onto the floor. “Fuck my life. One of you guys has to answer the door when the pizza guy comes, okay? Please? I can’t deal with looking at him.”

Everyone assures Bossuet that the guy delivering the pizza will not be the same person to whom he professed his love on the phone, but Bossuet still refuses to be the one to greet the pizza delivery person.

The moment of boisterous glee at Bossuet’s awkward faux pas dies away and the group settles back into the simple pleasure of a relaxing evening off. Everyone in the frat has been pushing themselves with schoolwork, les Amis activities and fraternity events all semester and, now that the Thanksgiving break is only a few days away, they are all practically zombies.

Due to the barrage of exams, papers and projects due this week, Enjolras has cancelled the weekly Alpha Beta Chi meeting and tonight, on the Monday before Thanksgiving, everyone is sprawled out in various states of exhaustion on every surface in the fraternity living room. A fire crackles in the fireplace. The house is peaceful. Grantaire wishes that they could all just stay at the ABX house for the holiday, instead of driving up into the mountains to Marius’ grandfather’s cabin. But the trip was decided upon weeks ago—ski passes have been purchased, the cars have all been packed up and the requisite holiday turkey is being purchased at this very moment by Courfeyrac, Combeferre and Feuilly—and there’s no cancelling the trip now.

Of course, Grantaire isn’t going anywhere unless he finishes his final project and gets it hung in the student gallery by four o’clock on Wednesday. He really should be at the art building at this moment working on it, but Enjolras had wanted to walk home from class together that afternoon and Grantaire isn’t one to turn down quality time with Enjolras. Besides, he’ll have plenty of time (probably) to finish the piece and get it hung up in the next two days. Especially since everyone, Enjolras included, will be leaving early Wednesday morning to drive up to the mountains. Once Enjolras has passed out of the city limits, Grantaire is positive he’ll be able to focus on his project.

Grantaire lets himself drop off the sofa and crawls back across the living room floor to his sketchbook, which is lying open on the floor near the fireplace. It’s a new one—green canvas cover and a handy elastic band to keep it closed—and he likes it well enough. He misses his old black one, though. It’s been months since he misplaced it at the Initiation Party and, while he’s really glad that no one has found it, he mourns the loss of the sketches it contained. There was one in particular of Enjolras (well, they were mostly of Enjolras) that he was sad to lose: Enjolras in the moonlight, head bent low over a textbook, curls falling into his eyes. Grantaire had found the most amazing balance of light and shadows across the angle of his friend’s sharp features.

There’s that word again: friend. He and Enjolras have been enjoying a warm companionship lately
And it’s enough for Grantaire. Has to be enough.

Grantaire glances up at where Jehan and Enjolras are seated together on the chaise portion of the dark brown sofa, Jehan’s delicate hands digging into the taught muscles of Enjolras’ shoulder blades. Enjolras groans and his shoulders relax a fraction of an inch. In any other frat house on Greek Row, a massage that elicited those sounds from another guy would be above and beyond the boundaries of friendship, but that’s just how things roll in the Alpha Beta Chi house.

For half a second, Grantaire wishes he could be the kind of friend to make Enjolras make those noises, but then his sense of self-preservation kicks back in. There’s no way he could handle it if Enjolras was making those sounds under his hands.

“Enjolras, my love, you are extremely tense,” Jehan comments, adjusting his position so he can dig a sharp elbow into Enjolras’ right trapezius. “What have you been doing?”

“He spent the last three days working nonstop on an Ethics paper,” Grantaire helpfully provides. Grantaire knows this because Enjolras had written that paper hunched over his laptop while sitting in a rickety old lawn chair in Grantaire’s makeshift art studio on the sun porch while Grantaire had worked on his own final project. Grantaire had warned him a dozen or so times that typing in that chair would do a number on his back, but Enjolras was undeterred.

Grantaire was glad that Enjolras hadn’t listened to his advice. It was nice to be out on the porch, just the two of them. Feuilly had dug up an old space heater so they wouldn’t freeze. They’d worked several afternoons, long into the night in companionable silence while the cold moonlight had filtered through the dusty old windowpanes. Every so often, Enjolras would ask for his opinion on a point he was trying to make in his paper and Grantaire was more than happy to offer a counterpoint to strengthen Enjolras’ hypothesis. It was nice.

It was more than nice. Moonlight and a single old floor lamp weren’t ideal for painting, but Grantaire wouldn’t trade those hours for anything in the world. The dark acrylic colors of his painting benefited from the unconventional lighting. He wonders if he’ll be able to recreate the mood when he moves the painting off of the sun porch and back to the his studio in the art building tomorrow.

“How can I see it?” Enjolras had asked on more than one occasion. Grantaire had always declined. It wasn’t that the painting was of Enjolras. Well, not enough of Enjolras to be noticeable. But it was definitely inspired by the man and Grantaire didn’t particularly want to share his work just yet.

On the sofa, Enjolras moans again. “Oh my god, Jehan,” he says, his voice tight and rasping. “I don’t know what you just hit but please do it again.”

Jehan meets Grantaire’s gaze over Enjolras’ golden head, his expression quizzical, as if looking for an answer to a question that Grantaire can’t even begin to figure out. He just shrugs back and continues his sketch. A tangle of penciled limbs have materialized on the page in front of him. Drawing Joly, Bossuet and Musichetta is always a challenge: it’s hard to figure out whose hands belong to whom.

“Enjolras,” Jehan begins, a small grin peeking out of one corner of his mouth, “I think I could work this knot out better if you were laying down.” Enjolras simply nods. Jehan is up to something.

Grantaire is shooed away from his comfortable spot on the rug as Jehan lays Enjolras out on the floor in front of the warm fireplace. “You know,” Jehan says thoughtfully, “it would probably be better if you took your shirt off.”
Enjolras acquiesces, sits up and begins unbuttoning his shirt. Grantaire isn’t sure if he wants to high five Jehan or smack him in the back of the head. Either way, Enjolras’ snap-button shirt is coming off and there isn’t anything that Grantaire can do about it (or wants to do about it).

“You know, I have this great massage lotion up in my room. Marius, could you run up and get it for me?” Enjolras is face-down on the carpet again and Jehan perches on top of him, straddling Enjolras with his thighs. Grantaire has no idea how Jehan can do that without completely losing his mind, but he supposes that’s what friendship is in ABX: sitting on your friend’s ass without getting aroused and horribly embarrassing one’s self.

Marius comes thundering back down the spiral staircase a few minutes later and tosses a small brown bottle to Jehan, who catches it deftly and pours a few drops into his hands. He rubs his palms together to warm up the lotion and the smell of lavender fills the room. Jehan places his hands into the muscles between Enjolras’ shoulder blades and Enjolras lets out another moan.

Jehan stops and sits up abruptly.

“Oh my gosh, I totally forgot,” he says in a high, too-breathy voice. “I have a load of laundry in the dryer. I need to go get it right now.” Jehan wipes the remainder of the lotion off on Enjolras’ lower back.

“Make Marius do it,” comes Enjolras’ muffled response. Enjolras must really be enjoying the massage if he’s willing to let Marius be subjected to pledge duties. He’s all but eliminated Marius’ hazing since becoming president.

“I can’t, my darling,” Jehan responds, dropping a light kiss on the back of Enjolras’ curls as he rises to his feet. “My laundry is very complicated.”

Enjolras lets out a sound that is very close to a whine. “Jehan, we were just starting to get that knot out. Please. Everything hurts.”

“Don’t worry, love, “ Jehan grins broadly and tosses the bottle of lotion at Grantaire. “Grantaire will take over.”

Grantaire knew Jehan was up to something. He’s going to kill that conniving little wood-nymph. But Jehan is already out of range, skipping up the stairs to his tower room. Funny, considering that the laundry room is in the basement.

“Uh,” Grantaire begins, looking desperately around the room. “I’m pretty sure Bahorel’s hands are stronger than mine.”

Bahorel nudges Grantaire with his foot. “Nah, I’m pretty sure your hands are perfect for digging into Enjolras. You can probably work him over real good, buddy.” His dark eyes are glittering madly and Grantaire adds Bahorel’s name to his murder list.

Enjolras turns his head to gaze at Grantaire with his disarming blue eyes. There are carpet marks on his cheek. “You don’t have to, R,” Enjolras says softly, his voice still fuzzy with relaxation. He looks wrecked. Yeah, there’s no way Grantaire isn’t going to do this.

“No, it’s cool,” Grantaire finally says, hoping his voice retains some semblance of normalcy, and crosses to short distance to where Enjolras is sprawled out on the carpet. “That’s what friends are for, right?” He steps one foot over Enjolras and eases down until he’s gingerly perched on the top of Enjolras’ thighs, right at the juncture where legs meet butt. Enjolras’ gluts tense for just a moment and Grantaire can feel the press of the muscles against the inside of his own thighs. He
desperately thinks of unsexy things: Niagara Falls and the Grinch Who Stole Christmas and Republican Supreme Court Justices.

Grantaire takes a deep breath, squirts lotion on his hands and places his palms on Enjolras’ back. The world does not end.

“So, Marius,” Joly says too loudly. “Tell us about your grandfather’s cabin.”

Marius lights up. “Well, it’s about a two hour drive into the mountains and right on the ski slope, so…”

The room falls into a comfortable conversation about their weekend destination, everyone staring at Grantaire and Enjolras while trying to act like they aren’t staring at Grantaire and Enjolras.

After a few moments, Enjolras begins to relax under Grantaire’s hands. It becomes strangely meditative: the slide of his hands over Enjolras’ firm muscles, the way his ribcage rises and falls as he breathes into the pressure, the soft exhalations when Grantaire hits a particularly tight spot.

Grantaire’s thumbs dig in under Enjolras’ right shoulder blade and there is a crunch. “Oh god, R,” Enjolras gasps. “Do that again.”

Grantaire definitely does not file that sound away for use at a later time. His thumbs repeat the gesture and Enjolras moans again.

“Guys! We got the best turkey ever!” Courfeyrac explodes through the front door and then skids to a halt, his eyes widening as he takes in the sight of Grantaire straddling a prone Enjolras. “Holy shit! ‘Ferre, you owe me five bucks.”

Combeferre, his arms wrapped about the biggest turkey Grantaire has even seen, hip-checks Courfeyrac out of his way. “It’s a backrub, dork.”

“Dammit.” Courfeyrac is also holding an armful of poultry, but his two paper-wrapped packages are much smaller than the one Combeferre is toting. Feuilly steps into the foyer a moment later, his arms loaded up with an even bigger turkey. Combeferre had told everyone that they were going to a free-range poultry farm just outside of town to pick-up the turkey for Thanksgiving dinner, but Grantaire hadn’t been aware that they were planning on buying an entire flock.

“Jesus, you guys,” Grantaire says, “Did you leave any turkeys for the other people who might want to celebrate Thanksgiving?”

“We’re not celebrating Thanksgiving,” Enjolras mutters from underneath Grantaire, his usual indignation at the callousness of a national holiday that glorifies genocide and land-theft tempered slightly by his massage. “We are having a vacation and a meal in honor of friendship and it just so happens to coincide with a school holiday called ‘Thanksgiving Break.’”

Courfeyrac rolls his eyes, but Enjolras is right. “That can be our mission before next year, E. We can petition the administration to call it ‘Fall Break,’ or ‘Friendsgiving,’ or ‘Pilgrims are Genocidal Assholes Day,’ but back to the point- my grandma gave me her recipe for Thanksgiving Turk—”

Enjolras coughs loudly—“sorry, Friendsgiving Turducken and we need a bunch of poultry for that.”

Marius lifts his head out of Cosette’s lap again. “Her what now?”

“Turducken,” Courfeyrac grins, holding up the two smaller poultry packages in his hands and nods his chin at Combeferre’s armful of turkey. “I guess it’s technically called a ‘Three Bird Roast,’ but
I think Turducken has a better ring to it: it’s a chicken, stuffed inside a duck, stuffed inside a turkey. It’s amazing. I’m making it myself."

From underneath Grantaire, Enjolras lets out a derisive snort. Courfeyrac ignores him and hauls his armful of turkey into the kitchen, Combeferre trailing behind in his wake. Feuilly starts to follow them out of the living room, but Joly stops him with a quick shout.

“Wait a sec, Feuilly,” he calls, wiggling his way out from underneath Bossuet and Musichetta, who are still piled on top of him on the loveseat. “Why do you have a turkey, too?”

Feuilly grins and glances quickly at the kitchen to see if Courfeyrac is still within earshot. “This turkey,” Feuilly informs the room in a stage-whisper, “is a back-up for when Courf’s Franken-turkey goes horribly awry.”

Feuilly is a smart man.

###

E

Everything is done. Enjolras has just handed in his Ethics paper, wished his professor a happy holiday and now he’s free and clear to enjoy Friendsgiving weekend. He vaguely wishes that Grantaire wasn’t driving up to mountains late Wednesday afternoon with Feuilly. Enjolras’ current carpool situation has him chauffeuring Combeferre and Courfeyrac on what promises to be a two-hour drive full of Courfeyrac singing loudly along to the cast recording of Pippin.

Enjolras had sworn that he’d never road trip with Courfeyrac again after an ill-fated Spring Break drive to the Grand Canyon during their junior year of high school, when Courfeyrac had assigned them all roles in a sing-a-long to the Rent CD. By the time they’d reached the South Rim, Enjolras had been demoted from Collins to Joanne and, finally, to Mark’s Mom. If Enjolras never hears “Seasons of Love” again, it will be too soon.

But when it had come down to carpool options for the trip to the cabin, Enjolras had a choice between driving Marius and Cosette, or Combeferre and Courfeyrac. He had definitely chosen the lesser of two evils… but he’s still not looking forward to being a back-up singer in Courfeyrac’s one-man musical.

Riding up with Grantaire seems like it would be a lot more fun. He’d probably be down to make fun of the myriad of roadside homemade jerky stands and rustic souvenir outposts that litter the mountain highway between their college town and the ski resort. Grantaire probably has a lot of artistic opinions about hand-carved wooden bear statues and ornamental wreaths fashioned out of deer antlers. Unfortunately, Grantaire has to work on his art project until late Wednesday afternoon and Courfeyrac has demanded that Enjolras get to the cabin as early as possible to help get everything set up.

At least Grantaire will get there eventually.

Enjolras’ shoulders are still relaxed from Grantaire’s massage the previous night. Jehan was good at backrubs, but Grantaire was amazing. Enjolras had lost track of time while Grantaire was digging his thumbs into his sore muscles- it might have been ten minutes or it might have been hours. He’d settled into a timeless fugue state over the duration of the massage. At one point, Grantaire had laid himself flush across Enjolras’ back, driving his entire body weight into the heel of the hand that was attacking a knot just below Enjolras’ shoulder blade.
Enjolras could feel the press of every single cotton fiber of Grantaire’s t-shirt pressed along his back. Thank god he’d been lying down. The move had definitely had an effect on him that might have been noticeable if he’d been sitting up.

The campus is deserted as Enjolras strolls through fountain plaza outside the student center. The fountain has been turned off for the winter and a pile of dead leaves has accumulated in the corner. His footsteps echo sharply off the sandstone of the buildings.

Enjolras’ phone rings in his front pocket, the blaring shattering through the peaceful silence of the abandoned campus. “Gotta find my corner of the sky!!!” Enjolras’ phone screams at him. Courfeyrac’s custom ringtone. Enjolras had tried to disable it on several occasions, but Courfeyrac always managed to change it back. It was a losing battle and Enjolras had given up. He really should remember to put his phone on silent.

He lets the call go to voicemail. No doubt Courfeyrac is calling with yet another brilliant idea for their weekend plans. Whatever it is—snowball battle, pumpkin pie-eating contest, matching footie pajamas—can wait until he gets back to the house. Chances are pretty good that Courfeyrac will have forgotten about it by then. He’s been very excitable and distracted all week.

The door of the student center slams open and a girl in a blue coat emerges, clutching a steaming to-go cup of coffee and speaking sharply into her cell phone. “I know, Mom. I’ll get to the airport in plenty of time,” she whines into the phone. “Yes, I’ll leave plenty of time to get through security… I know Thanksgiving is the busiest travel time of the year—”

Enjolras isn’t particularly interested in her conversation, but her fresh cup of coffee has his full attention. He’d slept hard the previous night after Grantaire’s massage and has been sleepwalking through the day. A cup of coffee might wake his ass up and give him enough energy to finish packing for the weekend when he gets back to the house. God, Courfeyrac wants to leave so early tomorrow morning.

If he did stop into the campus coffee shop, Enjolras could easily pick up an extra cup of coffee. Enjolras knows that Grantaire is in his studio in the art building, working on his project. Enjolras also knows that Grantaire has put a moratorium on any potential interruptions—phone calls, texts and, although he didn’t state this explicitly, visits.

Yeah, Grantaire is trying to focus on his work, but if Enjolras is just popping in briefly with coffee, well, that can hardly be counted as an interruption. It’s a favor, a friend doing something nice for another friend. That’s it. Enjolras has never visited Grantaire in the art building, but he knows where it is now and he can probably figure out where the student studios are.

Enjolras pushes through the door of the campus coffee shop, quickly thumbing a text message to Grantaire.

To Grantaire: I’m @ coffee shop. The usual?

R

Grantaire’s phone gives off the slightest vibration at the incoming text, but he doesn’t notice. He’s busy trying to squeeze the last bit of Payne’s Gray acrylic paint out of the tube. Besides, his phone is shoved into his hoodie pocket and his hoodie is tossed in the corner of his small, windowless studio.

Grantaire isn’t entirely sure what he thinks about his new iPhone. It was a gift from Courfeyrac, who had presented it to him a few weeks ago, bouncing like an excited puppy. “You’re the
Philanthropy Chair of this frat, dude,” Courfeyrac had explained when Grantaire had protested the expensive gift. “You need to be able to get your email, Google shit on the go and keep up-to-date on the house Facebook group. Besides, I really want to be able to text you gifs of baby kitties doing adorable things.”

Courfeyrac had insisted that the frat would pay for the phone, so Grantaire couldn’t use the expense of its monthly plan as an excuse. So he’d said goodbye to his old, faithful flip-phone and joined the smartphone revolution. At face value, it was pretty great. Grantaire enjoyed being able to text photos and he finally got an Instagram account. Also, he now knows what the hell an emoji is. His iPhone definitely had its perks.

But.

Courfeyrac had taken the liberty of loading everyone’s contact numbers into the phone and installing customized ringtones for all the guys in the frat. So Grantaire couldn’t get a phone call from Courfeyrac without “Corner of the Sky” blaring out at him. The rest of the ringtones ranged from incredibly apt—Combeferre’s ringtone was “She Blinded Me With Science” and Bahorel’s was the Beastie Boys’“(You Gotta) Fight for Your Right (To Party)— to baffling—Jehan’s was a bizarre dubstep remix of various bird calls—to downright embarrassing. Grantaire had almost had a heart attack the first time Enjolras had called his new phone and Whitney Houston’s “I Will Always Love You” had blared out of the speakers.

(“Courf, what the actual fuck?!” Grantaire had yelped, desperately trying to figure out how to silence the still-new device.

Courfeyrac had just looked at him with huge, innocent eyes. “What, R? I heard you guys talking about that movie, The Bodyguard, one time.” He grinned and cocked one eyebrow. “Why, is there some other reason you’re freaking out?”

” Dammit, Courfeyrac.

Luckily, if Enjolras was calling Grantaire’s phone, it meant that he wasn’t around to hear the ringtone. Thank god for small miracles. Grantaire keeps meaning to change it, but he can’t be bothered to figure out his new technology. He’s got more pressing issues. His art project, for example.

Nothing like a little bit of procrastination and panic to fuel creativity. Grantaire has until four o’clock on Wednesday (That’s tomorrow, dumbass! What were you thinking? His inner voice screams at him) to have his final project finished and installed in the student gallery. If you ask him, that’s a bit unfair. Finals don’t even start until early December and it’s only just now Thanksgiving break. But the senior’s fall semester projects have to be exhibited for a few weeks so that the freshman art majors can write papers about them for their final project.

Grantaire can’t wait to read what the freshman make of his piece. To a casual observer, his final project appears to be a landscape of a mountain range at dawn; gold, red and orange tones seeping over a shadowy jumble of rocky terrain. The shapes in the painting are familiar: it’s a pretty decent rendering of the foothills just outside of town. The Rocky Mountains are a familiar site to just about everyone at their school.

But if a freshman looks really closely, they might realize that the mountains are built of abstract human shapes. Along the bottom of the painting, a cluster of lines and angles could just be a hill… or it could be Bossuet, Musichetta and Joly tangled up in one another. As the eye moves further up, a particular outcropping is exactly the same shape that Courfeyrac and Combeferre make when they sit with their heads tilted together. The highest peak, tipped with gold and red from a rising
sun, looks strangely similar to a certain sharp profile that is very near and dear to Grantaire’s heart.

Everyone who has looked at it so far has seen only mountains. Grantaire wonders if anyone will be sharp-eyed enough to spot his friends. He’s both afraid and hopeful that they will.

Of course, no one see the painting at all if he doesn’t get it done by four o’clock tomorrow.

Grantaire sets the brush down with a sigh. His hand is starting to cramp. He needs a break.

He needs a cigarette.

He needs a drink.

He settles for some fresh air.

The front steps of the art building are quiet. Procrastination is a prevalent trait among the art student population and most of them are inside, feverishly working on their own projects.

The fall sun is already low on the horizon, casting long shadows across the flagstones. A lone student in a blue coat shuffles down the path, a cup of coffee in one mittened hand and her phone in the other—“I know, mom, I’ll be there by dinner, I promise”—she doesn’t glance at Grantaire as she walks past.

The slate blue sky is cloudless, but a chill bites at the edge of the air. Everyone claims it is supposed to start snowing and that they’ll have fresh powder all weekend up at Marius’ house in the mountains. Bossuet and Joly had texted Grantaire earlier to ask if he wanted them to buy him a sled for the trip. Grantaire most certainly did.

They were all heading up early the next morning, but Grantaire had procrastinated on his project admirably and wouldn’t be able to join them until Wednesday evening. Feuilly, bless his heart, had offered to stick around and wait for Grantaire so they could ride up in his four-wheel drive Jeep. Thank god. Grantaire could have driven up in his ancient pick-up truck, but that seemed like a pretty good way to die.

Feuilly would be a good driver, plus his car was four-wheel drive.

Grantaire pats his jeans pockets in search of his pack of cigarettes. He’d been good about cutting back this semester—no one in the Alpha Beta Chi house was a regular smoker and he found it fairly easy to abstain when everyone else was, too—but the pressure of his final project renewed his need to break the stress with smoke breaks. But his pockets are empty. Balls. He’d left his cigarettes in his hoodie back in the studio.

“Big plans for Thanksgiving?” a voice behind him asks. Grantaire glances around. A handsome, dark-haired student slouches against the front door of the art building. Felix Tholomyès, fifth-year senior and notorious player. Grantaire had it bad for Felix in the fall of his freshman year, but so had every other first year art student. They’d hooked up one night after a debauched art department party but, Grantaire had been dismayed to learn, so had every other first year art student.

After their single, fumbling tryst, Felix had pointedly ignored all of Grantaire’s calls and texts. It had taken Grantaire a couple months of moping, listening to Radiohead and licking his wounds to get over the ersatz love affair. For the next three years, Grantaire had watched Felix climb in and out of the bed of practically everyone in the art department. The boy was charming and charismatic and utterly irresistible. Felix actually reminded Grantaire of Courfeyrac… if Courfeyrac had chosen to use his powers for evil and was a total asshole.
Years ago, Grantaire would’ve walked over hot coals for the chance to be noticed by Felix. Now, during the fall of Grantaire’s senior year and right before a major project deadline, he is simply a nuisance; an attractive nuisance, but a nuisance nonetheless.

Grantaire considers ignoring him, but it would be a pretty tricky maneuver to pull off, considering they were the only people in the vicinity. Instead, he shrugs nonchalantly and answers. “Yeah, me and some of the guys are going up the mountains.”

“Oh, you and your frat boys?” Felix smirks. “I heard you went Greek, R. Kinda hard to believe.”

“Shut up, Felix,” Grantaire snaps. It comes as no surprise to find out that, three years later, Felix is still a giant bag of dicks. Grantaire starts to head back inside the building but Felix stops him with a hand on his chest.

“Calm down, I was kidding.” Felix says. He pulls a small, silver flask out of the back pocket of his too-tight black jeans. After taking a long pull, he offers it to Grantaire. “Here, take some of the edge off, buddy.”

“I’m not your buddy, Felix,” Grantaire grumbles, but takes the flask anyway. Tequila. Ow.

“Are you still mad at me about that party, like, four years ago?”

“Three years ago, and no. I’m not mad.”

“You sound mad,” Felix says, taking the flask back and swallowing another mouthful. “I’m sorry about that, by the way.” Felix settles himself on the thick cement railing bordering the landing and pats the spot next to him in invitation. Against his better judgment, Grantaire sits.

“That’s one of my biggest regrets, you know,” Felix continues, taking another drink from the flask and passing it back over to Grantaire.

“What, being a giant dick?” Grantaire asks.

“No,” Felix replies, sounding put out. “Not giving you a chance back then. I should’ve.”

It takes Grantaire a moment to realize that Felix has moved closer to him on their cement perch. The warmth of his slender thigh presses flush against Grantaire’s own. “I was a freshman. I did dumb things.”

“So did I, R,” Felix says, reaching one hand up to brush a wayward curl out of Grantaire’s eyes. “I was stupid not to call you. I was stupid not to see how much potential you had.”

Oh, for fuck’s sake. Every word out of Felix’s mouth is utter and complete horse shit: it’s blatantly clear that he’s looking for a pre-vacation hookup and Grantaire has the dubious honor of being the only person around. Grantaire really does not need this right now. Three years ago, his heart would’ve burst if Felix had casually stroked his hair but now, it feels empty and a little bit gross. “Look, Felix—”

“You’re really something now, R, you know that? I was a selfish asshole that year and I didn’t realize how great you were. But I see how great you are now.” Felix’s eyes are gazing into Grantaire’s. His eyes are a dark brown and his hands, rough from his work sculpting steel, are nothing like the smooth caress of Enjolras’ elegant fingers. But he’s staring at Grantaire like he wants to devour him whole, no strings attached and Grantaire takes a moment to enjoy the sensation. It’s a welcome change from the complicated tango that he and Enjolras have been dancing all semester long.
Felix is still talking. “If you want to take a break from your project, we could both probably use a little distraction.” His face is close. “If you want,” Felix whispers, and then his mouth is pressed against Grantaire’s. It’s warm and soft. A little dry. Grantaire stays still, feeling Felix’s tongue darting into his mouth while his hand slides up Grantaire’s neck to grasp his dark curls.

Well. The kiss isn’t terrible.

Grantaire could do this. He could relax for a little bit, let this pretty boy pull him into an abandoned studio and have his way with him. Release some of the stress and tension that’s been building up all semester. Grantaire relaxes into the kiss for the briefest of moments, lets his hands slide down Felix’s thin arms. And then Grantaire snaps to his senses. Felix isn’t Enjolras. Grantaire loves Enjolras. And Grantaire would rather have no one than have someone who wasn’t his Enjolras.

Both of Grantaire’s hands flex against Felix’s shoulders, getting ready to push him away, but it isn’t necessary. The kiss is interrupted by something else.

“Gotta find my corner of the sky!!” A ringtone blares from somewhere nearby. Courfeyrac’s ringtone.

Thank god for Courfeyrac, Grantaire thinks, pulling back. Felix makes a frustrated sound and follows with his mouth, but Grantaire keeps him away with one arm while he searches his pockets for his phone. Nothing. Then he remembers- his phone is in his hoodie, and his hoodie is in the studio.

But if his phone is in his hoodie and his hoodie is in the studio, then where the hell is that ringtone coming from?

There is another sound now, mixed in with the tinny sound of the Pippin song. Two small, hollow plops followed a soft splash of liquid against the pavement.

Grantaire finds the source of the sound and his stomach drops. Enjolras is standing at the base of the stairs to the art building, his blue eyes impossibly wide and mouth gaping. Two empty cardboard to-go coffee cups float in the small pool of brown, steaming liquid collecting around the soles of his black combat boots.

Enjolras barely registers the insistent warbling of Courfeyrac’s ringtone over the sound of blood pounding in his ears. His only clue that he’d dropped his to-go coffee was the warm seep of hot liquid against his jeans, where the splash back had begun to seep through the dark denim. He may have forgotten how to breathe. He’s definitely forgotten how to blink: all he can do in this moment is stare owlishly up the stairs at Grantaire and that very pretty boy who was kissing Grantaire.

A boy. A boy had kissed Grantaire. And Grantaire had kissed him back.

Enjolras is positive that this is some sort of horrible, bitter irony. He finally got what he wanted: an affirmative answer to his never-ending question about Grantaire’s sexuality. But he made this wonderful discovery while watching the boy he liked passionately making out with someone else.

His insides twist. He wants to cry. He wants to throw up. All he can do is continue staring.

Grantaire and the boy separate and Grantaire looks right at Enjolras, his bright green eyes wide. How did Grantaire know he was there?

Oh, right. The ringtone. Courfeyrac’s stupid fucking ringtone. Enjolras fumbles in his pockets and
silences the call.

The little plaza is silent. Grantaire stares at Enjolras. Enjolras stares at Grantaire. And the pretty, dark-haired boy on the steps crosses his arms and smirks.

Finally, Grantaire breaks out of the tableau and steps toward Enjolras. “E--” Grantaire begins, but Enjolras steps sharply back. His boots splash in the puddle of cooling coffee.

“E, I can explain,” Grantaire manages to say. He reaches the bottom stone step and hovers there nervously. They are over an arm’s length away, a cold and impersonal void between them. Enjolras doesn’t make a move to close the distance.

“No, there’s no need to explain,” Enjolras says, his voice tight. “I just—I mean, I didn’t know…” The words that he needs to say are simply not coming. “You’re gay?!” he finally blurts.

Grantaire’s shoulders stiffen. He nods once, sharply. “Yeah, E. I’m gay. You got me.”

“Oh god, Enjolras thinks, he sounds so angry. Why does he sound so angry?"

“No, sorry. It’s none of my business.” Enjolras forces the words to come out steadily but the realizations of the past minute are crashing down on him. Grantaire was kissing a boy. Grantaire likes boys. Grantaire is mad at him.

It really is none of Enjolras’ business. He can’t judge people for who they choose to kiss or not kiss. (But why did Grantaire want to kiss this skinny mess of a boy? Why was Grantaire kissing him and not Enjolras?) Enjolras realizes that he’s been standing stock still, staring at Grantaire and saying nothing while these revelations bang around inside his head.

Grantaire, clearly tired of waiting for Enjolras to speak, starts to head back up the steps. “You’re right, E. It’s none of your business. Go home.”

Enjolras is in motion now, taking the steps two at a time to catch up to Grantaire. “Wait, R,” he says, reaching up and grabbing Grantaire’s arm. Enjolras is one step below Grantaire on the stairs, making their height almost even. Enjolras’ hand wraps tightly around Grantaire’s upper arm. Enjolras does not let go.

The pretty, dark-haired boy lets out a sharp laugh and Grantaire’s head whips around toward him, curls shaking. “Oh my god, shut up, Felix.” But this Felix person does not shut up. Instead, he simply continues laughing as he slinks inside the building, letting the door slam behind him.

Enjolras and Grantaire are alone.

“Do you have something you want to say to me, Enjolras?” Grantaire glares at him. The steps have leveled out their height difference and Grantaire is looking down at Enjolras for once. It is disconcerting.

Enjolras clenches his jaw before daring to speak. If he puts enough tension into his jaw, it might be enough to keep him from breaking down entirely before he gets a straight answer from Grantaire.
Finally, after what feels like an eternity, he is composed enough to speak. “Why didn’t you tell me?” he manages, the words coming out tight and tense.

Grantaire’s eyebrows shoot up as he fixes Enjolras with an incredulous gaze. “Why didn’t I tell you, E?”

“You should’ve told me—“

“Would it have mattered?” Grantaire voice goes flat. “Would we still have been friends?”

“Yes, it would have mattered!” Enjolras bites out.

“And?”

“And what?”

“Would we still have been friends?” Grantaire’s green eyes are narrowed. His fists are clenched tightly at his sides.

Enjolras has no choice but to be honest. “I don’t know,” he says simply. It’s true. If he had known that Grantaire was into dudes, Enjolras isn’t sure that he could’ve kept their relationship platonic. He opens his mouth to explain that part, but Grantaire cuts him off.

“Okay,” Grantaire snaps, yanking his arm out of Enjolras’ grip and retreating up the stairs toward the art building. “Okay, E. I see how it is.”

No. This isn’t how it is supposed to go.

“Grantaire wait—“

“Have a great night, E. I’ll see you at Marius’ cabin tomorrow—“

“R!” Enjolras tries to catch the door before Grantaire can close it.

“And don’t worry: I’ll do my best not to ruin your Friendsgiving with my gayness.”

The door to the art building slams in Enjolras’ face. “Grantaire!” he shouts, pulling on the door. It’s locked. A keycard access pad blinks merrily on the stone wall, mocking him. Enjolras refuses to be bested by something as simple as a locked door. Refuses. He begins pounding on the small glass window set into the heavy wood of the door. “Grantaire!”

A face appears in the small window, but it isn’t the one Enjolras was hoping for. Felix peers at Enjolras curiously. “Hey!” Enjolras yells through the glass. “Can you get Grantaire?” Felix shrugs, flashes Enjolras a cocky grin and then flips him off.

What an asshole. Grantaire’s maybe-boyfriend is a dick. Enjolras turns on his heel and storms off down the stairs, madder than ever. That guy doesn’t deserve to be kissing Grantaire.

The wind is picking up and a flurry of fall leaves swirl around Enjolras’ black combat boots. Enjolras pulls his coat tightly around him, lamenting his lost cups of coffee. He digs into his pocket, pulls out his phone and dials Grantaire’s number. Nothing. His hands are shaking as he dials a second time. The call goes straight to voicemail again.

###

Enjolras lasts two whole hours back at the house before he interrupts everyone’s excited packing.
“Has anyone heard from Grantaire?” Enjolras asks cautiously, stepping into the kitchen. Courfeyrac is standing on a countertop, pulling armloads of canned food out of a cupboard and handing them down to Combeferre and Feuilly. Joly and Bossuet are loading various cans and cartons into large cardboard boxes piled on the table while Marius checks the items off a list.

Courfeyrac frowns down at Enjolras from his perch. “He texted a while ago. Said his phone was dying but not to wait up. Sounds like he’s going to pull an all nighter in the studio?”

Bahorel and Jehan enter from the back door and each grab a box from the stack on the table. “Is this it, Courf?” Bahorel asks. “We’re almost out of room in all the cars.”

“Just have a few more things,” Courfeyrac replies, reaching farther back into the cupboard and pulling out a can of cranberry sauce, a bag of marshmallows and a packet of dried Ramen noodles. “Gross,” he wrinkles his nose up and drops the Ramen back on the countertop. “This should do it,” he says, tossing the last two items into Bahorel’s box.

Bahorel shakes his head, hefts the cardboard box and heads for the back door. “It’s like we’re preparing for the zombie apocalypse or something.”

He’s right. The cupboards are practically empty. Courfeyrac has cleared out most of the food from the kitchen.

“Are you leaving anything here, Courf?” Enjolras asks, jumping up slightly to sit on the countertop.

Courfeyrac slides down to join him. “I left a packet of Ramen.”

Enjolras grimaces.

“We’ll grab coffee and breakfast on the road tomorrow, E,” Courfeyrac slings an arm around Enjolras’ shoulders. “Stop worrying. We’re on vacation. This is going to be the best Friendsgiving ever.”

Miraculously enough, Enjolras does stop worrying. He stops worrying about the drive, about the food and, most importantly, about Grantaire. Let him stay out all night. Enjolras doesn’t care. If they need to patch things up, well, they’ll have an entire weekend in the mountains to do it.

Outside, in the dark autumn evening, a light snow begins to fall.

###

R

The knee-high snowdrifts covering campus the following afternoon come as a surprise to Grantaire. It had been sunny when he’d left the house the previous day and, as he had not planned on spitefully spending the night in the art building, he hadn’t packed a change of clothing.

Nor had he looked outside that afternoon as he’d scrambled to hang his jury review pieces in the student gallery, just under the wire for the four o’clock submission deadline. Sure, a couple of people had walked into the building with a dusting of snow on their hair and shoulders. And when Felix had come over to apologize for his behavior the previous afternoon, his hands were icy and a light sheen of melted snow had been on his nose and cheekbones.

Grantaire had been too busy dodging Felix’s apology to question him about the weather situation. And it was a seriously half-assed apology. “Sorry I pissed off your frat boy boyfriend, R,” Felix
had said, as Grantaire adjusted the last light, focusing it on the center of his painting.

With great reluctance, Grantaire had to inform Felix that Enjolras was not actually his boyfriend. “He’s just… some guy I know,” Grantaire had said, the words feeling coarse and heavy in his mouth. Felix’s eyes lit up with that new information and his mediocre apology turned into a full-on second attempt at seduction.

“I see,” Felix gazed up at Grantaire through thick, dark lashes. “Well, then, since you’re done with your project, maybe you and I could go somewhere and give him something to really be mad about.”

Grantaire was tempted to take him up on the offer, let Felix pull him into one of the vacant studio spaces and devour him. Get a few love bites on his neck to flaunt in front of Enjolras, that judgmental, homophobic bastard. If Enjolras is so determined to be offended, then Grantaire could give him something to be mad about.

As fun as the idea of spiting Enjolras is, however, the actual reality of it-- letting someone else touch him, letting hands that aren’t Enjolras roam his body, feeling the press of a strange pair of lips against his—turned Grantaire’s stomach. He’s so fucked: in love with a boy who wants nothing to do with him; who will never want anything to do with him; yet repulsed by the idea of being with anyone else. Grantaire might as well just give up and become a monk.

With a sigh, Grantaire had accepted Felix’s apology, declined his proposition, and set off into the snowy afternoon.

And now Grantaire has to walk through a surprise blizzard to get home and drive through a snowstorm to the mountains to spend the Thanksgiving holidays with that very boy. Stupid fucking Enjolras.

For just a brief moment, Grantaire toys with the idea of bailing on the trip. Almost everyone is already in the mountains and Feuilly can handle the drive up by himself. Enjolras would be relieved. And Grantaire would have the long holiday weekend alone in the house to sulk and drink red wine by himself.

No. Everyone would be disappointed (well, almost everyone) and Grantaire promised. Joly had bought him a sweater and Marius had rented him a snowboard for the weekend. Grantaire couldn’t let them down. Plus, Feuilly had stuck around waiting for him all day so he could give Grantaire a ride. It would be a dick move to cancel and make Feuilly drive up by himself during a snowstorm.

Anyway, from what Grantaire had gleaned from Marius’ excited rambling, the cabin was enormous. Grantaire can probably manage to stay out of Enjolras’ way in a house that big.

He glances down at his hoodie pocket, where his new iphone is resting, all dead and useless. Too bad. It would’ve been nice to text Feuilly an update that he was on his way.

With a sigh, Grantaire pulls his green hoodie tighter around him, tugs the hood up over his black curls and starts his arctic trek back home.

By the time he reaches the Alpha Beta Chi house’s freshly shoveled front walkway, Grantaire’s grey Converse are soaked through and his jeans have turned black with water up to his knees. He steps into the foyer and shakes the snow off of his head and shoulders. It lands on the mat like fat little snowballs. Grantaire hadn’t realized that the snowstorm was going to be this bad. They should really get going before it gets worse.
“Feuilly!” he calls, stomping his feet, leaving puddles and shedding salt. “Feuilly, I’m back! I’ll be ready to hit the road in five! Just let me go pack real quick…”

No answer. Grantaire pulls off his soaked sneakers and kicks them on the rag rug next to the door where the normal pile of wet footwear lives, but there are no shoes or snow boots there now, save one pair: shiny black combat boots, the toecaps still glistening with a few clinging drops of melted snow.

*That’s weird.* Grantaire thinks, curling and uncurling his sock-covered feet in an attempt to get some feeling back into his ice-cold toes. The boots are still wet, like they had been out in the snow recently; like their owner had been the person who shoveled the front walk. But the only person who would have done that, the only person left in the house, was Feuilly. And Feuilly doesn’t own any combat boots.

The implications of the boots hits Grantaire at the exact time as their owner’s voice.

“Feuilly left,” Enjolras stands at the top of the staircase, bundled in a sweater, goose-down jacket, scarf and knit cap. His feet are wrapped in thick woolen socks. He looks like that kid from *A Christmas Story* who can’t put his arms down.

*You’ve got to be fucking kidding me,* Grantaire thinks, and then realizes that, after the way Enjolras treated him the previous day, he’s fully justified in saying that out loud. “You’ve got to be fucking kidding me,” he says, directly to Enjolras’ face. Enjolras blanches.

“Yesterday was… unfortunate,” Enjolras says, not moving from the top of the stairs. “I didn’t articulate my thoughts well and… I didn’t manage to say what I meant—”

“I think you made yourself perfectly clear, E,” Grantaire climbs the stairs, pushing past Enjolras and heading to his own room.

“I was actually hoping that we could talk on the way up to the cabin,” Enjolras says, trailing after Grantaire.

“Or—how about this for a crazy idea?-- we could *not* talk? How about that?” Grantaire wheels around to face Enjolras. “How about you drive, I’ll sit there and we’ll just not fucking talk? Because that’s about all I can deal with today, okay? Is that *acceptable* to you, Enjolras?”

“Grantaire…” Enjolras face falls.

“I said *‘Is that acceptable?’*” Grantaire snaps.

“Yes. That’s fine.”

“Good. I’ll meet you at the car in five and we’ll have a nice, *quiet* drive up to the mountains,” Grantaire slams his bedroom door and gets to packing.

Enjolras and Grantaire manage to spend the entire car ride in silence.

This is not as miraculous as it sounds because the car ride lasts all of forty-five seconds, from the garage to the bottom of the driveway, where Enjolras’ little hybrid is firmly stuck in a bank of freshly plowed snow that has been pushed up against the sidewalk. Silently, Enjolras and Grantaire get out of the car and walk around to the back of the car to inspect the damage: the snow on the ground reaches well passed their knees and the pile from the plow is up to the car’s bumper.

They’re going nowhere.
“Okay,” Enjolras mutters from beside Grantaire, his breath coming in foggy bursts. “So we’ll just go inside, grab a snow shovel and—“

Grantaire bursts out laughing.

“What, R? We can dig ourselves out of this and be on the road within about half an hour…”

“Oh my god, Enjolras,” Grantaire cannot stop cackling. “Look at the roads. Look at the car—“

There was already a thick covering of fresh white flakes on the newly scraped windshield of Enjolras’ hybrid—“It’s snowing way too hard, dude. There’s no fucking way we’re driving to the mountains tonight.”

“My car has four-wheel drive, R,” Enjolras argues, violently shaking the snow off of his knit cap. “If we can just get out of the driveway, I’m sure that we’ll be fine once we get to the highway.”

The loud crack of wood interrupts him. One of the trees on the side yard of the house, branches heavy with fresh, wet snow begins to sag under the weight of the storm. The tree sits dangerously close to a power line.

“Uh, that’s not good,” Grantaire manages, before another brittle crack rips through the cold, muffled air. A top branch, thick and heavy, snaps off of the tree and plummets to the snowy ground, taking several smaller branches and the power line with it.

Every light on the block goes dark.


E

They say you learn something new every day. On this particular, snowy day, Enjolras has learned that the Alpha Beta Chi house has an electric heater. On any other day, he would be pleased that they aren’t using a natural gas heater, but a little disappointed that the frat hadn’t explored alternative energy, like solar power, to heat their house. Today, however, he can’t really be bothered to be concerned about natural resources or energy efficiency, because there is a full-on blizzard outside and their house has no fucking heat.

And no food, he realizes as he stares into the empty cupboards. Courfeyrac and company had emptied the kitchen the day before and taken almost everything to the cabin for the weekend’s festivities.

“We have frozen pizzas,” Grantaire offers, peering into the silent freezer.

“And no stove to cook them in,” Enjolras reminds him.

“Balls.”

Grantaire spies a small yellow packet resting, abandoned, on the countertop. “Well, we could always eat dry Ramen.”

Enjolras shivers, but not only at the thought of having uncooked Ramen noodles for dinner. The sun is setting fast and the kitchen is cast in cold blue shadows. The Alpha Beta Chi house is old and drafty; probably not great at retaining heat. They’re going to be cold soon.

As if he is reading Enjolras’ mind, Grantaire says, “We should get a fire going. I’ll grab some wood from the back yard”
“No,” Enjolras replies. “I can go out and get it.”

“You’re soaked, E—“

“So are you—“

They bicker in this manner for a moment, then decide to Roshambeau for the honor. Enjolras throws rock. Grantaire paper.

“I win,” Grantaire crows, pulling his hood over his black curls.

“Best two out of three,” Enjolras argues.

“No way, E, I won fair and square,” Grantaire is almost out the back door. “I’ll get the wood, you go scrounge through people’s rooms and see if anyone has extra food squirreled away.”

Fine, Enjolras can do that. “Just make sure you get wood from the middle of the pile—“

“I will.”

“—so it isn’t wet.”

Grantaire laughs. It’s the first time he’s cracked a smile since yesterday afternoon. “As you wish, Apollo.”

“R?” Enjolras says. Grantaire peers at him suspiciously from under his green hood. “Um, when you bring the wood in, bring it up to the fireplace in my room, okay?”

“Why?”

“It would be better to have a fire in an enclosed space,” Enjolras explains, his face reddening. He’d only been thinking of heat retention, not considering the consequences of inviting a still grumpy Grantaire to spend the night in his room. “The living room is too big, too drafty. We’ll stay warmer in my room.”

Grantaire nods without argument, but Enjolras can hear him muttering as he steps out of the back door into the snowy night.

Grantaire has a small stack of firewood neatly arranged in the fireplace of the President’s Room when he hears Enjolras’ sock-covered feet padding up the little staircase. He appears in the door a moment later, clutching a rectangular Tupperware container full of brown cakes.

“I couldn’t find much in the way of actual food,” Enjolras admits, “but I did manage to find some brownies up in Jehan’s mini-fridge.” He wipes some crumbs off the corner of his mouth with the back of his hand. Grantaire can smell the chocolate from across the room. Thank god. Anything will be better than dry Ramen noodles.

“That’s better than nothing,” Grantaire says and then properly hears Enjolras’ statement. “Wait, where did you find those?”

“Jehan’s room,” Enjolras answers, cramming another large brownie into his mouth. “Thank god, I was starving. And these are amazing.”

Jehan’s room. Uh-oh. “Um, Enjolras?” Grantaire asks, turning away from his fire-building project.
“How many of those have you eaten?”

Enjolras takes a moment, chewing before he’s able to answer properly. “Three,” he says, through a mouthful of chocolate. “But don’t worry, there are still plenty left for you.”

Despite the tenseness of their afternoon, Grantaire lets out a bark of laughter. “Three?! He manages to get out between snorts. “You’ve eaten three brownies that you found in Jehan’s room?”

“Yeah, but don’t worry,” Enjolras glares at him, finally swallowing down the huge mouthful of chocolatey goodness. “There are still a ton left for you.”

“Oh my god, Enjolras, you ate three of Jehan’s brownies?”

“Yes, R, that’s what I said,” Enjolras flops down on the bed and sets the container full of brownies on the red and grey striped comforter. “Calm down, I’m not gonna, like, die of chocolate poisoning. I’m not a dog.”

Grantaire completely abandons his fire and crosses the room to Enjolras, grabs a brownie and sniffs dramatically. Underneath the rich chocolate smell is a deep, earthy scent and Grantaire’s suspicions are confirmed. “Oh, shit, Enjolras.” Grantaire isn’t laughing anymore.

“What?” Enjolras asks, his voice finally betraying a small bit of concern. “Are they bad or something?”

“Uh, no. I wouldn’t say they’re bad. In fact, you could probably say these are good. Really, really good.”

Enjolras’ eyes narrow. “Grantaire, what the hell are you talking about? Use your words, please.”

“Enjolras, you just ate three pot brownies.”

“I did what now?”

“These are pot brownies and, according to Joly, Jehan’s pot brownies are crazy strong,” Grantaire says.

“Oh, shit.” Enjolras looks a little green.

“You’re gonna be okay, dude, I promise,” Grantaire assures him. “It’ll be like being high normally, just a lot more intense.”

That statement doesn’t help matters. “I’ve never been high before, Grantaire,” Enjolras panics. “I’ve never smoked pot or had an edible or anything. Oh my god—“

After Grantaire assures him that you can’t overdose on pot and pulls up a few articles about the effects of marijuana consumption on Enjolras’ phone, Enjolras calms down enough to sprawl out on the bed. He forces himself to breathe as Grantaire works on the fire, eventually pulling himself together enough to take criticize Grantaire’s method of fire-starting.

“You have to put the wood in a tee-pee shape and put the newspaper underneath it,” Enjolras instructs, rearranging the wood and striking a match. The fire licks up the newspaper and Enjolras blows lightly on it to encourage the flame to spread to the logs.

“Nicely done for a city boy, E,” Grantaire tells him.
“I was an Eagle Scout,” Enjolras says, sending another light breath onto the fire. “My troop didn’t do much in the way of camping in the actual woods, but they at least made sure we knew how to start a fire.”

“Will wonders never cease?” Grantaire grins at him. “Of course you were an Eagle Scout. That would explain the whole… never mind.”

“What? What’s that supposed to mean?” Enjolras asks. The whole what? What was Grantaire getting at?

But Grantaire just shakes his head. “Seriously, never mind. I was just talking out of my ass, as per usual.”

“Seriously, what does it explain?” Enjolras is growing pouty.

“I’ll tell you later,” Grantaire says. “After the blizzard. We’re trapped in this house together for the foreseeable future and I really, really don’t feel like getting into another fight with you, Enjolras. Not tonight.”

Enjolras can accept that. But Grantaire will explain that comment at some point in the near future.

Twenty minutes later, they’re stretched out comfortably on the rug in front of the fireplace. Warm, flickering firelight fills the room, creating a haven against the thick snowflakes collecting in not-so-small drifts on the windowsills. As far as getting snowed in goes, this could definitely be worse.

“I don’t feel anything,” Enjolras says to the ceiling. “Are you sure these are pot brownies?”

“I’m positive, E,” Grantaire replies, his chin nestled on his hands. He’s spread out on his stomach, his feet stretched out toward the warmth of the fire. “Maybe you’ll get lucky and it will turn out that you have an immunity to marijuana.”

The snow continues to pelt down out side, the white flakes starting to look like a galaxy of drifting stars against the blackness of the night sky. “You know, if you squint your eyes,” Grantaire says, doing just that, “the snowflakes start to look kind of like stars. Like we’re in the Millenium Falcon going into hyperspace or some shit.”

“Like we’re what?” Enjolras voice sounds thick and far away.

“The Millenium Falcon. Haven’t you ever seen Star Wars, Apollo?” Grantaire is thoroughly entertained by the way Enjolras’ brow scrunches up at the indignity of the question.

“Yes, I’ve seen Star Wars,” he answers. “I’ve just never noticed that snowflakes do that.”

“Well, you just need to use your imagination. Turn your head and look out the window.” Enjolras follows the instructions and turns his head toward the window, away from Grantaire. Grantaire briefly mourns the loss of his profile. “Now just kind of let your eyes relax and focus on the movement of the snowflakes.”

“What? That’s just—oh. Cool!”

“Told you so.”

“That’s cool,” Enjolras admits, still focused on the window. It’s soft and warm in the room.

Grantaire continues, “When I was a kid, I used to do that all the time. We’d be driving in my
parents’ car in a when it was snowing and I’d pretend that I was Han Solo.”

“That fits you,” Enjolras says.

“Yeah, but every kid wants to be Han Solo.”

“Not me,” Enjolras says. “He was always too sarcastic. I could never figure out why he joined the Rebellion if he was gonna be such a snarky dick about it. ‘Ferre and Courf and I used to play Star Wars and they’d always make me be Luke Skywalker because I was blonde.

“Courf would be Han Solo and ‘Ferre would be C3PO. Courf’s dog would be Chewbacca. I never liked being Luke, though. He was so whiny.” Enjolras lets out a huge yawn.

“Weed kicking in yet?” Grantaire asks.

“No.”

“Okay, sheesh. I was just asking out of, you know, concern.”

Enjolras is silent for a few moments. “Grantaire?” he asks, flipping his head back around toward Grantaire. His eyes are dark blue in the flickering firelight and his pupils look huge and black. Grantaire thinks that, despite his protests, Enjolras might be starting to feel the effects of the brownies. He’s not fool enough to press the issue. “Yeah?” he replies instead.

“Can I tell you something?”

Grantaire nods.

A small smile peeks out of Enjolras’ mouth. “I always wanted to be Princess Leia.”

It is one hundred percent impossible for Grantaire to process that information with a straight face. “You—“ he laughs, “seriously? You wanted to be Princess Leia?”

“Don’t laugh!” Enjolras sticks his lower lip out. It’s irresistibly red in the glow from the fireplace. “She was awesome. She like, led the rebellion, made plans, stood up to Darth Vader. Princess Leia was the shit.”

“You are not wrong in that opinion, Apollo,” Grantaire says, smiling.

Enjolras frowns. “Why do you call me that?”

“Apollo?”

“Yeah. Are you making fun of me?”

“No, it’s from…” Grantaire rolls over onto his side so he has a full view of Enjolras. The firelight flickers against his sharp profile, giving him an other-worldly, golden glow. If Enjolras could see himself right now, he’d understand the nickname. “Remember the time I fell off the ladder?”

Enjolras nods, eyes flicking toward Grantaire for the briefest second.

“Well, when I was telling Courf and those guys the story, I got all poetic and called you ‘Apollo.’”

Grantaire recalls. “You were there, E, don’t you remember?”

“I remember, I just… I just don’t know why you keep doing it,” Enjolras says, rolling onto his side, too, so he’s facing Grantaire. “Is it a nice nickname or a mean nickname?” His voice is soft.
God, he sounds so young. All Grantaire wants to do is wrap Enjolras up in his arms and hold onto him by the warmth of the fire. But, seeing as that is not an actual option, Grantaire just settles for a soft smile.

“It’s a nice nickname, Apollo.”

“Oh, okay.” Enjolras scoots closer.

They are both lying on their sides on the rug, barely a foot apart. Grantaire could reach a hand out and stroke Enjolras’ hair if he wanted to, but he doesn’t.

Surprisingly, though, Enjolras does. His hand rests on Grantaire’s curls for a moment, then trails down and strokes his cheekbone.

Grantaire does not move.

“What are you doing, Enjolras?” he asks, barely breathing.

Enjolras’ finger has moved down to lightly stroke Grantaire’s jawline, his delicate fingertips caressing of the sandpaper of Grantaire’s two-day old stubble. “The fire is doing cool things to your face,” Enjolras says, in way of explanation.

“The fire is doing cool things to your face,” Grantaire rebuts lamely, abruptly sitting up and pulling his face out of Enjolras’ reach. It’s too much to handle right now. But Enjolras follows him, sitting up and scooting closer. His knees bracket Grantaire’s. They are so, so close right now.

“There’s this shadow,” Enjolras says, leaning even further into Grantaire’s personal space and running his index finger down the length of Grantaire’s nose. Grantaire shudders. He should leave, he should go to his own room, he should but a stop to this. He stays. “It bends. Did you break your nose?”

Grantaire nods. Both of Enjolras’ hands are moving along the side of his face now, and he strokes both of Grantaire’s eyebrows. “You do this thing when you’re mad or sad, R,” Enjolras say softly, still stroking Grantaire’s brows. “There’s this line here sometimes—” one finger taps the space between his eyebrows—“but it isn’t here now. Are you done being mad at me?”

There is a huge weight in Grantaire’s chest right now. He can barely breathe. He doesn’t dare move. Something huge is happening, but he isn’t sure what. All he can do is stammer out, “No, E. I’m not mad at you any more.”

“Good,” Enjolras answers. “I hate it when you’re mad at me.” His hands have moved down, cupping Grantaire’s jaw. A tentative thumb brushes against Grantaire’s lower lip. He closes his eyes, unable to repress a shiver. “You’re so pretty, Grantaire.”

Grantaire opens his eyes. Enjolras is close, so close. What the hell is happening?

“I think about your mouth sometimes,” Enjolras say, his thumb pressing more firmly against the side of Grantaire’s lip. “I think about how I want to—”

“Oh my god, Enjolras,” Grantaire chokes out. He pulls back ever so slightly and tips his head forward, touching his own forehead to Enjolras’. For some reason he’ll never be able to explain, Grantaire is shaking with laughter. “Oh my god, E, you’re killing me right now.”

“What, why?” Enjolras demands, trying to pull his head back, but Grantaire keeps their foreheads pressed together with the light pressure of his hand at the back of Enjolras’ neck. His curls feel
amazing in Grantaire’s fist.

“Jesus, E,” he laughs shakily, “You get super gay when you’re high, buddy.”

“No,” Enjolras snaps and pulls his head sharply away from Grantaire's.

Fuck. Now Grantaire’s done it. He’d tried his best to not pick a fight with Enjolras while they were both snowbound, he really had, but his smartass mouth had gotten away from him. As per usual.

“I’m sorry, Enjolras, I didn’t mean to—“

“No,” Enjolras repeats. “I don’t get super gay when I’m high.”

“I said ‘I’m sorry,” I didn’t mean…”

“It’s not just when I’m high,” Enjolras says, and Grantaire freezes. “It’s all the time. I’m super gay all the time, R.”

The fire crackles in the fireplace. The wind howls against the glass. Grantaire is silent.

Enjolras inches closer and slides his hand back along the side of Grantaire’s face. “All the time,” he whispers thickly. And then his mouth is on Grantaire’s and Grantaire is lost.

This is better than Grantaire had dared to imagine. Enjolras’ lips are warm and soft. There is a desperate pressure behind the kiss. Grantaire gasps when Enjolras’ tongue presses against his own closed mouth. He parts his lips and allows Enjolras access, moaning into his mouth. This is everything Grantaire had ever wanted, this is too good to be true.

This is too good to be true.

Grantaire pushes back abruptly and Enjolras follows him for the briefest of moments before Grantaire stops him with two hands pressing against his shoulders. “No,” he manages, before Enjolras surges forward again, chasing Grantaire’s lips with his own.

“Please, R—“

It takes every ounce of resolve that Grantaire possesses to hold him at bay. Enjolras struggles toward him for a second longer, then lets his head droop. His blonde curls catch the firelight and Grantaire wants nothing more than to run his hands through them, feel their softness slipping between his fingers.

“Please,” Enjolras repeats again, this time to the floor.

This is unfair. This is horribly fucking unfair. Everything Grantaire wants in the world is being delivered to him on a silver platter. But it isn’t real. Enjolras is high as a kite right now, he can’t know what he’s doing.

If Grantaire reaches forward, pulls Enjolras into another kiss, he could take everything that he’s been longing for over the past few months. Enjolras could be his.

But he would hate Grantaire for it in the morning.

Slowly, reluctantly, Grantaire removes his hands from Enjolras’ shoulders and makes his way shakily to his feet. “I should go,” he says. He does not move.

“Please,” Enjolras says again, but this time he’s pleading for something else entirely. “Please don’t
“I should, E,” Grantaire tells him, still remaining frozen, looking down at Enjolras’ sad, bent head. “I shouldn’t stay here.”

Enjolras shakes his curls and finally looks up at Grantaire. His eyes are sapphire in the flickering light and the sadness behind them makes Grantaire’s heart want to burst. “Please stay, R. I won’t… I won’t do anything, I promise—“

“E, it’s not that—“

“Then stay.” Enjolras begs. “It’s cold in the house. You’ll freeze if you stay alone in your room.” Enjolras has a point. “Stay here, with me. I’ll behave, I promise.”

Grantaire weighs his options: if he goes to his room, he’ll spend the night freezing his ass off alone. If he stays here, at least he’ll be warm and he can keep on eye on his stoned friend. There isn’t too much danger of anything else happening between them. Judging by the drooping of Enjolras’ eyes, he’s reached the sleepy phase of his extreme high.

“Okay,” he finally cedes. “I’ll stay.”

“Yay!” Enjolras throws his arms around Grantaire’s thighs in a fierce hug, pressing his face dangerously close to Grantaire’s crotch. He immediately questions his decision. But Enjolras doesn’t stay there long; instead, he uses Grantaire for support as he climbs to his feet and then staggers over to the bed, stripping off his sweater, t-shirt and finally his pants.

Grantaire tries not to gape at the sight of Enjolras, bathed in warm firelight, dressed only in red briefs and a thick pair of wooly socks. “Um, E? You’re just gonna get cold, dude.”

“Nope,” Enjolras says, climbing into bed. “The best way to regenerate body heat is to crawl naked into a sleeping bag with someone else who’s naked.”

“Oh my god, did you learn that at your Eagle Scout meetings?” Grantaire can’t help but laugh.

“Uh-uh,” Enjolras is already buried under the comforter, his face nestled into a thick pillow. “I learned it from an episode of the X-Files.”

What a nerd. Grantaire gives up the good fight, strips down to his boxer briefs, and slides into the other side of the huge bed. It’s cold, but the heat from Enjolras is already warming the sheets. Grantaire stays still on his side, not quite daring to close the gap between them.

“R?” Enjolras voice is far away. “I need you to be the big spoon.”

“The what?” Grantaire has no idea what is coming out of Enjolras’ stoned brain any more.

“The big spoon,” Enjolras sounds frustrated and sleepy. “I’m the little spoon and you’re the big spoon. So c’mere…”

Oh. That explanation actually made sense. Grantaire takes a deep breath, rolls onto his side and pulls Enjolras tightly to him. He can feel each deep breath resonating through Enjolras’ back and against his chest. This is terrible. This is wonderful. Grantaire isn’t doing anything wrong. He’s just keeping his friend warm.

Enjolras shifts against him, and Grantaire gets a nose full of soft curls. He does his best not to take a deep inhale. He fails.

There are no more words. Enjolras is out.

Grantaire breathes in the scent of him and pulls Enjolras more tightly against his chest. “Goodnight, E,” he says fondly, and then, without realizing it was even coming, “I love you.”

Oh shit.
Friends(giving) of l'ABC

Chapter Summary

In which everyone is grateful.

Chapter Notes

You know what I'm grateful for? Awesome readers who still follow this fic. You guys are the coolest.

Comments and kudos appreciated.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

R

Grantaire tries not to gape as Enjolras maneuvers his little hybrid down the slick, sloping driveway of Marius’ grandfather’s cabin. The brown wooden house is tucked in a dense thicket of pine trees and has an exquisite frosting of shimmering white snow along its roof. A ribbon of smoke trails up from the stone chimney and disappears into the cloudy grey sky. It’s something from a fairy tale, like the witch from Hansel and Gretel had decided to upgrade and go for a full-on gingerbread mansion.

A thick path of boot prints circles the house and crisscroses the driveway, but the blizzard is still going strong and the divots are already beginning to fill with fresh white flakes. A clan of snowmen has been sculpted in the artic plain of the front yard and Grantaire suspiciously thinks that they all look a bit familiar. Snow-Combeferre has glasses perched on his carrot nose, Snow-Jehan is sporting a crown made of pine bows and fall leaves, and Snow-Bahorel is built out of four snow boulders instead of the traditional three.

At the front of the group is a snowman with what appears to be a yellow dishtowel for hair, wearing a red parka, with one stick arm raised in the air. His coal mouth is set in a firm line and his little stick eyebrows are furrowed in determination. Grantaire’s got to hand it to Courfeyrac and company: the likeness is incredible.

Enjolras slams the trunk of the car and glares at his snowy doppelganger, shaking his head on the way up the front path. Grantaire grabs his backpack out of the backseat and trots up the path after Enjolras, his feet sliding on the icy driveway.

The moment they walk into the cabin, all of Grantaire’s senses are assaulted by the overall cheerfulness of the place: an enormous fire is raging in the fireplace in the living room and Bossuet, Joly, Bahorel and Jehan are sprawled out on the rug in front of it. Joly is in the middle of a story and Bahorel is roaring with laughter.

The door to the kitchen bangs open and Feuilly, dressed in a ruffled orange apron, emerges along with an enticing mix of both sweet and savory scents. An agonized rumbling comes from
Grantaire’s left and he realizes that the sound is Enjolras’ stomach. He must be starving. When they left the house that morning, the food situation was exactly the same as the previous night: one sad packet of Ramen noodles and a shitload of pot brownies. Grantaire and Enjolras had lunched on soggy gas-station sandwiches on the way up, but the damp white bread and clammy meat barely took the edge off.

“You’re here!” Feuilly shouts. He hands off a plate of cheese and crackers to Eponine, who looks completely baffled as to what she is supposed to do with them, and wraps Enjolras and Grantaire in a giant bear hug. They are both squashed together inside of Feuilly’s embrace, and Enjolras puts one hand around Grantaire’s waist to steady himself. Grantaire doesn’t push him away, but he doesn’t pull him closer. Feuilly, oblivious to the physical-contact impasse that is festering in his arms, bellows gleefully into the cabin. “Guys! Enjolras and Grantaire are finally here!”

A chorus of greetings echoes through the cabin. The only person who does not effusively welcome them is Courfeyrac, who instead leans against the doorway to the kitchen, arms crossed and shaking his head. He, like Feuilly, is dressed in an apron, but Courfeyrac’s is covered in a cupcake print and pink lace trim. Grantaire vaguely wonders if these aprons belong to some female relative of Marius or if Courfeyrac had brought his own.

“Well, well, well,” Courfeyrac chides, glaring at them. “It’s about time you guys got here.”

“Sorry, Courf, the roads were terrible,” Enjolras explains, still held in a tight hug by Jehan, who shows no signs of letting go.

“Hmmm,” Courfeyrac purses his lips and cocks one eyebrow. “A likely story. This quote-unquote blizzard seems like a pretty good excuse to get out of appetizer duty.” He holds up an oversized piece of white paper, covered in a grid. Grantaire takes it from him and marvels at it: someone had arranged all of the Thanksgiving meal preparation duties—setting the table, appetizer preparation, dishes—in an easy to read spreadsheet. Sure enough, Grantaire and Enjolras’ names were in a column labeled “Appetizers.”

“Jesus, Courf,” Grantaire says. “This spreadsheet is insane.”

“I did it!” Joly calls out as he returns to his spot in front of the fireplace. “I can’t help with cooking tonight because I think I might be coming down with something and I don’t want to spread my germs. But I made an awesome spreadsheet!” Bossuet high fives him and then doesn’t let go of Joly’s hand as they fold into one another on the rug. That’s how you’re supposed to cuddle in front of a warm, flickering fire, Grantaire wants to shout at Enjolras. But he can’t. Because Enjolras doesn’t remember their awkward kiss in front of the fireplace last night at Alpha Beta Chi and Grantaire isn’t supposed to either.

Lying is hard.

“Frankly, I find it a little hurtful that you two would use a couple of errant snowflakes as an excuse to shirk your Thanksgiving duties,” Courfeyrac continues, pouting.

“Courfeyrac, this is an actual, Weather Service-approved, blizzard,” Enjolras says. Jehan has his arms wrapped around him from behind and his head is resting softly on Enjolras’ shoulder.

“Seriously, Courf,” Grantaire adds, dropping his voice dramatically. “While you guys were up here living in the lap of Nordic luxury, Enjolras and I were snowbound in a freezing frat house, scrounging for food and forced to huddle together for warmth.”

Courfeyrac’s face immediately lights up and Jehan lets out a little squeak, muffled by Enjolras’
sweater. Grantaire thinks he may have said too much. “You guys huddled together? All night? Alone in the frat? Nice!” Courfeyrac exclaims. He offers his fist up for an obligatory bump, which is finally answered by Jehan, who unwinds one arm from around Enjolras’ and pushes the frayed sleeve of his orange cardigan away from his slender hand and gently bumps his fist against Courfeyrac’s.

Grantaire pushes both of their fists down. “Shut up, you guys,” he grumbles. “We were in dire straights. It was pretty much snuggle or die. Anyway, we weren’t trying to ditch your Friendsgiving list of duties—”

“Meh, I was kidding about all that,” Courfeyrac grins, all traces of petulance wiped from his friendly face. “Just giving you guys shit.”

“But,” Grantaire finishes, “We totally fulfilled our appetizer duty.” He pulls an assortment of large plastic bags out of his backpack. Grantaire had ducked inside a mom-and-pop roadside stand when Enjolras had stopped for gas and procured several pounds of various jerked meats. There was elk jerky, deer jerky, buffalo jerky. He’d been tempted to buy a couple of weird woodcarvings and what appeared to be a holiday wreaths made of antlers, but Enjolras had intervened before Grantaire could make his purchase. Enjolras had sounded a little irritated when he’d ordered Grantaire to put all those things back, but there had been a twinkle in his bright blue eyes.

It was hard to tell if he was pissed off or amused. Which was pretty much par for the course between Grantaire and Enjolras these days. Especially after last night.

Courfeyrac ushers Grantaire into the kitchen in search of bowls for the jerky. Combeferre is inside, wearing yet another apron and peering into an enormous oven.

“Temperature is almost there, Courf. Your Turducken should be ready in about thirty minutes,” Combeferre says, shutting the door and straightening up, wiping his hands on the front of his blue checked apron. His soft grey eyes light up when he sees Grantaire. “R! You guys made it! We were worried.”

“Sorry, ‘Ferre,” Grantaire apologizes, as Courfeyrac bangs around in the numerous cupboards in search of bowls. “We left as soon as the roads were clear enough to drive.”

That wasn’t entirely true. They probably could have left earlier. The blizzard had slowed before dawn and the plows had been out early.

If Grantaire had looked out of the frost-covered window of Enjolras’s bedroom when he’d first woken up well before sunrise, he’d have seen the cold light of dawn trying to break through the gray storm clouds that still filled the sky. He’d probably also have noticed that the drifting snowflakes, though still plentiful, were falling at a much slower rate then they had been when Grantaire and Enjolras had drifted off to sleep. He might even caught sight of the massive snowplows moving dutifully up the street, doing their best to clear the two feet of snow off of the road.

But those things would only have been noticeable if Grantaire had looked out the window, and he sure as hell wasn’t doing that. Because getting up to go look out the window would mean unwrapping himself from around a gently sleeping Enjolras and that, that, would have been absolute madness.

Instead, Grantaire tightened his grip around Enjolras’ smooth torso, buried his face further into the covers and screwed his eyes shut against the daylight that was rapidly infiltrating the room. Grantaire was determined to hold on to that moment for as long as humanly possible because, holy
he spent last night in the same bed as Enjolras.

The down comforter was pulled up almost over both of their heads, but Grantaire could still feel the chill of the freezing room biting through his dark curls. The top of his head was the only part of him that was still cold, though. The rest of his body—from his toes to the tip of his nose—was pressed tightly against Enjolras’ back, like an adamant shadow. Grantaire’s left arm was threaded underneath Enjolras’ own arm and, wonder of wonders, Enjolras was holding Grantaire’s left hand tightly in his own, a tangled lover’s knot of fingers.

A warm breath of air ghosted over Grantaire’s fingers. Enjolras’ head was tipped down against Grantaire’s hand and his soft exhalations danced across Grantaire’s fingers every several seconds.

That was it. A meteor could have slammed into the earth right at that very moment, ending all life on the planet, and Grantaire would’ve died happy. There had been a lot of shitty moments in his twenty-two years, but in that instant—that brief, shining instant—Grantaire was happy.

In the predawn depths of Enjolras’ bedroom, Grantaire had let his imagination run wild, relishing in the perfection of the moment. If only that was Grantaire’s actual life. If only it were real. He imagined lying like this with Enjolras every morning, the two of them entwined on a daily basis.

You’re so warm, R, Enjolras would murmur at him, pulling Grantaire even tighter around him. Grantaire could almost feel the way the words would blow across his fingers, the way the resonance of Enjolras’ voice would vibrate through his back and into Grantaire’s chest.

So are you, Grantaire would reply and venture to press his lips to the warm skin between Enjolras’ shoulder blades. And Enjolras would flip over, pull Grantaire against him, dig his elegant fingers into Grantaire’s undoubtedly messy curls and pull him into a warm kiss—

Grantaire had to stop the fantasy right there.

Kissing Enjolras was just for fantasies; fantasies and bizarre fits of marijuana-induced affection. Enjolras had only kissed him on the previous because he was fucked up and high.

Maybe he wasn’t just high, maybe he meant it. Somewhere from deep in the back of Grantaire’s cynical brain, a hopeful little voice spoke up, like a Who Down in Whoville. Maybe he wants you, too. Grantaire tried to shove the little voice back down, but the optimistic little shit refused to be subdued. Just talk to him! It practically screamed.

Maybe he should.

The kiss could have the most simple explanation—that it was born from drug-added choices and that Enjolras had no idea what he was doing—or it could be possible that the pot had pulled down enough of Enjolras’ barriers and allowed him to do something that he’d been wanting to do. Perhaps he was just as attracted to Grantaire as Grantaire was to him.

Grantaire had no idea what is going to happen once Enjolras woke up but, dammit, he was determined to savor this moment. He deserved it.

“Marius!” Courfeyrac yells, still digging through cabinets. “Does your cabin have any bowls?”

Marius bangs his way into the kitchen a moment later, wearing a giant navy Nordic print sweater that threatens to engulf his lanky frame. Cosette trails behind him, carrying two very full glasses of red wine, one of which she shyly hands to Grantaire while Marius joins Courfeyrac on his search. Grantaire takes a sip. He is no sommelier, but the wine is exceptional.
“Marius’ grandfather has an excellent wine cellar,” Cosette tells Grantaire. She slips past Combeferre to stir a large pot that is vigorously boiling on the stovetop. “The cabin is incredible. You should get the full tour.”

After Marius finally pulls several serving bowls out of a cabinet on the far end of the vast kitchen, he escorts Grantaire through the house, leaving Courfeyrac and Combeferre to distribute the assorted jerky into serving dishes. Enjolras and his overnight bag join them on the tour.

The main floor has a cavernous living room where the other frat members are still splayed about, munching on plates of snacks and drinking wine and beer. Musichetta sets down a plate of crudité and gives Enjolras and Grantaire a wave and a smile. Eponine is curled onto a large leather sofa, nose in a magazine and sipping from a tumbler of clear, bubbly liquid. It looks like it could be simply soda, but Grantaire knows better. It’s definitely a vodka tonic. Eponine’s jaw is set and she gives Grantaire and Enjolras a terse nod, barely glancing at Marius.

“What’s Eponine doing here?” Grantaire asks, as Marius escorts them up a heavily carpeted staircase that leads to a loft that overlooks the living room. The last Grantaire had heard, she was defiantly staying in town and planning a solitary Thanksgiving in her studio.

Marius shrugs. “She came over to the frat the other night—the night you stayed at the art building—and Courfeyrac insisted that she come up here.”

That makes sense. Courfeyrac, generous spirit that he was, could never bear the thought of anyone spending the holiday alone. Grantaire is surprised that Eponine had accepted the offer, though. He wonders if he could have stood spending a weekend up at the cabin if Enjolras had brought a date. Probably. He and Eponine were kindred souls in masochism.

But Enjolras didn’t have a boyfriend. He’d told Grantaire as much on the drive up.

Enjolras’ knuckles had been white as they’d grasped the steering wheel of his little hydrid, eyes intent on the treacherous roads, but they kept flicking over to Grantaire every few minutes. Finally, on a wide, empty straightaway of road, Enjolras had broken the silence. “So, was that your boyfriend?” he asked.

Grantaire had continued looking out the window, watching the snow covered mountain rise up around them. “Who?” he finally replied.

“The guy from the art building the other day,” Enjolras clarified.

“Felix?!” Grantaire replied. “God, no…”

“If he is, it’s ok, R. You can tell me if you have a boyfriend.”

“I don’t, dude.”

Enjolras sighed. “You don’t have to feel bad. Whatever we did last night, it wasn’t cheating.”

So that’s what Enjolras was worried about.

“No, E,” Grantaire is telling him the truth. “He’s just some asshole I know from the art department. We hooked up like, a million years ago, and he must’ve been desperate for a pre-break hook-up. He kissed me. I didn’t want him to. And then you interrupted us before I could tell him to fuck off. The end.”

“Oh,” Enjolras replied, and then was silent for another mile. Grantaire fiddled with the radio. They
were deep in the mountains now and the only station available was some right-wing talk radio. He dug in his backpack for his iphone and connected it to the stereo. The distinctive twangs of a banjo filled the car. Another mile passed.

Enjolras spoke again. “You can tell me, you know. If you have a boyfriend.”

A laugh bubbled out of Grantaire’s mouth before he could stop it. “Enjolras. Seriously? When would I have time to have a boyfriend? I literally spend all of my time at either the art building or with you. I’m not having secret assignations with a mysterious boyfriend.”

Enjolras pressed on. “But you could tell me. I wouldn’t be mad.”

“I know.”

“But you didn’t tell me you were gay,” Enjolras’ jaw tightened. He didn’t look at Grantaire.

“I know,” Grantaire repeated.

“Why?” Enjolras was determined to continue this line of questioning.

Grantaire took a deep breath and tried to figure out how to phrase this next part. Another mile passed. The car climbed higher into the mountains. They were getting closer to the pass and the snow was falling harder. Grantaire said nothing.

The cabin is amazing. Although Enjolras had expected nothing less. Several of his parents’ friends had disgustingly large vacation homes at this resort. When they’d pulled up to the gate to check-in, the guard had raised an eyebrow at the name “Gillenormand” and instructed them to a street at the top of the ski slope. The homes on the slope were notoriously expensive and a cabin at the top of the mountain must be the best of the bunch.

Marius leads them through the palatial lodge. Above the living room is a luxurious master bedroom that, Marius awkwardly explains, has been claimed for himself and Cosette. They head down a back set of stairs into a wine cellar, walls lined with bottle after bottle of expensive vintages. Grantaire’s eyes light up and Enjolras elbows him.

“Didn’t have enough last night?” he asks. Grantaire claimed to have gotten really drunk the night before, although Enjolras doesn’t remember him drinking anything. Granted, Enjolras had not been in the most observant state of mind that night.

Grantaire looks confused for a moment and then pulls himself together, shrugging his shoulder. “Hair of the dog, E.”

Marius leads on. “There are a couple of bedrooms down here. Um, Joly and Bossuet and Musichetta have that one.” He nods his head to a door on the left. “And Eponine is over there. I think Courfeyrac and Combeferre have the back one.”

They go up another set of stairs. Enjolras is pretty sure that they are on a floor just below the living room. There are thumps from above them and voices filter down through the ceiling. Marius explains that Bahorel lost a snowball fight to Feuilly earlier and has been begging for a wrestling match to recover his lost dignity. From the sound of it, Feuilly has finally acquiesced.

There are more bedrooms on this floor. One for Jehan, one for Bahorel, another one for Feuilly.
Marius pushes open an oak door and flips on a light-switch. Two ornate queen-sized beds, covered in pillows, sit inside. “And this room is for you guys.”


Grantaire beats Enjolras to it. “Wait, Marius. We’re sharing this room?”

“Yeah, um, the house only has ten bedrooms.” Only. Jesus, Marius. “And the rest have all been claimed by everyone else, so…Courf said to put you guys here.”

Goddamit, Courfeyrac. Enjolras is going to kill him. Strangle him with his apron strings. Cram the Turducken down his throat. Courfeyrac is a dead man.

Marius continues, stammering. “But the sofa in the living room is a pull-out bed, so… one of you can sleep up there. If you don’t want to share, I mean.”

The thumps from the living room grow more intense above their heads. There is no way anyone is going to get a peaceful night’s sleep up there.

“No, its fine,” Enjolras says, tossing his overnight bag onto the empty bed nearest the window. “We can sleep in here. I mean, if that’s okay with you, R.”

Grantaire simply nods. Enjolras can’t be sure, but he thinks Grantaire looks a little pale. It could just be the dim lighting. Of course their shared room has romantic mood lighting. Of course it does.

Grantaire sets his backpack on the other bed. “There’s plenty of space, E,” he says. “What could possibly go wrong?”

Marius continues the tour. Apparently, there is still the outdoor deck and a hot tub to see. Enjolras dutifully follows, his mind lost. What could possibly go wrong? Based on that morning, the answer was so many things.

###

That morning, Enjolras had emerged from sleep slowly, like a man pushing his way through a thick fog. The first thing he was aware of was the warm, solid presence pressed firmly against his back.

Someone was in bed with him.

Enjolras forced his breathing to stay still as his mind, still thick with sleep and pot, spun wildly, trying to speculate as to whom exactly he spent the night with.

Enough light seeped in though the edges of the blanket that Enjolras was able to make out the thick ink lines and swirls that cover the arm wrapped around him.

Grantaire.

He relaxed just a fraction. He and Grantaire shared a bed last night. It wasn’t the end of the world.

The fog cleared a little more and Enjolras remembered pulling Grantaire into bed with him, begging him to spoon. Okay. That was slightly embarrassing but still not earth shattering. Spooning could be written off of a life-saving effort in light of the freezing cold house.

Why was the room so cold? Enjolras’ memory juddered even further back and he remembered the
storm, the branch taking out the power lines, building a fire.

He remembered downing several of Jehan’s pot brownies and Grantaire’s shocked expression when he realized exactly how much marijuana Enjolras had just ingested. Three incredibly potent edibles. That would explain why his head was so foggy that morning.

What else?

They’d built a fire last night. Grantaire stayed up in his room and they built a fire. Enjolras tightened his grip on Grantaire’s hand under the blanket and Grantaire offered up a soft little sigh, nuzzling his nose between Enjolras’ shoulder blades and humming in (what Enjolras assumed must be) contentment.

It was nice. They’d built a fire and Grantaire had slept with him. It was nice and not weird at all.

Enjolras took further stock of the situation. He wiggled his toes. They were still wrapped in his warm wool socks. Okay. That wasn’t super sexy, but again, it was for warmth.

The slightest twitch of his hips back against Grantaire informed him that they were both still wearing their underwear. It didn’t seem probable that they would have done anything the previous night and then bothered to put their briefs back on. Enjolras was reassured.

Except for one small thing. Or, rather, one not so small thing

The speculative press into Grantaire yielded additional physical reconnaissance in addition to the underwear information. Grantaire was… um, hard.

Enjolras forced his breathing to stay calm. It could have nothing to do with him. Sometimes this is how guys wake up. The term “morning wood” existed for a reason. It could have just been a reflex of Grantaire’s sleeping body. He might not even be reacting to Enjolras pressed against him.

But he might.

The fog was starting to dissipate more rapidly out of Enjolras’ brain and the memories were becoming sharper now. Grantaire is gay. Enjolras learned that a couple of days ago. There was a possibility that Grantaire could be into him. It wasn’t just a distant, hopeful dream anymore.

Last night, they’d sprawled out on the rug in front of the fireplace and smiled at each other in the firelight.

Grantaire had allowed Enjolras to stroke his face, to run his hands through his curls.

And somehow, after that, they’d ended up in bed together.

Enjolras pressed his mind to find the missing puzzle pieces. How did they get here?

They were on the rug, in front of the fireplace. His hands were buried in Grantaire’s curls. The firelight had danced across his face, setting his emerald eyes on fire. And then… oh.

They’d kissed.

Enjolras had kissed Grantaire.

He’d finally taken the leap of faith and pressed his lips against Grantaire’s intriguing smirk. He’d finally gotten to feel the rough stubble scrape against his own cheek, the wet heat of Grantaire’s mouth as his tongue had teased Grantaire’s lips apart.
Enjolras moaned at the memory. Grantaire let out a soft little huff in the bed behind him. Enjolras involuntarily pressed his hips back again, searching for the slightest press against Grantaire’s erection. (They’d kissed. They were in the same bed the morning after. This could mean something.) Grantaire pushed himself tighter against Enjolras’ back, his arousal a warm, hard fact now against Enjolras’ arse.

And then a big puzzle piece fell into place like an anvil.

Grantaire had said no to the kiss. He’d pushed Enjolras away. Last night, Grantaire had firmly rejected him and now, the next morning, Enjolras was sleepily grinding up against him. This was terrible.

“Oh, god,” Enjolras involuntarily squealed and yanked his whole body away from Grantaire. The violence of his moment not only pulled him away from Grantaire, but off the edge of the bed.

###

Friendsgiving dinner is a rousing success. Against all odds, Courfeyrac’s Turducken is a tender, perfectly cooked masterpiece of poultry. Feuilly’s auxiliary turkey turned out beautifully, as well, and Enjolras loads his plate with both. The farm where they’d gotten the birds was free-range and Enjolras pushes aside his vegetarian guilt for the evening. It’s a holiday, after all.

There are side dishes galore—green bean casserole, rolls, asparagus. Musichetta has made some sort of mashed potato dish that is an insane orange mixture of normal potatoes, sweet potatoes and carrots. It’s delicious.

More wine is poured.

Courfeyrac clinks his fork against his glass. “You guys,” he begins and then spews a long, rambling monologue about how much he loves everyone and how grateful he is for this weekend. He threatens to end his speech with a rendition of ‘Corner of the Sky,’ but Combeferre rescues the table from drunken musical theater warbling by making everyone promise that they’ll come to Courfeyrac’s opening night the following weekend.

Combeferre clinks his own glass and recites his list of things he’s thankful for. Jehan picks up on the theme, clinks his glass, and pulls a rumpled piece of paper from his pocket: a poem in honor of friendship. The clinking and speechifying is passes around the table, each of the friends standing up and vocalizing their own bits of gratitude.

Feuilly, seated to Enjolras’ left, finishes his own speech and sits down, leaving only Enjolras and Grantaire to speak.

It isn’t until he stands up to make his short speech that Enjolras realizes how much wine he’s had. At least three glasses, if not more. Marius has been quick with the refills. Enjolras rises unsteadily to his feet, clinks his fork against his almost empty glass, and begins. As he speaks, he gazes around the table at the faces of his friends and a lump rises in his throat. Enjolras is beyond grateful for each and everyone of them—Combeferre’s steadfast friendship, Courfeyrac’s exuberance, Pontmercy’s sweet naïveté—the list goes on and on, finally ending on Grantaire. “And, Grantaire,” Enjolras pauses, unsure of how exactly to phrase this, not trusting his wine-buzzed brain to find the right words, “Grantaire, I’m just…glad you’re here.”

Grantaire raises his glass at the end of Enjolras toast, then drains the undoubtedly expensive
contents in one long swallow. He isn’t quite sure what to make of Enjolras’ closing comment to him. On a scale ranging from “Grantaire, I love you” to “Hey, R, go fuck yourself,” he supposes that “I’m glad you’re here” rates somewhere around the middle of the spectrum.

He’d been completely baffled by Enjolras behavior all day, ever since Enjolras had woken up that morning, felt Grantaire’s embarrassing erection pressing into his ass and immediately hurled himself out of bed.

One moment, Grantaire was wrapped in a cocoon of warmth, balancing the curious sensation of a sleeping Enjolras pressing up against him--Grantaire was somewhere between mortified and aroused when he realized that Enjolras’ ass was pressed firmly against his own horribly embarrassing erection; he’d had an explanation at the ready, should Enjolras fully wake up and realize Grantaire’s state, but his brain had jettisoned those excuses when Enjolras had groaned and inquisitively twitched his hips back against Grantaire; maybe his hopes weren’t unfounded; maybe Enjolras had meant that kiss last night. Grantaire allowed that one glimmer of boundless optimism to flicker for a moment, the briefest of moments—and the next moment, Enjolras and the warm bedding abruptly disappeared.

Grantaire stayed frozen in surprise, curled on his side and shivering in the sudden cold of the abandoned bed, before he realized that Enjolras hasn’t vanished at all. He’d simply chosen to hurl himself off the edge of the bed rather than be faced with hard, physical evidence of Grantaire’s attraction to him.

Oh, god.

It took a solid minute to get Enjolras and the comforter off the chilly hardwood floor and back on the bed, the two of them negotiating a complicated tango, keeping bedding between any of their exposed limbs. They finally reposition themselves on the mattress with a solid foot of space between them.

_Well, it was nice while it lasted_, Grantaire thought as he pulled his portion of the blanket tightly around his shivering shoulders.

“Are you okay?” Grantaire finally asked Enjolras, who was now lying on his back with his eyes fixed on the ceiling.

“Mm-hm,” Enjolras offered a noise, rather than actual words.

“I didn’t mean to, um…” Grantaire began again, trying to reconstruct the excuse he’d mentally thrown out only minutes before. “It’s just that sometimes, you just, you know, wake up and you’re —“

“Oh, I didn’t—“ Enjolras interrupted.

“You really can’t help it, you know?”

“I don’t even know what you’re talking about, R.” Enjolras was blatantly lying. He finally flipped over and looked at Grantaire for the first time that morning. His blue eyes were wide and his expression a touch too innocent. “I was just really surprised to find someone else in my bed and I freaked out.”

“You didn’t know I was there?” Grantaire peered hard at Enjolras, searching for more evidence of the lie.

Enjolras just shook his head. No.
Oh, fuck. Grantaire was going to come off as so creepy now. “I was only there because it was cold, E,” Grantaire tried to defend his position, but it just sounded so bad. “You asked me to stay. You asked me to spoon you? Do you not remember any of that?”

Enjolras shook his head again. “No. I believe you, R, I just don’t remember.”

“Enjolras?” Grantaire exhaled softly before pressing on. “Exactly how much of last night do you even remember?”

###

The insistent clinks of cutlery on glasses shakes Grantaire out of his reverie. Everyone at the dinner table is staring at him. He needs to speak. Grantaire shakily stands as Marius unnecessarily refills his glass. He can do this. He can keep it together without drunkenly dumping out his feelings all over the table.

“You guys,” Grantaire begins. “My list begins and ends there. I’m grateful for you guys.” He glances around the table at the faces of all his friends. “Somehow, in this shitty world, I found you. You guys are the best of friends and the finest of brothers and I am immensely grateful for you.”

Everyone raises their glasses and drinks. Despite Combeferre’s protestations, Courfeyrac begins singing what Grantaire assumes is an old Alpha Beta Chi drinking song.

“Drink with me,” he begins, to a loud chorus of groans. Bahorel chucks a green bean at his head, but Courfeyrac presses on. “To days gone by…”

Grantaire sips his wine. Everyone starts to sing, even the girls. Why do they all know this song? Only Enjolras is silent.

*Here’s to pretty girls who went to our heads…*

Cosette smiles at Marius and takes his hand. Eponine looks at her plate.

Enjolras finally catches Grantaire’s eye. He spares a small smile.

*Here’s to witty boys who went to our beds…*

Enjolras looks quickly away.

###

Dinner is cleared. The spreadsheet lists Joly, Bossuet and Musichetta as having dish duty. The rest of the party stumbles into the living room with mugs of Bailey’s and coffee, plates of pie. There is pumpkin pie, pecan pie, chocolate pie. Cosette has made a Piecaken. (“A pie baked inside of a cake?!” Courfeyrac is incredulous. “If I weren’t gay, Cosette, I’d steal you from Marius so fucking fast. I just might do it anyway…” Courfeyrac pulls Cosette on to his lap and Marius looks stricken until she yanks him down on top of the pile.)

Combeferre and Enjolras are clearing the table, hauling dishes into the kitchen for the dish crew to scrub and load into the dishwasher. Enjolras is scraping bits of turkey into the trashcan when he feels Combeferre’s hand on his shoulder.

“Is everything okay?” Combeferre asks softly. Of course Combeferre can tell that something is wrong. Enjolras gives him the abridged version of the story, complete with the new and improved ending.
Combeferre listens intently, and then frowns. “You don’t remember anything?” he asks.

Enjolras shakes his head, repeating the lie one more time. “I don’t, ‘Ferre. I really don’t.”

###

It wasn’t until Grantaire had offered him the suggestion on a silver platter that Enjolras even considered the idea of lying about the previous night.

He remembered everything. Some bits were harder than others to pull out of the fog, but he definitely remembered. But sometimes people didn’t. He’d watched Jehan and Courfeyrac conferring at the breakfast table of the dorm’s dining room after long nights of drinking and smoking, trying to piece together bits of memory.

Sometimes they were able to figure out what happened. Sometime they weren’t.

“Enjolras?” Grantaire had repeated in bed that morning. “Do you remember last night?”

Enjolras slowly shook his head. “No, R,” he answered, following the lie right down the rabbit hole. “I don’t remember anything.”

Grantaire bit his lower lip and pulled the blanket tighter around his shoulders. “Oh.”

“I mean, I remember finding the brownies, eating a bunch. I remember getting the fire built and then everything just… goes to black,” Enjolras was trying to build a plausible timeline. If he could stick to the facts and just delete the really embarrassing parts like, oh, forcing himself on his friend, then the lie has a solid foundation. Good lies stick as close to the facts as possible. “And then this morning, I woke up, panicked and fell out of bed.”

Grantaire was silent for a long moment. Enjolras hoped he wasn’t finding holes in the story. Finally he spoke. “Me, too.”

“You, too what?”

“I don’t remember much passed that either.”

_Oh._ That was unexpected. “I don’t remember you eating any brownies last night, though,” Enjolras demands.

“I didn’t,” Grantaire says. “But I was drinking. I guess I was trying to stay warm and drank too much. You know how it goes.” The blankets around Grantaire’s shoulders shuffled the slightest bit and Enjolras assumed that he’d shrugged.

“You did?” Enjolras asked again, perplexed. “I don’t remember you—“

“Says the guy who can barely remember last night,” Grantaire’s grin is back in full force. “Don’t worry about it, E. You got high, I got drunk, we both misplaced a few memories. It’s not the end of the world.”

Grantaire was right. It wasn’t the end of the world. This situation might actually save everything.

“And, um, E?” Grantaire muttered, sounding less self-assured. “I don’t think anything, you know, happened last night. Between you and me?”

“Oh, yeah, no,” Enjolras was having so much trouble articulating that morning. “I didn’t even think that we’d, you know.”
“Okay, cool. Just wanted to make sure we’re cool.” Grantaire gazed over at him, green eyes full of concern. “Are we cool?”

“Yeah, R. We’re cool.”

###

Enjolras scrapes the last bit of food off the final plate. Everything is cool.

###

There is a rousing debate raging in the living room: Courfeyrac wants to play Celebrity, Feuilly wants to play Risk. There is a vote. Risk wins. Enjolras secretly suspects that people hadn’t voted for Risk so much as they’d voted against Celebrity. Courfeyrac, being a theater kid, was the only person who crushed it at that game.

It is surprising how quickly Enjolras loses all of his armies. He can’t seem to roll a win, no matter how hard he’d tries, and soon he was down to holding onto a single territory—Western Europe—against the growing threat of Courfeyrac’s massive military force.

“You know you can just give up, right, E?” Courfeyrac grins, rolling the dice for one final onslaught against Enjolras’ single remaining army. Enjolras smiles grimly. Never.

Courfeyrac’s roll is successful and Enjolras’ army falls. He excuses himself, leaving Courfeyrac and Feuilly, who has been staunchly holding onto Northern Europe, to battle it out.

Initially, he headed to the kitchen to grab another drink, but the big French doors at the back of the kitchen give him a better idea. He grabs his coat and gloves and steps outside, plowing his way across the snow covered patio to a picnic table situated at the far end of the deck.

It was so peaceful out here and he needed a moment.

It had taken Grantaire forever to answer his question on the way up the mountain. The question had been simple—Why?—but it had taken Grantaire miles to answer and his answer had been… confusing.

“Do you remember the first fight we had?” Grantaire finally said as they crested the summit of Vail pass. Enjolras’ fingers tightened on the steering wheel and he paused a moment before he replied, letting the rhythmic swish of the over-worked windshield wipers fill the silence.

“Yes?” Enjolras ventured.

“Do you remember what we fought about?” Grantaire pressed on.

Why was Grantaire doing this now? This wasn’t an answer to Enjolras’ question.

“Well,” Enjolras began, “I guess I got mad and called you a dick because you were telling everyone all the intimate details of what I was doing when you fell off the ladder—“

“Wait, you think that was our first fight?” Grantaire laughed.

“You don’t?” Enjolras replied.

“No, E. That wasn’t a fight. You got mad and stomped off but it wasn’t a fight.”

Enjolras searched for a moment and landed on the next thing he’d call their first fight. He didn’t
want to confess to Grantaire why he’d been so mad at him at that party, but he doesn’t really see an escape option here. “Okay, then I guess I was pissed at you at the Initiation Party because you were being drunk and dumb—“

“You count the Initiation Party as a fight?!” Grantaire looked shocked.

“We were mad at each other—“

“Yeah, but it was all passive aggressive. I’m talking about our first fight.”

“Grantaire, you’re going to have to just tell me. I can’t just keep listing times we argued. The drive is only supposed to last another hour.”

“Ha. You’re hilarious, E. We haven’t argued that many times.”

“We haven’t?!”

“Okay, you’ve got a point there.”

“Seriously, though, what do you consider our first fight?”

Grantaire pulled his knees up onto the car seat. “That night after I came to my first frat meeting. We were playing videogames on the couch, but you wanted to talk to Courf and ‘Ferre about Les Amis business…”

This was starting to sound familiar. “Okay?” Enjolras said.

“And then you started going off about their ‘life choices’ and how you didn’t ‘approve’ and—“

There it was. Enjolras remembered now. Grantaire had, for some inexplicable reason, decided to jump down Enjolras’ throat and argue. “You started defending them,” Enjolras said. “You were totally on their side about fraternity shit even though you weren’t a member yet and—“

“That’s what you think I was defending, E?” Grantaire was gaping at him.

“Isn’t it?”

Grantaire shook his head. “No, dude. No, no, no. I was definitely not talking about frat stuff.”

“Then what were you fighting me about?”

“I, uh,” Grantaire paused and tugged nervously at the edge of his grey beanie. “I thought you didn’t like the fact that they were dating.”

“Okay, I can kinda see how you’d think that,” Enjolras said, after a moment. It was natural for a friend to react negatively to two of his closest childhood friends suddenly in a relationship. He explained as much to Grantaire.

“No, sorry, E. That isn’t what I meant,” Grantaire responded. “I didn’t think you were pissed because two of your friends were dating each other. I thought you didn’t like their relationship because it was two guys, you know. I thought you were pissed about them being gay.”

Enjolras ripped his eyes off the road and turned to Grantaire. “You thought what?!”

“Enjolras! Drive!” Grantaire shouted and Enjolras turned his attention back to the road just in time to swerve back into their lane. “Jesus, dude. I’m sorry. Please don’t kill me with the car.”
Despite the fact that the heater was going full-blast, Enjolras felt like the temperature had suddenly dropped. How could Grantaire think that he disapproved of Courfeyrac and Combeferre’s relationship because they were gay?

“Grantaire,” Enjolras began, but had to pause. He had no idea how to put this.

“I’m sorry to be bringing this up, E, I really am, but I feel like something happened last night—“ Oh, god. —“and I just need to tell you—“

This was it. Grantaire was going to tell Enjolras that he remembered the kiss. That he was uncomfortable. That he felt weird.

“I just need to tell you that I think I’ve been operating under some wrong information here,” Grantaire said.

“What do you mean, R?” Enjolras asked.

“I thought you were pissed at Courf and ‘Ferre that night because you were, um, oh god, how do I even put this?” Grantaire was keeping his eyes on the toes of his shoes, which were pulled up on the seat. Normally, Enjolras would’ve been annoyed at wet feet on his car seat, but in that moment he was too preoccupied to care. “I thought you were homophobic.”

It was too much. Enjolras began to laugh, his shoulders shook as he tried desperately to keep both hands on the wheel and not let the car careen off the snowy highway. “Oh my god, Grantaire,” he finally managed. “Are you kidding me? I’m not homophobic. I’m gay.”

He glanced over at the passenger seat. Grantaire was looking at him, green eyes expectant, as if he knew that was what Enjolras was going to say. But he couldn’t. Enjolras had come out to him the previous night, but Grantaire wasn’t supposed to remember that. Enjolras wasn’t supposed to remember that.

But he did.

And he remembered that Grantaire, even in his (apparently) inebriated state, had rejected Enjolras’ advances. He’d pushed Enjolras away. Even if Grantaire didn’t remember that part, Enjolras still felt the need to assuage any fear that he might have that they couldn’t be platonic even though both of them were now out.

“Grantaire,” Enjolras said, hating the words that were about to come out of his mouth. “Just because we’re both gay doesn’t mean that we can’t still be friends. I’m not going to, like, throw myself at you just because we're on the same team. We're just friends.”


There was silence for a moment.

“So,” Grantaire said, “Do you have a secret boyfriend that you haven’t told me about?”

Enjolras looked over at him again then, and Grantaire was smiling at him. It looked a little sad, but Enjolras couldn’t be sure. “Nope, R. No boyfriend. Like you said, I pretty much spend all my free time with you. It would be insanely hard to manage a secret love affair and consistently keep kicking your ass at videogames—“

“Hey!”
They’d bickered for a few more snowy miles. Enjolras had spotted a gas station—its hand-painted sign read *Gas! Homemade Jerky! Rustic Collectables!*—and carefully pulled the car off the snowy highway.

And that was that. Enjolras takes a deep breath and exhales slowly, his breath clouding in front of him in the freezing mountain air.

R

Grantaire is done pretending that he doesn’t care where Enjolras is. He surrenders his remaining territories and armies to Feuilly and heads into the kitchen. It takes him a moment to locate Enjolras, who is just a dark shape on the edge of the patio, silhouetted against the starry sky.

###

E

The house is quiet when Enjolras and Grantaire drift in from the patio. There are still wine glasses and beer bottles scattered around the living room, but that can wait until morning. Someone—Feuilly probably—has put out the fire.

Enjolras and Grantaire make their way down to their room. Grantaire pauses as they entered the room together.

“Do you want me to sleep upstairs on the couch, R?” Enjolras offers, aware of Grantaire’s apparent discomfort.

“No!” Grantaire answers, yawning. “I don’t care if we share a room, E. It’s just that I, um, didn’t pack pajamas. Just don’t want to offend you.”

Ah. Enjolras bites hard on his lower lip to keep from making any embarrassing noises. He scurries into the bathroom to give Grantaire time to change. When he emerges, the lights are out and Grantaire is just a dark lump on the far bed.

Enjolras slides into his own bed, the sheets cold and unfamiliar. He closes his eyes and tries to force sleep to come. It should be easy. Turkey is full of Tryptophan and Enjolras has had more than a bottle of wine. Those two things combined should put him to sleep immediately. But he’s still wide awake.

From across the room, Grantaire’s breath is uneven. He tosses in his bed, the sheets rustling.

“R?” Enjolras ventures.

Grantaire finally replies, “What’s up, E?”

“Are you cold?”

There is another long pause before Grantaire replies, “…yes?”

The wine has definitely gone to Enjolras’ brain, but he is beyond caring. “Do you, um, want to sleep over here? I mean, it’s cold and it would be—”

Grantaire is already across the room, slipping underneath the comforter of Enjolras’ unfamiliar
bed. He curls into place immediately, knees sliding behind Enjolras’, arm curling around his side. Enjolras grabs Grantaire’s hand and pulls it tight to his chest, entwining their fingers. He hums contentedly. “You’re so warm, R.”

“So are you,” Grantaire replies, snuggling in closer.

So this is it. *This* is what Enjolras didn’t know that he needed. He drifts off to sleep, warm in Grantaire’s arms for the second night in a row.

Chapter End Notes

If you feel like there is a chunk missing, you’re right. What happened outside on the patio? Well... I kinda wrote that in a one-off fic a million years ago. Go read it!

It'll be fun!
The drive down the mountain is excruciating.

It isn’t that the roads are bad. In fact, the trip home is the exact opposite of the drive up: the pavement is dry and clear, and the view is spectacular. The snowdrifts rise alongside the winding black ribbon of highway, a sparkling blanket coating the Rocky Mountains.

It isn’t the company, either. The company is exquisite: Combeferre sits in the passenger seat—serving dual roles as navigator and de facto DJ—flipping through his iPhone to queue up episodes of podcasts that he’s decided Enjolras needs to hear.

Courfeyrac is splayed across the backseat, his feet propped up against the rear passenger-side window and his head resting in Grantaire’s lap.

“Tell me again why I have to ride in the back with Courfeyrac?” Grantaire whines as Courfeyrac shifts, rooting around in a plastic shopping bag on the floor in search of the last bits of jerky. Based on the grunt that had come out of Grantaire a few seconds ago, one of Courfeyrac’s flailing limbs had hit Grantaire somewhere soft and uncomfortable.

“Because,” Enjolras answers, “if Courfeyrac rides up front, he’ll have access to the stereo. And I don’t want to be stuck listening to showtunes on full-blast for the next two hours.”

“True that, E!” Courfeyrac pipes up from the backseat, his head still burrowed in the shopping bags on the floor near Grantaire’s feet.

Enjolras smirks and risks a quick glance in the rearview mirror. Grantaire’s forehead is tipped against the back window, his curls almost blocking his eyes. Enjolras thinks that he’s glaring at Courfeyrac, but it’s impossible to tell from this angle.
“As much as I love you, Courf,” Enjolras says, “I think I speak for everyone in this car when I say that none of us are in the mood for Pippin—

“Hey! I wasn’t gonna play Pippin—

Thank god.

“Because I gotta save it for opening night this weekend! I don’t want to ruin the brilliance of my performance for you guys.”

It was a little late for that, in Enjolras’ opinion. He’s heard Courfeyrac warbling “Corner of the Sky” so often, he could probably go on as understudy.

“Don't fret, Courf. We’ll be there,” Enjolras assures him. “We wouldn't miss it for the world.”

The whole frat had bought excellent seats the day tickets went on sale. Jehan had wanted to sit in the front row center, but Courfeyrac had begged them to settle for the middle of the third row. (“I can see the front row!” Courfeyrac had objected. “I don’t want to be able to see you guys! It’ll freak me out.”) They’d also promised that they’d all stick around for the opening night party.

Enjolras did not love going to theater parties, particularly opening night soirees, because he always managed to end up cornered by some actor who only wanted to talk about two things: how brilliant their performance had been and how attractive Enjolras was. It was always terrible. But it meant a lot to Courfeyrac to have his friends there, so Enjolras suffered through it.

There is a yelp from the backseat and Enjolras glances in the rearview mirror in time to see Grantaire extracting Courfeyrac’s hand from his crotch region.

“Sorry, dude,” Courfeyrac apologizes. “I dropped some jerky and—

Grantaire reaches under his own thigh to extract a hunk of meat. He pops it into his own mouth.

“Hey!” Courfeyrac protests.

“Hey, yourself,” Grantaire tells him. “If food goes anywhere near my balls, then it is, by all rights, mine.”

“He has a point, babe,” Combeferre chimes in. “And also: ew.”

Courfeyrac nestles his head back into Grantaire’s lap. Grantaire shifts uncomfortably. “But why am I stuck in the backseat with him?” Courfeyrac argues. “I could’ve sat in the front and ‘Ferre and Courf could’ve had the backseat all to themselves.”

“If you sat in the front seat, R,” Enjolras says—then I wouldn’t be able to stop staring at you and I’ll crash the car and we’ll all perish in a ball of flaming wreckage—“then those two would spend the entire drive making out and we’d be stuck watching. And listening.”

“It’s true!” Courfeyrac says.

Combeferre pauses the podcast. “Actually, Enjolras, I have a quick question about the budget for the Winter Formal—

“No!” Enjolas says. “No frat business until tomorrow morning, when vacation is officially over.”

Courfeyrac whines in the backseat. “What? We can’t even talk about the Fancy Party?”
“Nope.”

The annual Winter Formal, dubbed the “Fancy Party” by Courfeyrac, is an Alpha Beta Chi tradition that Enjolras couldn’t manage to snuff out. Luckily, he didn’t have to do much for the event. Courfeyrac and Jehan were in charge of party planning. All Enjolras had to do was show up and wear a tuxedo.

“Well, you’d better be willing to talk about it soon, E,” Courfeyrac refuses to be put off. “because Jehan and I are making the place cards for the dinner next weekend and you need to tell us the name of your date by Saturday.”

“My what?” Enjolras exclaims. He had most certainly not agreed to bring a date to anything, let alone a formal fraternity affair.

“It’s a formal, Enjolras. You have to bring a date.”

“It is tradition,” Combeferre agrees. Combeferre is terrible.

Courfeyrac lets out an over dramatic groan. “Oh, god, Enjolras. Am I going to have to be your pity date to the Fancy Party? ‘Ferre, I’m super sorry about this, but I’m going to have to pull an 80’s movie and take this hopeless loser to the – ow! Grantaire, why did you just hit me?”

“I have it taken care of, thank you very much,” Enjolras snaps. “’Ferre, can we keep listening that the podcast?”

They continue down the mountain, Combeferre and Enjolras dutifully learning about history in the front seat, Grantaire and Courfeyrac grappling in the back.

No, the drive isn’t terrible because of the roads or the company. The problem is that every crunch of tires on the gravel-covered highway carries them back toward real life and away from the weekend at the cabin.

And the weekend at the cabin had been perfect.

The morning after the Friends-giving dinner, everyone had rolled out of bed (Grantaire had rolled out of Enjolras’. Neither of them mentioned it.) to head to the ski hill. It wasn’t a very long commute to the slopes: Marius’ grandfather’s cabin was right on a run. They could literally step out of their door, strap on their skis or snowboards and head down the hill.

“You’re not coming, E?” Grantaire asked, tightening the laces on his snowboard boots on a wooden bench. Bahorel and Feuilly had made a trip to the ski shop and rented an assortment of equipment for the entire party.

“No, I think I’m gonna stay here,” Enjolras replied, nervously eyeing the stack of skis and snowboards next to the back door. “I don’t really… sport.” His choice of equipment for the snowy day was a book, spare blanket and giant mug of coffee. It would probably be better for everyone if he stayed off the slope and nestled by the fire.

Grantaire gave him a sad nod, then stepped out the back door and tore down the hill after Bahorel and Courfeyrac. Enjolras watched him go with envy. How was Grantaire so good at snowboarding? And why did his ass look so great in snowpants?

“Don’t break your arm again!” a cheerful voice called out from Enjolras’ elbow. Joly. Enjolras hadn’t even known he was there. It made sense that Joly was staying behind: he was still recovering from a cold. Bossuet and Jehan had also opted out of skiing and Enjolras could hear
them in the kitchen, cleaning up the breakfast mess.

Joly was looking at him expectantly. Enjolras stared back at him.

“So,” Joly said, finally, “how’d you sleep?”

Enjolras couldn’t tell if there was any hidden meaning to that question. Joly’s eyes were innocent enough behind his thick tortoiseshell frames, but still waters ran deep.

“Uh, good,” he answered.

“Great, great,” Joly nodded, looking out the glass door and watching their friends disappear down the snowy slope. “Was your bed comfortable?”

“It was. It was uh, comfy and… warm. And spacious. Definitely spacious. Tons of room because I had the whole thing to myself.” Enjolras knew he was talking too much, but he couldn’t stop. “And Grantaire said that his bed was good, too. Because our room has two beds. So he had his own. Which he slept in.”


Hours later, Enjolras was curled on one of the living room sofas, deep in his book, when the group of skiers came tramping back into the house. They were red-cheeked and cheerful, babbling about the ski conditions.

Grantaire stripped off his wet jacket and snowpants, then flopped onto the couch next to Enjolras. He was spread out across the length and his wool sock covered feet were barely an inch from Enjolras’ thigh.

“Nice tights,” Enjolras said, glancing up from his book for a moment.

Grantaire’s jaw dropped in mock horror. “These are thermal underwear, I’ll have you know, that athletes wear when they’re being athletic. And I, sir, am an athlete.”

Enjolras reached down to pick at the toe of Grantaire’s wool sock. “You’re pretty wet for an athlete.”

“Well, I might have fallen a few times.”

“A few dozen times is more like it, R,” Courfeyrac leaned over the back of the sofa to hand Grantaire a beer. “Dude ate more snow than a, um, a—Hey ‘Ferre? What’s something that eats snow?”

Combeferre wraps his arms around Courfeyrac from behind and rests his chin on his shorter boyfriend’s shoulder. “Nothing, babe. Nothing eats snow. Because it’s water, not food.”

Courfeyrac’s face fell.

“But animals drink snow. Particularly artic animals—“

Courfeyrac lights up again. “Grantaire drank more snow than a polar bear that just ate a shit-ton of peanuts. Boom! Still got it.” He drags Combeferre to the rug in front of the fireplace and they both collapse into a comfortable knot.

“But Courf, polar bears don’t eat peanuts,” Enjolras informed him, taking joy in dismantling
Courfeyrac’s shabby metaphor.

“You don’t know what they might find up there in the tundra, E! Maybe a polar bear found a crashed plane that had a huge cargo of peanuts and he—” Combeferre kissed him aggressively and Courfeyrac abandoned his theories about artic wildlife.

Enjolras caught Grantaire’s eye and they both grinned. Enjolras set his book aside and Grantaire filled him in on the day’s adventures. His descriptions were filled out by the other Amis, who slowly gathered in the living room after shedding their ski gear and grabbing drinks.

Bahorel is recounting a trip down a steep hill covered in moguls when Grantaire’s toes nudge Enjolras’ thigh. He glances toward Grantaire, who is pointing and flexing his feet.

“Sorry, E,” Grantaire mumbled. Enjolras wasn’t sure, but he thought that Grantaire looked slightly flushed. Although that might just have been the results of a day in the winter sun. “Just stretching my calves. They are tight, dude. I forgot how much snowboarding wrecks your legs.”

Enjolras had an idea. “Come here,” he told Grantaire, tugging at his wooly toes. Grantaire slides down the couch until his feet are resting on the plush arm and his calves are on Enjolras’ thighs.

“Oh my god,” Grantaire grunted as Enjolras dug his fingers into the muscles of his calf. He exhaled again sharply and bit his lip.

“Is that okay?” Enjolras released the pressure, but kept his fingers on Grantaire’s leg.

“Mmm-hmm,” Grantaire replied. “It’s just tight. Don’t stop, though.”

Everyone in the room was pointedly not looking at them.

Hours later, the fire had burned down. Enjolras had gotten back to their room first and quickly washed up. Now he hovered near the edge of his bed, dressed in a pair of pajama pants and a old high school debate team t-shirt, while Grantaire was in the bathroom. He wasn’t sure how to ask if Grantaire was planning on sleeping with him again. He wasn’t sure if he should ask.

There was the sound of spitting, then water being turned off and on, then the door to the bathroom opened. Grantaire stood in the doorway, clad only in his boxer briefs. His expression was unreadable. “Sorry,” he said. “I told you I forgot pajamas.”

“No, it’s cool,” Enjolras said. “It’s nothing I haven’t seen before.” That sounded so blasé.

Grantaire took one step toward his bed and then turned back to Enjolras. “So, uh…” he stammered.

“So.” Enjolras replied.

“It’s, um, it’s still pretty cold,” Grantaire said.

“It is. Do you wanna, um…” Enjolras didn’t have the words, so he simply pulled back the corner of the comforter as an invitation.

Grantaire burrowed in, sliding all the way over to the far side of the bed. His side, Enjolras realized. He paused for a moment, then said, “Do you mind if I—?” He gestured lamely to his pajamas.”

“Take of your pajamas? It’s cool, E,” Grantaire said. “Actually, the best way to stay warm is to sleep naked in a sleeping bag with someone else who is naked.”
Enjolras pulled his t-shirt over his head, trying to keep his face calm as his head reemerged from the cotton. Why had Grantaire said that? Enjolras had said that thing, that exact same thing, on the night of the blizzard. A night neither he nor Grantaire were supposed to remember.

He took a breath and then said, as calmly as humanly possible, “Where’d you hear that? The sleeping bag thing?”

Grantaire shrugs and the bedclothes rustle. “It was on an old episode of the X-Files or something.”

Enjolras tugged down his pajama bottoms. “Is that the one where Mulder and Scully got lost in the Everglades?”

“Sounds about right,” Grantaire’s eyes flutter. “God, you are such a nerd. C’mere,” he grabbed Enjolras’ wrist and tugged him into bed, promptly curling up into the big spoon position around Enjolras. Grantaire yawned and popped his neck, then settled his head on Enjolras’ shoulder.

“Thanks for being my personal furnace, E,” Grantaire mumbled into his back. He fell silent. A few minutes went by and Grantaire’s breathing evened out.

“Grantaire?” Enjolras ventured. Nothing. He leans back against Grantaire. Still nothing. Enjolras tried something: he shifted onto his back pushing Grantaire away for just a moment. Grantaire snuggled back up against him almost immediately, nestled his head onto Enjolras’ chest. This is nice, Enjolras thought sleepily, getting a nose full of Grantaire’s curls. He drifted off to sleep, tangled up with a boy who is starting to be a comfortable fixture in his bed.

The next day, the whole group goes sledding. Grantaire begs Enjolras to fit on a tiny plastic disk with him and careen down the sledding hill. They went off course, hit a small bump and crashed into a snow bank. Grantaire landed in the snow and Enjolras landed on Grantaire. It was not terrible.

The next night, Enjolras lifts up the blanket without even asking and Grantaire joins him. It was not terrible.

On Saturday, their final day at the cabin, the group goes skiing again and Enjolras, miracles of miracles, decides to partipate. Grantaire trades in his snowboard for a pair of skis and spends the day gentle coaching Enjolras down green runs. If part of that coaching involved Enjolras being held tightly in front of Grantaire, his skis bracketed inside of the other boy’s as they slowly snow-plowed down the mountain, well. That’s a totally legitimate teaching position. Granted, it was mainly employed by parents helping small children but… Enjolras didn’t need to know that.

On Saturday night, their final night at the cabin, Enjolras stayed up late chatting with Combeferre in front of the fire. When he finally got down to their room, the lights are off and the sound of breathing betrays the fact that Grantaire is already asleep. But there isn’t a lump in the extra bed. Grantaire had fallen fast asleep in their bed, on his side.

Enjolras smiled in the darkness, slid into bed and let Grantaire’s warmth envelop him.

And now, on the car ride home, Enjolras wants to ask if this is going to continue. If Grantaire wants to keep sleeping in his bed, or if this is just something reserved for holiday weekends in chilly mountain cabins. But Enjolras can’t ask those questions, because Courfeyrac is babbling on about his play and Combeferre is choosing podcasts and Grantaire is lost, staring vacantly at the scenery as it whips by. As they get closer to home.

Combeferre finally selects a history podcast about a Revolutionary War spy with an unlikely name,
Courfeyrac pipes down and they simply listen to the podcast hosts speak in dulcet tones about the intelligence the spy gathered while he was sewing pants for British officers.

Every so often, Combeferre would reach his hand into the backseat, palm upturned and fingers stretched toward Courfeyrac, who would invariably reach his own hand up to enmesh his fingers with Combeferre’s. They would stay like that for a bit, hand entwined, and then Combeferre would eventually take his hand back. It was simply and lovely.

Enjolras wondered what Grantaire would do if he reached his own hand into the backseat. Would he wordlessly take it, like Courfeyrac had done? Would he swat it away? Would he try to give Enjolras a low-five? Would he even notice?

It wouldn’t be out of the question if they held hands. They’d done it before. At various points during the last few nights, they’d woken up together, legs tangled, hands clasped. Sure, it was something that happened accidentally during the night, but would it be so far out of the question to want to consciously do it during daylight hours.

Enjolras glances in the rearview mirror again. Grantaire is looking at him. Enjolras ventures a smile in the mirror. Grantaire smiles back, before turning his head and gazing back out the window.

Okay. Here goes.

Enjolras slides his right hand off the wheel and slowly reaches it along the side of the driver’s seat. His palm is outstretched toward Grantaire. He wiggles his fingers ever so slightly.

Nothing. Maybe his hand is masked by the bags around Grantaire’s feet. He moves his hand slightly higher. There is a rustling sound as he bumps one of the bags.

“Uh, E? What are you doing?” Courfeyrac asks.

Shit. The wrong person definitely noticed this.

Enjolras can only manage an “um,” and he begins to withdraw his hand. His forearm is slightly stuck between the console and the seat. Brilliant.

Courfeyrac lets out a bark of laughter. “Oh, duh,” he exclaims, “Sorry, E.” Enjolras is relieved for a moment, but it is short lived.

There is a crinkle of cellophane and Enjolras’ hand is filled with dry bits of something cold. He pulls his hand into the front seat—tugging a bit to get it unstuck—and looks into his palm.

It’s filled with bits of jerky.

“Next time you want snacks, E, you just have to ask,” Courfeyrac informs him. “Also, that was the last of the jerky, so… we’re gonna need to make a pit stop somewhere.”

Combeferre pauses the podcast. “Courf, how much more jerky do you need? I feel like you’ve eaten at least an entire ungulate this weekend.”

“A what?” Courfeyrac, Grantaire and Enjolras reply in unison.

“Guys, seriously?” Combeferre says. “You don’t know what an ‘ungulate’ is? It was an SAT word…”
No one responds. Combeferre sighs. “It means ‘hooved mammal.’”

“Poor ‘Ferre, always the smartest one in the room. Or vehicle,” Courfeyrac sits up and leans forward onto the back of Combeferre’s seat. “Vacation equals snacks, babe,” he informs his boyfriend. “And I’ve decided that we are technically on vacation until we step inside the frat, so… more jerky, please.”

A road sign whips by then, advertising a gas station. Enjolras doesn’t particularly want to buy Courfeyrac any more dried meat, but they need gas. And it would be an opportune moment to step out the car and regain his composure after his epic hand-holding fail.

The gas station is the same rustic outpost where Grantaire and Enjolras stopped on their way up. As they pull up to the gas pump, Enjolras tries to give Grantaire a stern warning about antler wreaths, but he and Courfeyrac practically evaporate from the backseat the second Enjolras pulls the parking break.

“You know that they’re going to come back with, like, eighteen antler things, right?” Combeferre says as they both step out of the car. “And those will probably be our Christmas gifts. The entire house is going to get antler art for Christmas and it is your fault, Enjolras.”

Enjolras knocks him gently on the arm and hands him the credit card.

The mountain air is cold and biting. Enjolras pulls his hoodie over his curls and the sharp smell of tobacco floods his nose. Oh yeah, this is most definitely not his sweatshirt.

That detail is not lost on Combeferre, who gives Enjolras a sidelong glance as he swipes the credit card through the gas pump. But Combeferre doesn’t comment further. His eyes have followed Courfeyrac across the parking lot, where he’s holding Grantaire firmly by the arm as they dash into the shop.

“Ferre?”

“Hmm?” Combeferre mutters absently. His eyes are still on his boyfriends retreating figure.

“Everything okay?”

“Sure,” Combeferre replies, but doesn’t elaborate.

The tank takes forever to fill. Enjolras and Combeferre head into the shop to pay and grab a cup of coffee to combat the chill. A small brass bell tinkles merrily as they push the door open. Courfeyrac and Grantaire, already at the register, whip toward the entrance, identical expressions of guilt on their faces. They have one giant holiday antler wreath and armfuls of jerky. Dammit. Enjolras should have sent Combeferre in with them to supervise.

The clerk, an elderly woman wearing a buffalo plaid shirt that threatens to engulf her tiny frame, hands them the receipt as the door closes behind them with another tinkle of the bell.

“No returns!” Courfeyrac announces, preempting Enjolras’ lecture about rustic souvenirs. “Sorry, E! But we just supported a local business, so… don’t be mad.”

Enjolras just shakes his head and heads toward the coffee station. Grantaire’s voice stops him.

“Enjolras,” Grantaire says. Enjolras turns around. Grantaire is holding two steaming to-go cups. “I already got you one. If you want?”
Enjolras’ chest tightens even more. He did want.

R

Grantaire had assumed that, when they arrived back at the frat, everyone would in for a nice, quiet evening to recuperate after a weekend of travel, winter sports, and drinking. He thought that everyone would lounge around, maybe watch a movie, probably drink some beers. Grantaire figured that he would most likely head to bed early and give himself plenty of time to readjust to his previous, Enjolras-free sleeping arrangement.

In this, as in so many other things, Grantaire is dead wrong.

When he walks in the door, he enters a veritable construction zone. A dozen or so plastic storage crates are scattered around the living room, the furniture is in the process of being displaced and an enormous pine tree is propped up in the corner. Feuilly and Bahorel are crouched at its base, peering into the thick branches and holding pieces of a tree stand.

“Oh no,” Enjolras mutters, as he steps through the door behind Grantaire.

“Ignore him, R!” Bahorel instructs from across the room. “Enjolras hates Christmas.”

“I do not hate Christmas, Bahorel,” Enjolras says indignantly. “But isn’t this a little early? I mean, Thanksgiving is barely even over. I was hoping that we’d have a little time to focus on finals before we started thinking about—“

“Christmas decorations! Yay!” Courfeyrac exclaims, joining them all in the living room. “Oh my god, this is gonna be the best holiday season ever!”

Grantaire drops his backpack on the floor near the sofa, which has been pivoted out of its normal position to make room for the tree. A triangle of dust cleanly delineates the sofa’s usual resting place; a scattering of debris—bottle caps, a random pen, a few coins—fills the newly uncovered space. Marius and Cosette have a broom and dustpan at the ready. Grantaire thinks that Cosette must be crazy in love with Marius if she’s willing to sift through four months of frat house floor trash. The kid should probably lock that down.

“When did you guys even have time to buy a tree?” Grantaire asks.

Feuilly shrugs. At least, Grantaire thinks he shrugs. Feuilly’s upper half is jammed under the tree, and he makes some sort of gesture causes the branches to sway slightly. “We left earlier than you guys did,” he says, muffled by the boughs.

“Early enough to stop at a tree farm, buy a tree, load a tree and then unload a tree?” Grantaire replies.

Bahorel answers this time. “Eh, we’re pretty efficient. Plus you were driving with Enjolras, and Enjolras drives like my mom.”

“I do not,” Enjolras pouts.

“Sure you don’t, buddy. Uh, remind me again: where do you put your hands on the wheel?”

“Ten and two,” Enjolras instantly replies.

Bahorel laughs. “Thanks, mom.”
The room is buzzing with holiday excitement. Everyone is moving furniture, or rooting through boxes of decorations, or helping secure the tree. Enjolras stands at the edge, his overnight bag still in his hands, looking unsure.

Jehan calls out to him. “Enjolras, do you want to help me untangle these lights?”

There is a long pause. Enjolras seems torn. (Grantaire can’t imagine why: untangling Christmas lights is the worst.) He finally shakes his head. “Actually, I have a paper due tomorrow morning, Jehan. I should probably go up and give it one more proof read.”

“We’ll miss you!” Jehan is unfazed. He continues picking at the ball of lights.

Grantaire manages to catch Enjolras’ eye, getting a quick smile before he disappears upstairs.

All right. They’re back at the house. Things are back to normal. This sucks.

Grantaire doesn’t have too much time to wallow in self-pity. Courfeyrac enlists his help with the wreath (“Does it have to go above the fireplace?” Joly worries. “That seems sort of… morbid.”), putting Grantaire to work holding it up while Courfeyrac adjusts the position from across the room.

“Lower,” Courfeyrac instructs.

Grantaire moves it an inch lower.

“No, not that low. A little higher.”

Grantaire moves it up.

“A little more…”

Grantaire does.

“A little more… perfect!”

He can’t be one hundred percent sure, but Grantaire thinks that this is exactly where the wreath had started.

Marius is calling out an inventory from the floor near the couch. “Anyone missing a Bio textbook? A Swiss Army knife? A Twinkie?” There are shouts when the item is claimed, thuds when an unclaimed item is tossed in the lost and found bin. Grantaire is tempted to check out the Swiss Army knife, if it doesn’t find its owner. He’s totally focused on holding the wreath level while Courfeyrac marks where they should put drill holes for hooks and he couldn’t look at the when Marius held it up. If the knife is anything above the standard model, Grantaire is totally gonna call dibs on it. Pocket knives can come in handy.

Under the couch proves to be a veritable black hole. Marius and Cosette are still digging out random items: more change, a roll of condoms still in their wrappers (“Thank god,” Joly says with a shudder), a single cotton athletic sock. “Anyone missing a book?” Marius calls out. “Or, no… not a book. A journal thing-y?”

His query is met with a chorus of no’s.

“Check with Jehan,” Grantaire instructs, still focused on the wreath. “He’s got a million notebooks. It’s probably one of his.” Courfeyrac narrowly misses hitting Grantaire’s finger with a hammer.

There is an echo of footsteps and someone, presumably Cosette, heads up the stairs to Jehan’s
Grantaire turns his full attention to keeping Courfeyrac from smashing anything that oughtn’t be smashed.

Enjolras taps his fingers absent-mindedly against his thigh. He’s unpacked, put all his dirty clothes in the laundry bin, and knows that he should get going on his homework, but…he can’t seem to focus. After a weekend full of partying with his friends, he’d usually be in desperate need of personal time, but the idea of hanging out all night in his empty suite is depressing. He’d gotten used to having someone in bed with him. He’d gotten used to having Grantaire in bed with him.

He told everyone he was going to work on his Ethics in Politics paper, so he might as get to work. Enjolras sits down at his dark wood desk and flips his laptop open. It’s cold and takes a moment to whir to life.

He left his laptop at the frat all weekend. He didn’t take it with him. That is so beyond out of character that he barely recognizes himself.

Enjolras finished his essay before they left for the cabin, but he generally likes to proofread this work a couple of times before he hands it in. Once, in high school, he’d turned in a paper with the incorrect form of “there” and almost died of shame. This essay, though, is in pretty good shape. Enjolras reads it aloud quietly, lips barely moving. His second paragraph is a criticism of the electoral caucusing process. He wonders what Grantaire would say about it.

He’s only downstairs and down the hall. Enjolras could just ask him.

But the house is quiet. The group finished preliminary holiday decorations about an hour ago and, judging by quiet that fills the house, everyone has retreated to their own separate rooms to recuperate from the weekend and prepare for finals.

Grantaire probably needs his space. Or he could be sleeping.

Enjolras’ phone sites on the desk next to his computer.

Or Enjolras could text him.

If Grantaire is sleeping, the text won’t disrupt him.

If he’s working, maybe he could use the distraction.

Enjolras taps out a quick message.

To Grantaire: What are your thoughts on caucusing?

He puts in back facedown on the desk, so he can’t see if those maddening ellipses are appearing on the screen.

He doesn’t need to know if the message has been read or if Grantaire is replying or if…

Ping. Followed by another two more quick alerts.

Enjolras snatches up his phone and reads:

From Grantaire: As long as it's between 2 consenting adults.
From Grantaire: Get it? CAUCusing?

From Grantaire: jk. sorry. Too much time w courf this wknd. Terrible influence.

Another message comes in.

From Grantaire: Srsly, tho? caucusing is one of the dumbest things. Maybe it worked back in olde timey times when there were, like, 58 people per county, but now it’s irrelevant.

Enjolras grins to himself and types a reply. Grantaire replies to his reply. Enjolras replies to Grantaire’s reply to his reply. This goes on for a while.

To Grantaire: I suppose u have a better plan?

From Grantaire: Duh.

From Grantaire: I’d tell you about it, but too much to text. I’ll tell u about it in person sometime.

Enjolras chews on his lip for a second, then brashly types out another text.

To Grantaire: U busy now?

There is no reply, but after a moment, Enjolras hears the rapid beat of footsteps on the steps to the presidential suite. He quickly smooths his hair and opens the door before Grantaire can even knock.

R

It’s not like Grantaire had schemed to get back into Enjolras’ bed again. But when the opportunity arouse, he’d have been a fool not seize it. The first night back at the house, he accidentally dozed off in Enjolras’ room while they were in discussing electoral procedure. Enjolras had nudged him awake and tentatively asked if he wanted to stay the night. (“It’s easier than going all the way downstairs,” Grantaire had sleepily agreed, dragging himself off the rug and climbing into bed. “Plus, it’s cold, right?”)

The second night, he’d tried reading up for his art history finale while lying on Enjolras’ king sized bed, but wound up with his face smashed into his textbook, drooling slightly on an illustration of Liberty Leading the People.” Enjolras hadn’t said anything, just nudged him aside and crawled into bed.

On the third night, Grantaire was sitting in one of Enjolras’ armchairs, trying to clean up some of his sketches, when Enjolras stood up from his desk, stretched out his neck and began to pull his shirt over his head.

“All right,” Enjolras said, his golden curls a mess as his head emerged from the shirt. “It’s definitely time for bed.”

“Oh, right,” Grantaire replied, snapping his sketchbook shut and staggering to his feet. He headed for the door. “I’ll see you tomorrow, E.”

“Wait!” Enjolras didn’t quite shout, but there was still urgency in his voice. “I meant that, uh, we should go to bed. If you want, I mean.”

Oh, Grantaire wanted.

It became an unspoken agreement for the rest of the week. They would study together up in
Enjolras’ room, then go to bed. They spent every night that week tangled together, then Grantaire would sneak out of Enjolras’ room and back to his own before the frat woke up.

Grantaire isn’t sure why they’re being sneaky. It’s not like they’re even doing anything illicit, they’re just sleeping, but he just doesn’t want to share this information with everyone in the frat just yet.

“You’re going to Courf’s play tonight, right?” Enjolras mutters to Grantaire from the depths of the bedding. It is Friday morning and Grantaire has just gotten his jeans on and is heading out the door. He turns back. The room is still a cool green in the dawn light, and Grantaire can’t make out Enjolras’ face in the shadows.

“Yeah, I’m going;” he replies. “I’ve gotta support an ABX brother. Plus, Courf would straight-up murder me if I missed it.”

“Cool,” Enjolras says, curling over in the nest of blankets. “Sit by me, okay?”

“Oh, E,” Grantaire softly closes the door and creeps down the hall. “It’s a date.”

---

Enjolras can barely see across the theater lobby, but his ears are inundated with enthusiastic babbling as he pushes his way through the crowd in search of his friends. Enjolras isn’t sure if everyone at the party is excited about the performance, or the free champagne at the reception, but atmosphere is festive.

Courfeyrac had been great in the show, or so Enjolras thought. It was hard to tell sometimes with your friends. Courfeyrac onstage was a lot like Courfeyrac in life: energetic, charismatic and constantly singing.

Enjolras pushes onto his tiptoes, surveying the crowd for a moment. He’d had to pee after the show and had somehow lost Combeferre and Grantaire in the throng of people. It isn’t a large lobby, but it is packed.

A hand touches his lower back and Enjolras turns toward it, sure he’s going to see Grantaire at the end of that intimate gesture.

It is not Grantaire.

A brunette boy is smiling up at him.

“You’re Courfeyrac’s friend, right?” The boy asks. Enjolras thinks he might have been in the play but he wasn’t really paying attention to anyone on stage other than Courfeyrac. There is eyeliner smudged around his eyes. So, he was either in the cast of the show or going through a phase. Either way, Enjolras isn’t interested.

“Yeah, have you seen him?”

The boy shakes his head dismissively, then proceeds to tell Enjolras about the previous four times they’d apparently met and what Enjolras had said to him each time. Uh oh.

Enjolras begins to move away, but the crowd is too thick for a quick escape. The boy trails after him.
“Courf should be out in a minute or two. He’ll be coming up those stairs.” The boy nods toward an unmarked metal door on the near wall.

Enjolras can probably wait.

Grantaire isn’t sure he’s ever been alone with Combeferre before. They both sit on a low, cushioned bench as the party presses around them. Grantaire isn’t exactly sure what to say. This is Enjolras’ best friend. He should probably do something to impress him.

“So, uh,” Grantaire begins badly, “Courfeyrac was really great in the show.”

This is, apparently, the correct thing to say because Combeferre beams.

“He was, wasn’t he?”

The crowd ebbs and flows around them. Grantaire spots Jehan over in the corner, nibbling on cheese from a tiny plate and talking to Bahorel.

The crowd parts and Courfeyrac comes in to view. He’s standing across the room, a sea of people between them. The girl who played opposite him has her arm curled around his arm. Another guy from the cast is looking up at him adoringly. There is a small crowd gathered around him, each face worshipful. The girl reaches up and smooths a wayward curl out of Courfeyrac’s eyes.

Grantaire hazards a glance at Combeferre, who is gazing at Courfeyrac. His face is gently blank, but his eyes are so sad. Grantaire has never seen Combeferre look like this before. Usually he’s so calm and collected but now he just looks… defeated.

Grantaire does something crazy: he puts his hand on Combeferre’s. Combeferre looks over at him, surprised, then squeezes Grantaire’s hand back.

“You okay?” Grantaire tries not to make the question too heavy, but the look on Combeferre’s face was so melancholy.

Combeferre nods. “Yeah, I’m fine. It’s just…” He trails off.

Grantaire picks it up. “But it’s hard loving someone who’s so universally adored?”

“Pretty much.”

“Are you guys…?” Grantaire doesn’t know how to finish the question, but Combeferre helps him out.

“No, we’re fine. We’re great, actually. But sometimes I see him with other people, flirting, and he looks so… natural. In his element. Happy. I know he loves me. He’d never do anything, but. Just look at him.”

Courfeyrac is glowing. His grin is huge. He says something to his small audience and they erupt in laughter.

Combeferre is right. Courfeyrac is one hundred percent in his element right now. Grantaire has seen him work it at parties and such, but this is masterful.

Then Courfeyrac glances over to their side of the room and his face lights up when he spots them. Combeferre waves shyly. Courfeyrac’s face glows.
Yeah, Combeferre has nothing to worry about.

“I should go join him,” Combeferre says, standing up and letting go of Grantaire’s hand. “Thanks, R. I hate to be a sadist, but sometimes it helps to have someone who understands how you feel.”

Combeferre disappears into the crowd before he can explain that. What does he mean that Grantaire understands how he feels?

Before he has time to process Combeferre’s statement, Grantaire catches sight of Enjolras, near the stage door. He’s standing brittly against the wall, a boy leaning into his personal space. Enjolras gazes down at the boy inscrutably. Grantaire knows that look. Enjolras is running out of patience and if this conversation isn’t interrupted soon, a certain flirty boy is about to get snapped at.

Grantaire sighs, pulls himself to his feat and crosses the room to save Enjolras, a knight in scruffy blue jeans.

“Hi!” Grantaire says, too brightly and sidles up to Enjolras. The boy instantly leans away. “I’ve been looking for you.” He rests his head on Enjolras’ shoulder. Well, the side of his his arm. Grantaire isn’t really tall enough to properly rest his head on Enjolras’ shoulder.

The boy looks dismayed. Grantaire can’t see Enjolras, but he feels Enjolras’ head tip over to rest on his. This was a good tactic to take.

“I was wondering when you’d find me,” Enjolras mumurs. “This is…”

“Brandt,” the boy says, but he starts to move away. “I was in the show. Anyway, just wanted to say hi. You should check out the cheese table.”

“That was brilliant.” Enjolras mutters against Grantaire’s curls, pulling them more tightly together. “Why couldn’t you have done that ten minutes ago?”

“Sorry, E. I didn’t realize you were in distress.”

Grantaire smiles. “You know, if you didn’t want to get hit on at this thing, you could’ve just brought an actual date.”

Enjolras drapes himself over Grantaire’s shoulders from behind, pulling Grantaire to him. “I don’t need a date, I have you.” He rests his chin on top of Grantaire’s curls and Grantaire is beyond grateful that Enjolras can’t see his face right now.

“Wow, E. You know how to make a guy feel special.” Grantaire laughs, but it is hollow.

Without moving his chin off of Grantaire’s head, Enjolras grasps him by the shoulders and begins to steer him through the crowd.

“Are you using me as a human shield?”

“Yep, and now I’m gonna need you to defend me as I get some cheese.”

Grantiare mock sighs. “As you wish.”

###

Saturday mornings are meant for staying in bed. But when you’re sharing a bed with a certain someone and you don’t want a house full of frat boys to know about it, you’ve got to get up early.
Enjolras hardly budges when Grantaire climbs out of bed. Normally, he wakes up a little but last night, he’d had a couple of glasses of wine at the party and Enjolras isn’t typically a wine drinker. Grantaire isn’t surprised that he’s still passed out. What did surprise him, however, was the fact that wine-drunk Enjolras had pressed a soft kiss on the top of his head as they drifted off to sleep the previous night.

Grantaire pulls his gray dress shirt over his head. It’s a wrinkly mess but no one will see him between here and his own room. What the hell did Enjolras mean by that?

It was evidence of two very different hypotheses: either Enjolras got overly affectionate when he was intoxicated and just went around kissing anybody at any time or he was interested in Grantaire and their kiss during the blizzard actually meant something.

They need to have a conversation.

Conversations are pretty much Grantaire’s least favorite thing, but this is really getting ridiculous.

Grantaire balls his pants up under one arm and grabs his shoes and socks. That conversation can wait, however, until later. Enjolras needs to sleep and Grantaire needs to get back to his own room before the rest of the house wakes up. He steals one more glance at the dark lump on the bed and pulls the door shut with a small click.

“Well, well, well, look what we have here.”

Grantaire wheels around, eyes wide. Courfeyrac and Bahorel are sitting against the wall at the bottom of the small set of stairs, facing Enjolras’s room, still dressed in their party clothes from the night before.

They each have a cup of coffee in their hands and a third mug sits on the floor between them, wisps of steam escaping from the surface. This is not a crazy random happenstance, it’s a stakeout.

Grantaire runs a hand through his curls and tries to look nonchalant. “Oh, hey.”

Courfeyrac looks offended. “Oh, hey? Oh, hey?! Oh, hey, says the guy who just got busted as fuck leaving Enjolras’ room at 6:30am. In his underwear? Clutching his clothes? This is a walk of shame if I ever saw one.”

“I think walk of shame is a tad judgemental,” Bahorel objects.

“You’re right, Bahorel, and I withdraw the statement. There’s nothing shameful in finally locking down the guy you’ve been pining over for three months. Imma call it a walk of triumph!”

Grantaire doesn’t care what Courfeyrac calls it. They need to get out of here before they wake Enjolras up and he comes to see what the noise is about. That’ll only add fuel to the fire.

“I haven’t been pining.”

“Oh, really?” Courfeyrac grins. “Then what exactly do you call it?”

“Nothing. It’s nothing. And I’ve just been crashing in E’s room because it’s so cold out. And Bahorel snores. And, uh, reasons.”

“Yeah, the reason is that you’re stupid in love with him and now that you two are banging—“ Bahorel makes the banging gesture with his large hands.
This is escalating quickly.

“Whoa. Whoa, dude. No. It’s not like that at all,” Grantaire explains the situation as he rushes them down the hallway.

Grantaire hopes that they’ll leave him alone once they get to his and Bahorel’s suite, but Courfeyrac snags him as he tries to head into his bedroom and plops him down on the sofa in the common area.

“Grantaire, my child, this has to stop.” Courfeyrac looks serious.

“Where’s Combeferre?” Grantaire deflects. If he can just distract Courfeyrac, maybe they won’t have to have this terrible conversation and he can just disappear into his room and sleep for the rest of the day.

“He’s busy.” Courfeyrac won’t be misdirected. “We’re here to talk about you and your woefully oblivious love life.”

“It’s not woefully oblivious.”

Courfeyrac sighs. “You think you and Enjolras have just been sharing a bed for two weeks because you’re bros and that’s what bros do. Are you insane? Are you an actual insane person, Grantaire?

“Because normal, sane people do not start a common-law relationship with their friend, who they also happen to be stupid in love with.” Courfeyrac pauses, then adds an obligatory, “duh,” just for emphasis.

It takes two more minutes of Grantaire arguing his position, but eventually Courfeyrac and Bahorel wear him down. “Fine,” he says softly, admitting defeat. “You’re right. I’m stupid for him.”

Courfeyrac jumps up and catches Bahorel’s hand for a high five. “Finally! Oh my god, I’ve been waiting forever to hear you say those words, you giant fucking loser. Now, we just need E to admit it, then you two crazy kids can get married, buy a condo and adopt a couple of pug dogs.”

“Courf—“ Grantaire begins to protest, but Courfeyrac swiftly cuts him off.

“No,” he grabs Grantaire by the shoulders and looks him straight in the eye. Deadly serious. “Time to stop playing, R. I know that you do this idiotic thing where you try to talk yourself out of believing that anyone could ever possibly be into you, or would want to see your artwork, or would want to love you, or whatever.”

Grantaire says nothing.

“R, we love you.”

“Yep.” Bahorel has decided to add something to the conversation. Grantaire waits for more. There is none.

After an awkward pause, Courfeyrac continues, “You’re our friend, our housemate and, thanks to the good old fashioned Greek system, you’re our brother. Every single person in this house loves you and that extends to Enjolras.”

“We’re friends, Courf—“

“Oh my god, stop. If I have to hear that tired, bullshit statement one more time, I’m gonna kick-
punch.” Grantaire doesn’t really know what that means. “You and Enjolras are so much more than friends. You do practically everything together: you have brunch, you walk to class, you’ve slept in the same fucking bed for, like, the last week. You don’t do that with anyone else. Hell, he doesn’t do that with anyone else.”

Grantaire is silent. Courfeyrac is correct. The spiderwebs of subterfuge that he’d been spinning are quickly ripped away. They aren’t just friends.

“Look, kid,” Courfeyrac says, even though Grantaire is at least two years older than him. “I’ve known Enjolras for a long time. He doesn’t get close to people easily, and I know that he chooses his friends carefully. He’s aloof and can be a bit of a dick but… when he lets you in, you realize that he’s a really great guy.”

Courfeyrac takes a deep breath, then continues slowly. There is something different about his tone. “Honestly, that’s why it took me and Combeferre so long to get together. I always just figured that if ‘Ferre were into dudes, he’d probably be in love with Enjolras. I kinda waited, you know? When he came out in twelfth grade, I expected the other shoe to drop, too. Combeferre sat me down right before the holidays and told me he was gay. I assumed the next logical statement to be ‘and I’m dating Enjolras,’ but that never happened.

“I could be in love with my best friend and not worry about him dating my other best friend. I mean, it was still painful and full of pining, but at least it wasn’t entirely hopeless.”

Grantaire cuts in. “Courf? You’ve been in love with Combeferre since high school?”

“Pfft,” Courfeyrac simply snorts in response. “Dude, I’ve been in love with Combeferre since the second I met him. But I didn’t really realize it at the time, considering we were in kindergarten and most five year olds don’t really have the cognitive ability to process that emotion. I just wanted to bring him fruit snacks and make sure he had all the best colors of crayons.

“The first time I realized it, though, was in high school. The Homecoming dance was coming up and we were all trying to decide whether or not to take dates. Enjolras flat out refused. I believed his exact words were “I seriously doubt that there are any other gay kids in this school who would be willing to out themselves at a dance. And even if there were, I probably wouldn’t want to go with them.” He was such a picky little shit, even then.” Courfeyrac pauses to consider this. “Maybe even more back then. Believe it or not, R, he’s mellowed out a bit since high school.”

If this current incarnation of Enjolras was considered mellow, Grantaire would love to see the non-mellow version. He was probably tossing over desks and building barricades and shit to protest standardized tests or whatever.

“So, he’s never…” Grantaire can’t quite finish the thought.

Courfeyrac shakes his head. “Nah, he’s… you know. I mean, I don’t know how much “you know,” but he’s hooked up with a couple of guys. There was that one dude at the national debate finals our junior year, then another guy at his internship after we graduated. But nothing ever really lasted,” Courfeyrac grins at the memory.

“I spent the majority of freshman trying to throw him together with one of the many, many pretty gay boys who were fawning all over him, but it only really worked once or twice. He’d never call them back or return their texts. And he had this face, this scrunched up, put out little frown that he’d always make when one of his hook-ups would text him.”

“Awesome, Courf,” Grantaire glares at him. This conversation has been the opposite of helpful. He
could only imagine Enjolras making that face at him one day. “Thanks for making me feel terrible —”

“No!” Courfeyrac interrupts. “See, that’s the thing, R. He doesn’t sleep with people. He doesn’t cuddle. He doesn’t let hook-ups spend the night. He doesn’t buy them fancy brunch. He doesn’t do any of the things that he’s currently doing with you and you two (if you are to be believed) haven’t even done anything physical.

“This is the behavior of a man in love, Grantaire. And the man in question just so happens to be in love with you.”

Grantaire says nothing. Everything Courfeyrac has said makes perfect sense, even if it is completely illogical. How could someone like Enjolras—handsome, passionate, intelligent, strangely funny—be interested in a grungy mess like him?

Bahorel and Courfeyrac just stare at him. No one is talking.

“Courfeyrac,” Grantaire says softly, maybe only to break the silence. “What do I do?”

“Ask him out, asshat,” Bahorel says.

“There is literally no way I can do that,” Grantaire says. “Also, I was asking Courf.”

Courfeyrac shrugs. “I concur with Bahorel. You need to ask him out. Also, you are an asshat.”

Bahorel slings one arm around Courfeyrac’s shoulders. “You’ve done things with him a billion times. Just ask him to go someplace with you, and then add that, at the end the excursion, you’d really like to put his dick in your mouth.”

“God, Bahorel!” Grantaire says, shoving Bahorel’s arm off of him. Bahorel retaliates and traps Grantaire in a headlock.

“You got a better idea?” he asks, digging his knuckles into Grantaire’s curls.

“Ow, dude,” Grantaire whines. “No, no I do not have a better idea.”

“I do,” Courfeyrac’s eyes are shining and that is always a bad sign that shit is about to hit the fan. He shifts into a British dialect, “I suppose you wonder why I’ve called you in here.”

“Courf, no.” Grantaire narrows his eyes. Fake-British Courfeyrac is the worst Courfeyrac.

“I do what I want, mate. Anyway, there happens to be a Fancy Party coming up, thrown by the coolest fraternity on campus, if not the world, and I think this would be a prime opportunity for you to suck it up, stop being a wanker, and fucking ask Enjolras to go with you.”

Grantaire swallows. “Okay.”

“Okay?” Bahorel releases him from the headlock.

“Okay?!” Courfeyrac stops being British.

Courfeyrac and Bahorel are both exuberant. They immediately begin making plans for Grantaire’s promposal.

“Make it romantic—“
“No! It needs to stay simple—“

“But he deserves a grand gesture—“

“Grantaire doesn’t want to scare him away.”

Finally, they reach a consensus: Grantaire is going to talk to Enjolras, casually, that night. Courfeyrac helpfully writes out short a statement on scrap of paper: *This is a date.*

“If you get too nervous and forget to mention that this is an actual date, just shove this card at him,” Courfeyrac says. “I don’t want to be subject to this bullshit friend charade for a moment longer.”

Everything is set. All he needs to do is make it through this day. Grantaire can do this.

Enjolras emerges from the shower, then practically has a heart attack when he realizes that Combeferre and Jehan are sitting on his bed.

“What are you guys—why are you—I’m naked!”

“Seen it before, Enjolras,” Combeferre shrugs. “We need to talk to you.”

“And the only way to manage that is to ambush me outside my shower? I’ll be downstairs in, like, ten minutes.”

“Yeah, but this is both urgent and sensitive, love,” Jehan adds.

Enjolras doesn’t really have anything to do today, urgent or otherwise, but he’s a bit chafed by the invasion. There’s something serious in both of his friends’ manner, like they’re about to have an intervention or a--

“You need to ask Grantaire to the Fancy Party,” Combeferre says, cutting right to the chase.

Enjolras pauses for a moment, unsure how to tackle this statement, but before he can speak, Jehan chimes in, “You like him.”

That’s an understatement.

Jehan continues. “He likes you. Everyone in the house knows this but the two of you. You guys need to get it together.”

The million excuses that Enjolras has for this problem fly out of his head. His only remaining thought is of Grantaire pushing him away in front of the fire. Rejecting his kiss. Enjolras can still feel the burn of shame. Grantaire had said no, Enjolras pushed the issue. Grantaire had said no again.

This wasn’t about his feelings for Grantaire. This was about Grantaire’s lack of feelings for him.

“Guys,” Enjolras begins, perching on the edge of the bed. “He’s not—“

“Stop speculating about his feelings, Enjolras,” Combeferre cuts him off.

“I’m not speculating, I know.”
“You know nothing. Are you actually inside his brain? Are you a mind reader? Can you hear his thoughts?”
“I can read human behavior.”

“You’re not a good at that as you think you are Enjolras.”

What did *that* mean?

“You understand groups of people,” Combeferre explains. “The movements and actions of many. But when it comes to individuals, my friend, you are woefully oblivious.”

Enjolras does not reply, he simply stares at the bed. There is a still a Grantaire-shape in the sheets, a dent from his head on the pillow on his side of the bed. His side of the bed. Grantaire had stayed up here enough that half of the bed was claimed as his, although neither had ever said it. It was unquestionably Grantaire’s.

Enjolras looks up. Combeferre is still studying him, grey eyes soft. He looks at Jehan, who smiles gently, noticing the two human shaped dents in the bed. “You should see the way he looks at you Enjolras, when you aren’t looking. Actually, you should see the way you two have been looking at each other lately.”

“Jehan, I kissed him.” The confession tumbles out. Enjolras should be relieved, but he isn’t.

“What?! Yay!” Jehan throws his arms around Enjolras.

“Don’t yay yet, buddy.” Enjolras pushes Jehan back to arms length and looks at him. “He asked me to stop.”

“He… what?”

“He asked me to stop,” Enjolras keeps his voice calm, but can feel his face flush. It is still hard to talk about. Embarrassing. “He said no, he pushed me away. So… whatever theory you two are cooking up, you can stop. Grantaire isn’t interested.”

Combeferre and Jehan exchange a look. Then Jehan hands Enjolras something: a small black notebook, a bit battered but well-loved.

“What is this?”

“Open it,” Jehan replied, opening the cover and revealing the first page. Drawings. Sketches. Oh, it’s Grantaire’s sketchbook.

“Jehan, why do you have this?” Enjolras asks, flipping through the pages.

“Marius found it under the couch. He thought it was mine. It is definitely not mine.”

The first page is just scribbles. Circles, spirals, a couple of vaguely human shapes that have been scratched out with harsh black strokes. Then the next several pages feature sketches of crowds of people. Enjolras recognized the Student Center. Here are a group of faceless people sprawled out on the quad, their bodies sketched with care but their faces blank.

Then his own face is staring at him from the page.

Enjolras is no judge of art, but he thinks it is a very good sketch. Then there’s another. And another. About three quarters of the way through the book, after a drawing of Cosette, the sketches
stop. The remaining pages are crisp and untouched.

Enjolras looked at the date. August. Grantaire had drawn him like this in August.

“Marius found it under the couch,” Jehan repeats. “I thought you needed to see it.”

Enjolras’ says nothing.

Combeferre is the first one to break the silence. “So, I don’t think you are exactly right about the way he feels about you, Enjolras.”

“But he…”

“We don’t know what is going inside that curly head, Enjolras. Just… talk to him about it.”

“I can’t.”

“Just do it.”

“Okay,” Enjolras finally breaks down. He’s worn out. Months of willful ignorance have finally taken their toll on him.

Combeferre and Jehan both look surprised, as if they’d expected this argument to go on much longer.

“So? Ask him to the thing!” Jehan says.

“The thing?” Enjolras needs clarification here.

“The Fancy Party! The formal!”

That’s not an entirely terrible idea.

But Enjolras needs coffee if he’s going to be making huge, life-altering choices today. He tells Combeferre that he’s heading to the Musain but, instead of letting him walk in peace, they trail him to the Hill, offering ideas and advice.

“Get him flowers! Boys love flowers!” Jehan says, as they push their way through a crowd of students waiting in line at a brunch restaurant.

Combeferre is more strategic. “You’re going to need to make it pretty obvious, E. Super clear. You guys have been tiptoeing around this for ages. You’ve got to be really overt.”

By the time they’ve escorted Enjolras to the Café Musain, the plan has been decided: Enjolras will ask Grantaire that night. He’d have roses and champagne and he’d dress up and look nice. The words “Will you go to formal with me? As a date,” were rehearsed over and over and over, like he was learning lines for a play.

Jehan promised to make him a small card that he could hand to Grantaire in case the words started to come out wrong. “There can be no doubt that this is an actual, for-reals date.”

Enjolras has now fully embraced this plan and once he’s agreed to back something, he’s practically unstoppable. “I’ll make it perfectly clear. I’m pre-law.”

“And look how far that’s gotten you.” Combeferre looks shocked at his own comment. Clearly, dating Courfeyrac has started to build up his sassiness.
Enjolras would love to stay and trade more snark with Combeferre, but he’s gotta mission now.

“Tonight.” He promises them, grabbing them both in a quick hug, then sets off down the street, in the direction of a florist Jehan recommended. He taps out a quick text to Grantaire.

*To Grantaire: I need to talk to you. Tonight?*

Enjolras can do this.

*R*

Grantaire can’t seem to sit still. Enjolras has been absent from the house all day, and it is making him twitchy. He sits on the couch, running the plan through his head again. He’s just going to be low-key but honest. He’s going to (mostly) confess his feelings, ask Enjolras to the Fancy Party and make sure he knows it’s an actual date. Then he’s going to fall over from exhaustion, because this mental torment has been destroying him. One way or the other, at least tonight he’ll know.

Grantaire is anxious and sitting up requires far too much effort right now, so he throws himself on the living room sofa, staring blanking at the dark TV, mentally replaying his speech. *Hey, I need to tell you that I have feelings for you. Will you go to the Winter Formal with me? As a date?* It’s less than twenty five words. It’s not that hard.

Marius, Joly and Bossuet come banging into the living room a moment later, Grantaire vaguely waves at them. Marius is clutching a black garment bag and beaming.

“I bought a tux!” he exclaims.

*Bought a tux?* thinks Grantaire. Jesus, Marius. *Who buys* a tux? Oh. People who have rich parents and grandparents. People like Marius. People like Enjolras. Enjolras probably owns, like, three tuxes. Grantaire’s pulse races and he forgets his promposal entirely. He cannot be allowed to think about Enjolras in a tux while he’s asking him out, or he’ll just lose his focus and start spouting gibberish.


Marius is still babbling on about his tux. “The guy at the shop said this is the same type of tux that Tom Hiddleston wore to the Oscars last year. He also said that other people who’ve come in to get fitted have been talking about our formal. It’s pretty much *the* event of the season, R.”

Grantaire can see that. Courfeyrac has put an incredible amount of work into the planning. Plus, it’s small. Exclusivity tends to make events seem way cooler than they are.

“All the girls in Cosette’s house are super jealous that she’s going,” Marius beams. “They keep asking me who in ABX doesn’t have a date yet.”


“A couple of girls were hoping Enjolras would ask them, but I told them that he already has a date.”

Wait, what?

“Why would you do that, Marius?” Grantaire is incredulous. He cannot have heard what Marius just said correctly.
Marius looks at him like he’s an idiot. “Because he does?”

Joly and Bossuet are back. They hand beers to Marius and Grantaire, who is still a bit too stunned to say thank you. “Come on, Marius,” Joly says. “Let’s go show Courf your tux. He’s gonna die.”

They disappear up the stairs. Grantaire is still sitting stock still on the sofa, his unnoticed beer still clenched in his hand.

Oh no. Grantaire has a new understanding of why Enjolras wanted to talk to him. He already has a date. He needs to break it to Grantaire. They have just been sleeping together platonically and Enjolras needs to clarify so that Grantaire doesn’t have any wrong ideas about their relationship.

*Thank god.* Thank god he found out before he dumped his feelings out all over Enjolras; while there is a still a chance to salvage this friendship.

A text pings in on Grantaire’s phone.

*From Enjolras: U home?*

Fuck. Here they go.

---

The champagne is chilling in an ice-bucket. Small teelight candles cover the top of the desk and dresser. There is a huge bouquet of roses wrapped in tissue paper resting on the nightstand. The other five dozen roses have been reduced to petals, which now cover the bed. The florist was embarrassingly expensive, but Enjolras didn’t give two shits about the cost. He’s going do this thing and he’s going do it right, even if that means spending way too much on hothouse flowers.

He dressed himself nicely in a crisp button-down and a snug pair of trousers with a brand new pair of underwear on underneath, in case this goes really well.

He fiddles with his tie. Romantic overtures are so not his speed, but Jehan and Combeferre assured him that the plan was solid, so… he’ll go will it.

Enjolras does one more quick visual check on the room. Everything looks good. He taps out a text to Grantaire—

*To Grantaire: U home?*

--and then perches gingerly on the edge of the bed, careful not to crush any of the rose petals.

No response yet. Enjolras straightens and then un-straightens his tie.

Ping.

*From Grantaire: Up in sec*

Okay. Here they go.

There is a tentative knock on the door. Enjolras pulls it open just a bit. Just enough to see out but not so much that Grantaire can see in. Not that Grantaire is trying to look in the room. He’s standing at the bottom of the three little stairs, shuffling one scuffed grey Converse against the carpet and looking down at this feet.

“Do you wanna come in?” Enjolras’ voice is tighter than he expected. He wills himself to relax.
He fails.

“Uh, actually,” Grantaire mutters, still talking to his feet. “I’ve got a bunch of stuff to work on tonight so—“

“You can work up here,” Enjolras needs to get him in the room. Then everything will fall into place. Grantaire shakes his head. He still hasn’t looked at Enjolras.

“No, E, that’s cool. I kinda need to focus, so I’m just gonna lock myself in my room for a bit and get shit done.”

Oh no. Enjolras needs to stick to the plan. If he sticks to the plan—just tell him how you feel—everything will turn out okay.

“Wait! Before you go, I really do need to talk to you—“

Grantaire finally meets his eyes. He looks weird. “Is this about the formal thing?”

He knows. How does he know? Well, Enjolras supposes he’s been incredibly obvious. Of course Grantaire would expect to be asked out. They’ve practically been living together for the past week. Does he look weird because he expected Enjolras to do this a long time ago? Is he mad that it’s happening too late?

Enjolras clears his throat. “Yeah, it is actually.”

“It’s cool, E,” Grantaire does not let him finish. “Don’t worry about it.”

Don’t worry about it?


“I’ve already got a date, so… don’t worry about it. It’s all right.”

Enjolras clutches the door handle and tries not to fall over. His face is blank. How could Grantaire have a date? Who could be Grantaire’s date. How could he do this?

“Oh,” he manages finally. “Okay, cool. Good to know.”

They stand there for a moment, neither looking at the other, neither willing to go.

Finally Grantaire breaks the silence. “Anyway, I should probably get to work. See you tomorrow, E.”

He pads down the hallway. Enjolras waits until he’s out of sight before shutting the door and sagging against it. How had he been so wrong? How had Combeferre and Jehan been so wrong?

He takes a deep breath, and assesses the situation. Now that Grantaire is taking someone to the Fancy Party, there is no way that Enjolras can show up solo. He needs to find a date to this thing, STAT.

Enjolras puts that problem off until tomorrow. He crosses to the bed, shoves the rose petals onto the floor and collapses. He doesn’t know how long he lies there, crushed, crushing a few wayward rose petals, but he falls asleep eventually. When he wakes up the next morning, he’s got a plan. It’s not a great plan, but it’s a plan.
Chapter End Notes

A couple of people have asked about the podcast that Combeferre plays in the car. Yeah... that's a real thing that I subscribe to and they did not one but TWO episodes about Hercules Mulligan.

You can check them out at: Stuff You Missed in History Class: Hercules Mulligan Part One
A Chapter in Which They Adore Each Other

Chapter Summary

In which Enjolras and Grantaire mope, Courfeyrac gets excited about word play, Eponine double deals and everyone has a happy ending.

Chapter Notes

This thing is DONE! Thanks to everyone who has kept reading updates, leaving kudos and comments, and still caring about this long-ass fic over a journey of several years.

A huge thanks to the incredible ellebeecie for her periodic reminders that I should probably finish this story and for letting me use her to set deadlines. Thanks, lady, you are a champion.

R

Someone is knocking on the door to Eponine’s apartment.

Grantaire rolls over and buries his face in the crease of the futon mattress but the knocking does not stop. Whoever is at the door is insistent.

“Eponine,” Grantaire croaks. “There’s something at your door.”

It would not be impossible for Grantaire to pry himself off of the futon and simply answer the door himself, but that sounds absolutely excruciating. His head is thick and his body heavy. Last night, Eponine had opened up her liquor cabinet and helped him drown his sorrows and, judging by his sorry state this morning, they’d drowned the hell out of those little bastards.

Of course, troubles and sorrows can’t actually be killed, not even by the most potent of alcohol. It’s morning and Grantaire still has deal with the fact that Enjolras is bringing someone else to the Alpha Beta Chi Winter Formal, but now he has to deal with it coupled with a piercing headache and tumultuous stomach. And someone is banging on the damn door, making everything that much worse.

Grantaire pulls the blanket tightly around his shoulders and jams a throw pillow—marigold-colored velvet; Eponine has the weirdest taste—over his head. The worn velvet of the pillow has the consistency of sandpaper and the futon smells weird; a combination of take out Chinese food and feet. The pillow is itchy, the futon is stinky and someone is still knocking at the fucking door.

Well. This is his life now.

How the hell did he get here? As of yesterday morning, he was enjoying his status as a semi-permanent resident of Enjolras bed and now, barely twenty-four hours later, he’s occupying a musty, mysteriously stained futon.
Grantaire tries not to think about the lost paradise of Enjolras’ bed, but it’s cold. It’s cold and it’s lonely. It’s lonely here and Enjolras’ bed always has… well, it always had Enjolras in it. Grantaire misses the warmth, but also the comfort of another human body. Of a very specific human body, to be precise.

They’d been platonically exploring various and sundry ways to sleep over the past week or so. (Well, Grantaire had been. It’s entirely likely that Enjolras was simply asleep.) Grantaire was a big fan of the original position that had led him down this rabbit hole: big spooning. It was nice to wrap his body around Enjolras’. Even though Grantaire was the smaller of the two, he felt like he was doing something worthwhile, felt like he was keeping Enjolras safe and warm. That’s not a feeling Grantaire had very often.

Of course, being the little spoon had his advantages, too. Enjolras’ lanky frame wrapped around Grantaire like a glove. It was comforting to have approximately fifty percent of your body covered by the boy you’re stupidly in love with.

A new position was making a run for the money, though, one that Grantaire privately referred to as the Baby Sloth. It was simple, but elegant: Enjolras laying on his back, with Grantaire draped over the side of him. There was a spot right along the side of Enjolras’ neck that was a perfect resting place for Grantaire’s head. It was warm, and soft and he could hear the beating of Enjolras’ heart.

Sometimes, Enjolras’ hand would come up and rest in Grantaire’s curls. Sometimes, he’d wrap it around Grantaire’s back. And one time, on a single glorious occasion, Grantaire had awoken to find Enjolras’ hand lightly resting on his ass.

That had only happened once though, and Enjolras was probably fast asleep. Probably.

The banging on the door starts up again and Grantaire flops over onto his back.

“Eponine,” he whines, his voice hoarse.

There is a flush, then the sound of the faucet. The pipes in Eponine’s studio are old and create a cacophony of clanging valves and running water anytime anyone some much as think about turning on the tap. Grantaire thinks he hears Eponine come out of the bathroom, but he isn’t sure. He can’t summon the energy to turn over and look at her. He continues to speak from under the couch cushion. “Ep, the door.”

“I hear it,” she swings by the couch to give his shoulder a sharp swat on her way to answer the knocking. The plumbing polyphony plays on, so she raises her voice. “You know, you could get up and answer it.”

“I can’t,” he groans. “I have a broken heart… and probably alcohol poisoning.”

There is no reply, but Grantaire can practically hear Eponine rolling her eyes, even over the sound of clanging pipes and running water. Luckily, she does cross the room and opens the door with a sharp, “What?” Grantaire can’t hear the person’s response above the plumbing noise, but Eponine’s voice changes. “Oh,” is all she says.

Grantaire turns over just enough to get a glimpse of Eponine standing in the doorway, but he can’t see who is there. The chipped wooden door blocks the visitor from view. Eponine’s expression, though, is quixotic. She glances at Grantaire, and then steps into the hall, pulling the door shut behind her.

Grantaire should care, he really should, but he’s too exhausted to properly give even half a shit.
about anything right now. He reaches one arm along the floor, fingers seeking the bottle he and Eponine had emptied the previous night. It’s at the edge of the sofa. He grasps it by the neck and gives it a quick shake. There is a splashing. Good. Make that the bottle they’d almost finished. Grantaire lifts it to his lips and tastes a long swig. Tequila. Ow.

It tastes terrible and his stomach lurches in protest. He waits a few moments as his insides settle down, the alcohol buzzing through him, making everything feel better for the time being.

By the time Eponine returns, he’s managed to pour the remaining tequila into the chipped mug that he’d left on the table last night—on one side of the mug, a cartoon ear of corn dressed like a cowboy is grinning and giving a double thumbs up; on the other side, a logo reading “Corny’s Corral! We’re all ears!” is emblazoned in fading red on the porcelain; Eponine could not explain how she had obtained such a mug-- and swallowed a few more gulps. Drinking tequila for breakfast is disgusting and he should really feel some remorse, but Grantaire is well and truly out of fucks to give.

The door clicks shut. Eponine looks at him, inscrutable.

“Who was that?” Grantaire asks, swigging his breakfast tequila.

“Are you already drinking?” She says, answering his question with a question.

He cocks one eyebrow in what he hopes is charming nonchalance. “Eponine, it’s Sunday. I’ve just had my heart stomped on. Cut me some slack here, gurl.”

“Since when do you say ‘gurl?” she questions again. Eponine is not forthcoming with statements this morning.

“Sorry, I’ve been spending too much time with Courfeyrac.”

“Clearly.”

Grantaire holds up his mug in a mock toast. The corn cowboy grins down at him, shooting him the never-ending thumbs up. At least Corn Cowboy is on his side. “So? Let’s keep this pity party going. Day drink with me? Please? I have so, so many things to lament, ‘Ponine.”

She doesn’t answer, but tromps across the tiny studio apartment to the kitchenette and pours a healthy slug of coffee into a non-corn decorated mug. “I’ve heard it, R. Trust me, I heard about it last night. All night.” She adds cream and sugar and brings the coffee to Grantaire.

He takes the mug and takes a sip, trying not to grimace at the sweetness. He’s not going to be rude and tell Eponine that he takes his coffee black. Grantaire futilely wishes he were with Enjolras: Enjolras would know how Grantaire takes his coffee.

“Eponine, don’t minimize my pain,” he whines, dumping the over-sweetened brew into his tequila-filled corn mug. Grantaire thinks Corn Cowboy’s painted-on smile gets even wider. Eponine looks horrified.

She sits down next to him, and the old futon frame groans under their shared weight. “So, tell me again about your epic heartbreak?” she asks.

“Don’t be a dick, Ep,” Grantaire begins.

She interrupts. “No. Seriously, R. Tell me one more time about what happened between you and Enjolras last night.” Her face is earnest. She does not look like she is fucking with him, not even a
Grantaire unravels the whole story again. He feels like he told her this exact same thing at least three times the previous night, but she doesn’t stop or interrupt him, or even look bored. Eponine just sits next to him, knees pulled up to her chest, her dark eyes intense.

“So Enjolras told you that he has a date to the thing?” Eponine asks.

Grantaire nods, although that isn’t one hundred percent accurate: Marius told him that Enjolras had a date to the formal, but the source of the information doesn’t change the facts and Grantaire doesn’t have the wherewithal to correct her, so he just nods a second time. It feels like his brain is slamming against the inside of his skull.

Eponine regards him for a moment, her mouth twitching ever so slightly. “Okay,” she finally says. “Okay. So let’s make some plans for this Fancy Party and make him super jealous, shall we?”

E

Enjolras feels slightly better as he leaves Eponine’s apartment building. He hadn’t thought that she’d say no outright, but he had expected it to be a bit more challenging to convince her. It had been shockingly easy.

Sure, when she’d first answered the shabby wooden door, she’d looked like she wanted to simultaneously rip his head off and punch him in the neck.

“What?” she’d snapped.

“Eponine, I need your help,” Enjolras said, the words tumbling out of him. “Please be my date to the Fancy Party.”

Her eyes had widened, but she’d only said “Oh,” glanced quickly back into her apartment and then stepped into the hall, yanking Enjolras down the rickety staircase to the lobby.

“I have someone over,” she’d explained, maintaining a death grip on his elbow as she hauled him downstairs. “He doesn’t need to know I’m being asked out by frat boys.”

“Oh, no,” Enjolras said. “Please, don’t let me get in the way of your… thing. God, sorry. Never mind.” He began to turn away.

Eponine snagged him by the collar of his shirt, giving Enjolras the sensation of baby kitten being carted around by the mama cat. “Don’t worry about it, E,” she said, shaking her head. “It’s nothing serious. Just some dude. I will absolutely go to your formal thing with you.”

“You will?”

“Sure,” she shrugged. “I’ve got nothing better to do this weekend. Anyway, sounds like it’s going to be the social event of the season.”

There were two conditions, however, that Eponine had insisted on: one, that he let her work out the party details with the guys from the Social Committee and, two, that Enjolras buy her a gown.

Enjolras readily agreed to her terms. He would buy her a thousand new dresses if that got him out of coordinating the party arrangements with Courfeyrac and Jehan. The last thing he wanted to do
is confess to them that he’s bringing Eponine to the Fancy Party. Combeferre undoubtedly told Courfeyrac about Enjolras’ plan to ask Grantaire to the formal and, consequently, all about Enjolras’ miserable failure at the attempt.

He was really not in the mood to talk to Courfeyrac, who’d been giving him weird, disappointed looks all morning. Enjolras couldn’t understand why. It wasn’t his fault that Grantaire was going to the Fancy Party with someone else. Enjolras had done the best he could, given the circumstances.

He probably owes Eponine two dresses in exchange for the favor.

“I’ve actually got to talk to Courf about something else today anyway, so I’ll just let him know about the formal,” she said, breezily vague. They made quick plans to meet up later in the week to firm up details and then parted, Eponine heading back upstairs to her gentleman caller and Enjolras stepping out into the brisk winter morning.

He pulls his coat tighter around him. The sun is brightly shining down on Eponine’s shabby street, but the air is still chilly. It’s funny: he was hoping the cold weather would continue while Grantaire was sharing his bed. But now that their slumber party of convenience is over, Enjolras resents the cold. It only reminds him of how alone he is.

He turns left onto 13th Street, heading down the Hill toward a stretch of small shops. It is still fairly early on a Sunday, but the stores should be opening in just a few minutes. A couple passes him, both bundled up in coats and knit caps. The smaller girl’s arm is wrapped around her taller girlfriend’s waist, hand tucked into her coat pocket for warmth. They are adorable. Enjolras wants to throw something at them.

Before he can find anything to petulantly hurl at the cute couple, he arrives at his destination: a storefront with a wrought-iron gate on the door and a hand-painted sign above it reading “The Fitter.”

Enjolras had spent a couple of hours online last month buying gifts for all his friends, but then, out of the blue, Courfeyrac had decided that a holiday Fancy Party wasn’t festive enough without a “Super Exciting Creative/Retail/Ebay Treasure Swap (Also, Non-denominational Traditional Awesomeness).”

“Oh, as I like to call it, “Courfeyrac had proudly announced at the weekly fraternity meeting, “S.E.C.R.E.T S.A.N.T.A.”

“Uh, Courf?” Enjolras reluctantly interrupted Courfeyrac’s presentation (complete with PowerPoint, courtesy of Combeferre) to point out, “That literally just says ‘Secret Santa.’ There is nothing non-denominational about that.”

“Nope,” Courfeyrac said cheerfully, “it’s an acronym. It may look like it says “Secret Santa,” but, to the educated linguist, it actually stands for ‘Super Exciting Creative/Retail/Ebay Treasure Swap (Also, Non-denominational Traditional Awesomeness).’ I see how you could make that mistake, Enjolras, but it’s definitely a secular gift exchange. Next slide!”

“He worked really hard on that acronym,” Combeferre whispered as he held out a top hat full of paper slips. “Pick one.”

Enjolras reached in, silently praying to whatever deity watches over atheists participating in non-denominational holiday gift exchanges to let him draw Grantaire’s. He’d already gotten Grantaire a gift, but had found a handcrafted cedar wood flask in an Etsy shop, said fuck it and bought it, too. The gift exchange would be a great opportunity to give Grantaire an extra gift without it being
Please let me get R, please, Enjolras begged.

He unfolded his paper. Jehan.

At the time, Enjolras had cursed the vaguely defined patron saint of gift-giving atheists, but at this point he’s grateful. Before last night, he’d known just what to give Grantaire but now-- now that Grantaire is dating someone else, now that Grantaire is bringing someone else to the Fancy Party-- Enjolras is beyond relieved that he won’t have to give a present to his unrequited love interest in front of all their friends. That would have epically sucked.

He looks at the tiny sign taped inside the glass door of The Fitter. Sunday: 10am-5pm. He checks his phone: 9:57. Perfect.

Enjolras isn’t a last minute shopper, but everyone in the frat had received their S.E.C.R.E.T.S.A.N.T.A. assignments at the meeting this past Monday, and by then it was way too late to order something else for Jehan. The gift exchange is scheduled for Friday night, just under a week away, at a members-only cocktail party before the actual formal, and Enjolras doesn’t trust the US Postal Service to get anything delivered on time during the busy holiday season.

It isn’t a big deal anyway; Enjolras knows just what to get Jehan. The Fitter is a head shop, a little hole-in-the-wall at the end of the Hill that has a handcrafted glass pipe that the little poet had been coveting for ages. It’s a little more expensive than the fifty-dollar limited that the gift exchange allowed, but Enjolras doesn’t care.

Jehan will love it, and it will be worth bending the rules to make him happy. Besides, nobody needs to know how much it cost. And if Jehan does spill the beans about the cost of the pipe, well, Enjolras can just claim that is Jehan is so high that he doesn’t know what he’s talking about.

It’s a good excuse. He should know, he’s used it himself.

R

Eponine lets Grantaire crash on her futon for four more nights before she finally snaps.

“Dude, you can’t live here,” she grumbles on Thursday morning, as she shuffles across the studio to start a pot of coffee. “Go home.”

Grantaire rolls over and peers up at her, eyes bleary. They’d emptied a couple of bottles of wine the night before and Grantaire isn’t entirely sure he’s sobered up. “I can’t go home. It’s toxic.”

“Oh my god, R, no it isn’t,” Eponine says, casually swirling hot water in the coffee pot in a half-assed attempt at cleaning it. “You know what’s toxic? My liver, my liver is fucking toxic. I cannot keep drinking away your sorrows, buddy.”

“Eponine—“

“No. Go home. Make someone else drink with you, give Bahorel cirrhosis of the liver for a change. Stop hiding from Enjolras.”

Grantaire is about to object, but she has a point. He sits up, drawing his knees to his chest. “What if, um… What if Enjolras’ new boyfriend is around?”
Eponine turns to him and levels her gaze. “Grantaire. I can promise you that there is absolutely no way that Enjolras will have a boy over.”

“But what if he—“

“No,” she says. “Not gonna happen. Trust Mama Eponine. She knows a lot of things, she does.”

“Oh god, never call yourself that again.”

Eponine laughs. “Yeah, I regretted it immediately. Now go home, frat boy. I’m sure your brothers miss you.”

Grantaire hopes they do. He misses them.

E

If you asked Enjolras, he would never admit to noticing that Grantaire had stayed out on Wednesday night. And Tuesday night. And the three nights before that. If you checked his phone, you definitely wouldn’t find anything in his browser history that resembles Facebook-stalking, or Instagram-stalking, Snapchat-stalking, Twitter-stalking or any other form of social media surveillance. You wouldn’t find those things not because they didn’t happen, but because Enjolras diligently erased his history. Courfeyrac had a bad habit of snooping on other people’s phones and Enjolras did not want his pathetically persistent vigil on Grantaire’s accounts to become common knowledge.

But there was nothing. No updates, no pictures, no check-in, no snaps, nothing. Enjolras doesn’t know if that is a good sign or a bad sign. The absence of any online presences could mean that Grantaire is dead in a ditch or it could mean that he’s been so busy with his new love interest that he hasn’t had time to post. Or his hands weren’t free to—no. Enjolras banishes that horrifying thought.

On the plus side, no new posts means no photos of the new beau. As curious as he is about Grantaire’s date to the Fancy Party, Enjolras doesn’t actually want to see adorable couple photos of the two of them.

He’s sitting in the living room, hunched over his laptop, right foot tapping erratically as he tries to simultaneously proofread an Ethics paper and keep an eye on the front door. Enjolras commandeered the front room as an ersatz office for finals, claiming that he needed the room to spread out. This was technically true, but it is also true that the living room is the best place to keep an eye on the front door. The two things are not mutually exclusive.

There has been nothing for four days. Nothing.

So it comes as a bit of shock to Enjolras when the front door slowly creaks open on Thursday afternoon and Grantaire slinks in. “Hey,” Grantaire says weakly.

Enjolras wants to hug him. Enjolras wants to hit him. He settles for returning his “hey” and scanning Grantaire’s neck for any sign of being sucked on. It’s clear.

“So, uh. How are finals going?” Grantaire asks, but does not come into the living room. He hovers nervously in the foyer, as if the slightest movement might send him fleeing from the house.

“Good,” Enjolras says, trying not to make any sudden moves. “How are yours?” He does not ask
Grantaire where he’s been. He does not want to know.

“Uh,” Grantaire reaches up to scratch the back of his curls. His eyes look tired and skin under them is tinted purple. “I actually didn’t have, uh, much to do for finals. All of my classes just needed a final project and I turned those in last week. So…”

The front door flies open and Marius and Cosette tumble in, arm in arm and babbling about flowers. They come screeching to a halt when they see Enjolras and Grantaire. Marius looks gobsmacked.

“Um, hey guys,” he says, his eyes wide. “We should go, Cosette—“

Cosette nods, the saddest expression on her lovely face. Even Cosette feels sorry for them? Enjolras could not be more embarrassed.

“Stay!” Grantaire blurts. “You guys should stay and tell us about your, uh, flower things.”

Cosette gives Marius a small sideways glance and he nods back, so she launches into a description of the boutonniere she ordered for Marius and the matching corsage he got for her. “What kind did you get for your date, R?” she asks.

“Oh,” Grantaire says, looking uncomfortable, “I didn’t actually get them anything yet.”

Cosette presses on. “What are they wearing?”

“I’m not actually sure, Cosette. We haven’t talked about it.”

“Is there a certain color that your date looks good in?”

Grantaire just shrugs.

Cosette’s cagey questioning momentarily impresses Enjolras, until she turns to him.

“What about your date, Enjolras? What kind of flowers did you get for them?”

It’s like discussing the finer points of your imminent beheading with your executioner. Enjolras isn’t sure why he doesn’t leave the room, but he doesn’t. He stays and endures the flower conversation, and then endures the rest of the week.

###

R

Grantaire lays on the horn. The gentlemanly thing to do, of course, would be to walk up to Eponine’s door and escort his date to the car, but it is freezing outside and Grantaire has his truck idling in a No Parking zone. Also, Eponine isn’t a real date and Grantaire isn’t a real gentleman.

“Try it again,” Courfeyrac says, his breath coming in little puffs. “Also, can you please make your heater work a little faster?”

“You didn’t have to come with me, you know. You could have just driven in with ‘Ferre in a couple hours,” Grantaire reminds him, laying on the horn again. He’s texted Eponine a couple of times, too, but to no avail.
Courfeyrac shakes his head and rubs his arms briskly over his arms. “Nope, we’ve got decorating to do, son.” The bed of Grantaire’s truck is loaded with a small cargo of party decorations: bolts of gauzy fabric, a case of tea lights, several boxes of twinkle lights, among other things. Grantaire hopes it doesn’t start snowing, like the sky is threatening. He doesn’t have a topper to his truck bed and he’d hate to see what would happen to Jehan’s face if all the decorations got soaked.

Grantaire’s own overnight bag is sitting back in the truck bed, too, but there isn’t anything in there that he’s concerned about. His tux is in a garment bag, hanging up behind him in the sliver of space between the back of the truck’s bench seat and the back window and that he does care about. Eponine and Courfeyrac had practically dragged him out of Eponine’s studio to make his appointment at the rental shop. Ever since Grantaire had asked Eponine to the Fancy Party, those two had become inseparable. It is disconcerting.

Turns out, he's grateful they’d forced him into a tux. Grantaire had been planning on wearing an old suit that he’d worn to his dad’s second wedding, but Courfeyrac had blanched when Grantaire pulled it out of the closet to show him. “R, no offense, but… no. Just no.”

In the suit’s defense, it had been very expensive about a decade ago.

But the tuxedo; the tuxedo had taken Grantaire’s breath away. The tailor made a couple of alterations and then Grantaire had dared look in the mirror. The sleek black Burlington Wool fit him like a glove. He hated to admit it, but it was fantastic.

Judging by the looks of open admiration on both Eponine and Courfeyrac’s faces, they thought this was a success, as well.

His tux has now been carefully hung against the back window, leaving just enough room for Eponine’s dress. If she ever got out of her apartment and decided to grace them with her presence.

On cue, Eponine comes bursting out of her front door, arms overflowing with her dress, overnight bag, purse and what appeared to be a reusable Ikea bag crammed with gift-wrapped boxes.

“I thought you said you were getting a haircut,” Eponine says, in lieu of a greeting. She slides into the patched front seat of Grantaire’s pickup truck, jostling Courfeyrac who, in turn, jostles Grantaire. The garment bag containing her gown spills onto Courfeyrac’s lap.

“Oh, Vera Wang,” Courfeyrac reads off the side of the dress bag. “Fancy.”

Eponine just shrugs, a tiny half-smile tugs at the corner of her mouth. “Sometimes, I’m fancy, Courf. You don’t know my life.” She turns reaches over him to tug at one of Grantaire’s curls. “You. Haircut?”

“I said I’d think about getting a haircut,” Grantaire replies, trying to maneuver his stick shift into first gear without accidentally racking Courfeyrac. It’s true. He thought about it and realized that he didn’t give a fuck about his hair. “I’ll just pull it back or something.”

“It’s too long, R,” Eponine complains. “We have time to stop somewhere really quick—“

“Eponine, no.”

“And just have them trim up the back a little,” she persists.

“I’m just gonna pull it back—“

“You’re going to wear a man bun to the Fancy Party, Grantaire? No, I’m not going to let you ruin
my photographs with hipster hair,” she glares at him and he thinks she is joking. Thinks.
“Seriously, though. Please get a trim—“

“It’s okay, Eponine,” Courfeyrac begins. “Enjolras won’t—oof. “There is a rustling of garment
bags, then a sharp grunt. Courfeyrac shuts up. Eponine looks pleased with herself.

“Enjolras won’t what, now Courf?” Grantaire ask, shifting into second gear and taking less care
with his shifting. Courfeyrac brought this on himself.

“He, uh, won’t… have gotten a haircut either,” Courfeyrac says. Grantaire shoots him a look. That
doesn’t sound like the way the original sentence was heading.

“You guys don’t need to be all weird about Enjolras,” Grantaire says. “I’m barely going to have to
see him tonight.”

Or, at least, that’s the hope. Grantaire is planning on making an appearance and then getting out of
there as quickly as humanly possible. He has no desire to sit in the ballroom and watch Enjolras
and his mystery date have a romantic fairy tale evening. Whomsoever that date might turn out to
be.

No one has mentioned it, and Grantaire’s pride won’t allow him to ask. He literally cannot think of
anyone that Enjolras would want to ask to this thing. Cosette said it isn’t any of the girls in her
sorority. Besides, Enjolras is gay. Bringing a platonic girl date doesn’t sound like something he’d
do.

Grantaire has never seen him give preference to one boy over another. The whole situation is
baffling and irritating. Had he been sneakily seeing this guy the whole time? Was it a long-
standing crush that Enjolras finally got the chance to ask out? Was it someone from the Internet?
Grantaire cannot even fathom any of those options. Well, he’s going to find out soon enough.

Eponine is still frowning at his hair. “I could probably do something with it real quick,” she says,
“If the hotel has scissors or something?”

Grantaire sighs, and runs a finger through his thick black curls. “What’s the point, ‘Ponine? Who
do I have to impress?”

“Me?”

He laughs. “That’s not hard: your standards are impossibly low, ‘Ponine. I mean, you had a thing
for Marius Pontmercy, for fuck’s sake, so…”

“Shut up, R,” Eponine reaches around Courfeyrac and smacks him so hard they briefly swerve into
a bike lane. She launches in a voracious diatribe of Marius’ fine qualities and Grantaire considers
his attempt at a diversion a rousing success.

Grantaire isn’t even sure what the point of this ruse is. The second he and Eponine walk in the
door, everyone will know that he doesn’t have a real date. He supposes that it’s better to have a
friend at this thing, since he’s stuck going to it. As much as he’d like to, he can’t back out of the
party and disappoint his friends.

He just has to get through this Secret Santa nonsense. Grantaire couldn’t believe it when he’d
pulled Enjolras’ name out of the hat at the meeting on Monday. At that time, they’d been getting
along great and sleeping in the same bed and everything was chill. Grantaire knew exactly what he
was going to get Enjolras.
But now that they are barely speaking, the gift feels a tad too much. Grantaire briefly wonders if he could switch with someone else, but at this point, it’s probably too late. Oh well, hopefully he can keep his composure through the gift exchange portion of the evening. There’s a reason it’s called a Secret Santa. Enjolras may not even figure out it’s him.

They pull up to the hotel and Grantaire parks his car on the street. The place has valet, but he doesn’t use it. Valets make him nervous. Grantaire pulls his bag out of the bed of the truck and heads toward the door, but Eponine is still in her seat. She’s tapping out a text.

“Can we please get this over with, ‘Ponine?” he asks.

She holds up her non-texting finger. “Wait for just a sec, I need to find out about a thing—“ her phone pings and she looks relieved. —“We’re all good. Let’s go.”

E

The Stonemason Inn is one of those impossible buildings that unexpectedly appear in very old American cities. Nestled between an Eddie Bauer storefront and a sleek sushi restaurant on the main boulevard of town, the historic building in an anachronism that is almost impossible to believe.

“It was built in 1832, the mansion of a gold rush millionaire,” Combeferre informs him, reciting the facts from memory. “They have twenty guest rooms, a ballroom, and …”

Enjolras pulls his little hybrid into the circular driveway of the hotel and a valet in a fleece jacket dashes out to collect his car.

“How does a hotel this small have a valet?” he asks softly as his car, with the prepubescent-looking valet barely peeking over the steering wheel, disappears down an alley.

“It’s a very expensive small hotel,” Combeferre answers.

Enjolras looks at him, expecting a joke, but his face is serious. The Social Committee presented a budget for the formal, but Enjolras had handed it off to Joly, the treasurer, without glancing at it. He’s starting to think maybe he should have.

Walking into the lobby is like stepping out of time machine. The Stonemason Inn was built in the 1830’s and it clearly liked the time period because nothing seems to have changed over two centuries. Everything is antique, expensive and in pristine condition: the floor is gleaming hardwood and a wide carpeted staircase crawls up one wall. A small front desk, complete with a wall of pigeonholes behind it, is tucked right under the stairs.

“You made it!” Courfeyrac dashes across the lobby and wraps his arms around his boyfriend. Combeferre picks a small bit of red tinsel out of Courfeyrac’s hair with a quizzical look.

“I’ve been decorating,” Courfeyrac explains. Enjolras does his tiniest eye-roll, unable to contain himself but wary of tormenting Courfeyrac too much. It doesn’t work.

“Don’t give me that, E,” Courfeyrac chides, dragging their luggage to the front desk. “I’m in charge of this here Fancy Party and I’m gonna make it the best damn fraternity formal this town has ever seen! It’s gonna be magical… I mean, it will be for those of us who aren’t being total party poopers and pooping all over the party.”
Enjolras doesn’t even try to control his eye-roll this time. “Courfeyrac, I’m not being—“

“Oh yes you are, President Poopypants,” Courfeyrac says. “Can’t you just enjoy the night?”

Enjolras cannot. He can endure the night, suffer through it, keep a stiff upper lip, close his eyes and think of England; there is no way in hell he can enjoy it.

Taking his silence for agreement, Courfeyrac pushes on. “Eponine is here, by the way. She’s already settled in to your room.”

“She has? Oh, then I’d better get my key and go up and say ‘hey’,“ Enjolras takes a step toward the front desk, where a diminutive, white-haired woman begins to greet them. Her welcoming smile melts into shock as Courfeyrac practically dives in between Enjolras and the desk.

“Go sit by the fireplace, you guys. I’ll get your key and give the bellhop your bags,” Courfeyrac assures them, sounding just a touch manic. He waits until Enjolras and Combeferre are on their way to the other side of the lobby before leaning in to talk to the desk lady in whispered tones.

“He’s being suspiciously nice today,” Enjolras says, frowning. Courfeyrac had been aggressively helpful all morning: suggesting that Enjolras ride with Combeferre so he wouldn’t have to try and find the hotel on his own; carrying Enjolras’ bags out to the car that morning and insisting that he’d find a bellhop to help bring the luggage in from the car.

“He is, isn’t he?” Combeferre smiles across the lobby at his boyfriend.

“Yeah, a little too nice,” Enjolras says as Courfeyrac shoots them a wide grin and a double thumbs up, then goes back to signing some paperwork. “He’d really better not be up to something, ‘Ferre. I’m gonna be white-knuckling my way through this weekend, I really don’t have any patience for Courf-style shenanigans right now.”

“He’s going to be on his best behavior. I made him promise,” Combeferre settles onto a plush sofa and props his feet up on a large round leather ottoman. The fire crackles. “Thank you for being here,” he tells Enjolras. “I know things didn’t exactly work out the way you’d hoped and I—“

Enjolras cuts him off. He doesn’t want to think about it, let alone hear Combeferre talk about it.

“It’s okay, ‘Ferre. Sometimes life just… doesn’t work out the way you want it to.”

Combeferre falls into silence, and Enjolras settles into the sofa, gazing at the flames. God, he is dreading tonight. He’s put up such a stoic front all week—pretending to be unaffected by Grantaire’s betrayal, feigning excitement about the party details, toying with people when they’d asked about his date. He’s been playing it off like some great mystery, but the jig will be up when he and Eponine walked in together.

Enjolras had been worrying about it when he and Eponine had met for coffee earlier in the week. He’d handed her some cash to buy her dress (“Jesus, Enjolras,” she said, flipping through the stack of bills he’d handed her, “are these hundreds?” They were. Enjolras didn’t really know how much formal gowns cost, so he’d rounded up) and they were making arrangements for arriving at the venue that weekend. At some point, he’d stopped making sense and had just started babbling out a stream of nonsense words to poor Eponine.

“Enjolras,” she said, grabbing both his hands in hers. “Stop freaking out. I guarantee you: you are going to have the absolute best date to this formal. Every single person in that room is going to be jealous of you when you walk in.”

That seems like overkill. Enjolras doesn’t need everyone in the room to be jealous, just one person.
He still can’t figure out who Grantaire is taking, but he is determined to outshine that bastard is, whomsoever he may be. Normally, Enjolras didn’t pay much attention to his formal wear, but he’d gone to the tailor this week to have a few adjustments made to his tuxedo. He’d been talked into a new tie and pocket square—scarlet, naturally—and purchased a new pair of shiny, uncomfortable dress shoes. Eponine insisted that he get a haircut.

He was going to look good. Eponine was going to look good. Even if Grantaire wasn’t fooled into thinking she was an actual date, they could at least outshine everyone in the room.

The bags are finally handed off to a bellhop and Courfeyrac comes bounding over, plopping down on Combeferre’s lap. “What do you guys want to do? The gift exchange is in an hour, then we’ve an hour or so before dinner starts at eight, so—“

Enjolras stands up, cracking his neck. “Actually, Courf, I’d love to go up to my room. Unpack my stuff, maybe take a quick shower—“

“No!” Courfeyrac shouts so loud that Combeferre winces.

“No?” Enjolras asks. “No, I can’t go to my hotel room?”

Courfeyrac’s eyes shift. “It’s not ready.”

“But the bellhop just took my bags up.”

“It’ll be ready in a sec, just let me…” Courfeyrac whips out his phone and taps out a text. A moment later, the phone dings with a response. “Okay, cool! We can go up.”

Courfeyrac hauls Combeferre to his feet and sets off down the hallway to the guest rooms, Enjolras trailing behind.

“Courfeyrac?” Enjolras asks after him. “Did you just text the bellhop?”

“Maybe.”

“Why do you have the bellhop’s phone number?”


That was not an answer.

R

“Up, up, mopey,” Eponine says, sliding her phone into her pocket and nudging Grantaire with her toe. “We need to get out of the room so they can turn the beds down.”

“Did the front desk just text you?” Grantaire swears she had just gotten a text.

“Sure,” Eponine says, but it isn’t too convincing. Luckily, common sense can’t really penetrate the pathetic blanket of self-pity in which Grantaire has wrapped himself. He doesn’t question her.

“Where are we going?” he complains as he’s dragged down the hall.

“I thought you and I can get a drink before you have to go to the gift exchange,” Eponine says.
“Eponine, don’t leave me.”

“Sorry, bébé,” Eponine does not sound sorry. “Gift exchange is for brothers only. Besides, I need that time to get fabulous for the main event tonight. Courf says that you need to be in the parlor, with your gift, by five o’clock.

“Why is Courf texting you about my itinerary?”

“Because I’m awesome. And because I actually read his texts.”

“I read texts!”

“You check your texts and then get all sad and ignore them if they’re from anyone not Enjolras. I’ve seen you do it, don’t deny it.” Eponine says.

It’s true. Grantaire has been off his texting game this week. He’s been off his everything game, if he’s being honest. If he’s been distracted this week, he can’t imagine how he’s going to make it through the next semester. He’s supposed to be graduating in the spring and the only thing he has left is his senior thesis next semester. He can’t imagine working on that while living in the same house as Enjolras, and dealing with the presence of Enjolras’ new boyfriend.

Oh god. What if Enjolras’ new boyfriend joins the frat?

Grantaire really needs to consider moving out next semester. He can’t keep hiding on Eponine’s futon forever. He can maybe find a place on the cheap. There are always students who drop out over the winter break and need to unload their lease. Grantaire got this far in his life without Enjolras, he can do it again. It just means going on a cleanse. A fast. A purge. Torture.

The bar is stunning: black and white floor tiles lead to a long marble bar, behind which are shelves upon shelves of liquor bottles. Grantaire doesn’t have a chance to inspect every single one, but the ones he does recognize are top-shelf and expensive. He orders a Macallan 25-year with a splash of water after Eponine shuts down his request to make it a double.

“No getting drunk tonight, buddy,” she scolds, sliding the bartender a twenty and giving him strict instructions to keep an eye on Grantaire.

Grantaire takes a sip and waggles his eyebrows. “Afraid your date won’t be able to perform tonight if he gets too drunk?”

“Gross, Grantaire,” she glares. “I’m not going to dignify that with a response. Grab your drink, kid, we’ve got a S.E.C.R.E.T S.A.N.T.A to get you to.”

Grantaire cannot wait.

E

“This next one is for… Enjolras!” Courfeyrac reads the name off the gift tag. It’s a big rectangular package, wrapped in bright red paper with a green ribbon tied around it. The gift is passed through the crowd and lands on Enjolras’ lap. It isn’t heavy. He shakes it. Something dense barely jostles inside. Enjolras makes short work of the wrapping and then stares at the contents of the box.

He lifts a white hooded sweatshirt out the box and regards it quizzically. There is some sort of gold screen-printing along the bottom.
“Hold it up!” Joly instructs, his voice muffled by the thick woolen infinity scarf that had been a gift from Jehan.

It would make a lot of sense if Joly were his S.E.C.R.E.T S.A.N.T.A. His sense of humor tended toward obscure pop culture references and inside jokes. Enjolras still isn’t entirely sure what his gift is.

He holds it in front of him, displaying it for the room. “It’s uh, a sweatshirt?” He offers, sliding his arms into the sleeves and pulling the zipper.

Clearly some of his friends know what it is supposed to be. Joly, Bahorel and Combeferre are all subtly smirking. Everyone else looks just as confused as Enjolras. Grantaire is staring at him innocently.

“It’s a hoodie, E, obviously,” Grantaire says. “Pull up the hood.”

Enjolras does. The fabric on the hood is different, a dark brown jersey instead of the same white as the rest of the garment. There’s something attached to each side of the hood: brown rolls of fabric that look like cinnamon rolls or buns or… oh. Enjolras bursts out laughing.

“Oh my god,” he announces, zipping himself into the hoodie and pulling the hood over his head. “It’s a Princess Leia hoodie. Are you even kidding me?”

He looks around the group, but he already knows who the gift is from.

Grantaire shrugs, grinning. “Never give up on your childhood dreams, E. You can be anything you want: even a space princess.”

“This is incredible,” Enjolras gushes. The tension between himself and Grantaire has dissolved in an instant. “I can’t believe you remembered.”

The words are barely out of this mouth when their meaning crashes into Enjolras like a tidal wave. Grantaire remembered.

He’d told Grantaire about his Leia thing the night they were snowed in at the frat. The night they’d kissed. The night they had both supposedly blacked out.

“I can’t believe you remembered,” Enjolras repeats, more slowly.

The grin slides from Grantaire’s face. His eyes go wide. He looks incredibly guilty.

“You remembered, R. Why didn’t you tell me you remembered?”

Grantaire scrubs one hand across his eyes. “I’m sorry, dude, it’s just that the whole night was weird and—” His head perks up and his eyes narrow. “Wait. If you remember telling me, then that means you remember that night, too, Enjolras.”

Uh-oh.

That slight complication had not occurred to Enjolras until now. Before he can think up a counter-story, Grantaire continues, “Holy shit, dude, you do remember that night, don’t you? Why didn’t you tell me you remembered? Why did you lie?”

Seven curious faces peer at them. Enjolras desperately wishes they were having this conversation somewhere else, anywhere else, but fate had led them to this sitting room in this bed and breakfast
in front of every single one of their closest friends. Also, he's still wearing a Princess Leia hoodie. The universe is doing Enjolras no favors today.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” Enjolras says again, repeating the only thought looping in his brain.

“Because you kissed me, Enjolras!” Grantaire finally bursts.

“Oh, shit,” Bahorel mutters. “Here we go…”

“You kissed me and you were really f*%cked up and then you said you didn’t remember, so… so I just figured: pretend it didn’t happen. Why bring a bunch of drama?”

“Oh my god, Grantaire!”

“Why didn’t you bring it up, E? If you remembered, why didn’t you say something about it.”

“You said no!”

There it is. It’s out. The thing Enjolras is most ashamed of. “I kissed you and you said no.”

Silence.

Their friends stare at them, making no effort to hide their curiosity. Grantaire’s throat works. There is a crinkle of wrapping paper. Enjolras stares directly into Grantaire’s green eyes, using every ounce of determination to keep his should steady and his chin from wobbling. If everything is coming to a head, he can at least keep his dignity intact.

“And you thought,” Grantaire says slowly, “that I said no because I didn’t want you? Is that what you thought, Enjolras.”

Enjolras can feel his throat tightening. If he speaks right now, he’s liable to dissolve. He manages a nod, which he hopes comes off as stoic rather than trembling.

Grantaire breaks eye contact. “Oh my god,” he says, rubbing one hand over his eyes, “Oh my god, Enjolras. No. No, I didn’t ask you to stop kissing me because I didn’t want you—“

“Then why?”

“Because… because I wanted you too much, okay? And, by some miraculous turn of events that night, I had you. The thing I wanted most in the world was being handed to me on a silver platter. I could have kissed you back, E. We could have made out and fallen into bed and done god-knows-what that night, but it wouldn’t have been real. Do you understand that? It wouldn’t have been real.

“What would you have done if you’d woken up in my bed the next morning? Jesus, Enjolras, you would have hated me for taking advantage of you. I would’ve ruined everything. It wouldn’t have been worth it: a night of my dreams coming true and then a lifetime of knowing that you didn’t mean it, that you didn’t want it. And I don’t know if I could’ve lived with myself after that.”

“Why didn’t you… why didn’t you say something? Why didn’t you ever bring it up?”

“Enjolras,” Grantaire sighs. “I figured it was a side effect of the pot. I figured that if you meant it, if you wanted to kiss me, that you’d try again.” He continues tightly. “And you didn’t. So…“

Enjolras won’t drop it. “So what?”

“I can’t deal with this right now,” Grantaire says. “I need to… I don’t know, I just need—“ He
bolts out of the room, in the direction of the guest rooms.

Enjolras becomes fully aware that he is standing in the middle of a Christmas light covered hotel parlor, surrounded by his silent friends, who all look like they just witnessed a holiday miracle.

Grantaire disappears around the corner and all Enjolras can do is stand there clutching the sweatshirt and trying to force himself to breathe.

"Enjolras?" Courfeyrac takes the smallest of steps toward him, but Enjolras holds up one hand sharply, a stop gesture. He inhales, forcing his lungs to accept air.


"Enjolras--"

"I said not now."

Courfeyrac won’t be silenced. "Go get him, buddy."

“What?” Enjolras looks up at Courfeyrac, who is not wearing one of his usual mocking expressions. He looks strangely serious and his warm brown eyes are shining. "If you're gonna do it, you've got to do it now--"

Enjolras does not wait for Courfeyrac to finish. He is dashing out of the parlor, reaching his maximum sprinting speed in less than five steps.

He’s not sure where Grantaire’s room is, but he assumes it’s in the same hall as everyone else. The hotel isn’t large and it’s likely that the whole ABX party is together.

He catches sight of Grantaire turning the corner at the end of the stairs. He's right.

“Grantaire!” Enjolras shouts, catching up to him.

“Please, E,” Grantaire says, coming to an abrupt halt in front of room 55, Enjolras’ own room. “I just need to be alone, I need to process—“

“No,” Enjolras says. “Please. Don’t walk away from me. We need to talk.”

“What do you want me to say, Enjolras? I’ve spent the last couple of weeks confused as fuck. You kiss me, then pretend like it never happened—don’t make that face, Enjolras, that is literally what you did—and then we practically start living together, but you haven’t laid a finger on me. What am I supposed to think, dude? You’re a pretty forward guy, Enjolras. If you want something, you just reach out and take it and you never… you know. You never—with me, I mean.”

Grantaire’s eyes flick up to the ceiling. “And now I find out that you remembered kissing me. You knew you did it and you never said anything. I thought that if you wanted me, E—if you wanted me the same way that I wanted you—then nothing would stop you. But you didn’t kiss me again. So I figured, ‘Hey, whatever. We’re just friends. It’s all good.’ But it’s exhausting. I’m exhausted, Enjolras. Do you have any idea how fucking tiring it is to pretend you aren’t in love with your best friend?”

“You’re, you’re in love with me?” Enjolras stammers.

“I don’t know why I said that, dude, I really don’t,” Grantaire looks up, his eyes finally meeting Enjolras’. “I just need—I don’t know. I just want to go to my room, okay?”
Enjolras stares at him. “Uh, I’m not stopping you.”

“You’re kinda in my way, E,” Grantaire gestures to the door behind Enjolras.

Enjolras is standing in front of his own door, number 55. “No, I’m not.”

“Yes you are,” Grantaire replies. “This is my room.”

Enjolras frowns and digs into his pocket, pulling out the tiny brass room key. There is clearly a “55” stamped on it. “My room is number 55.”

Grantaire opens his palm and shows Enjolras his own room key, also clearly marked with a “55.”

“Well, there must be some mistake—”

“Nope.” The door to room number 55 opens and Eponine stands in the doorway, sheathed in a form-fitting green sequined gown. She looks unbelievable pretty and undeniably smug, like the cat that finally got the canary. “Actually, gentlemen: it’s both of your room.”

She steps through the doorway, yanks them both inside, then turns back around to face them, arms crossed authoritatively. “You two can do whatever you want in here—fuck, fight, I do not care—but you’re gonna stay in here until you figure your shit out, okay?”

Enjolras begins to protest but Eponine shuts him down before he can even manage one syllable. She holds up one freshly manicured finger. “No arguing. I’m going down to the bar. If I see so much as a glimpse of one of you downstairs before you work your shit out, I will cut you? Capiche?” She is smiling, toothy and dangerous.

The door clicks shut. There is nothing for a moment, then Enjolras hazards a glance around the room. Grantaire is resolutely staring at the floor. Two suitcases are set on the bed. Two tuxedos hang in the closet.

This room does indeed belong to both of them. But that doesn’t mean they both need to stay in it.

Enjolras heads for the door. “I’m going down to the desk to get another room—“ he says, yanking it open.

Eponine stands in the doorway, arms crossed, manicured nails tapping impatiently against her bicep. “Nice try,” she shakes her head and glares. “Get back in there.”

Enjolras does.

“Grantaire, we aren’t getting out of here any time soon,” he says. “Can we please just talk?”

“About what, E?” Grantaire snaps, flopping down on the bed and yanking off his shoes. “You kissed me when you were high and then lied about it. Seems pretty straightforward to me.”

“Grantaire—“

“No.”

“Will you please just—?”

“No,” Grantaire snaps. “We aren’t going to talk about anything. I’m going to take a shower, get ready for this stupid fucking Fancy Party and try to make the best of my last night in this fraternity.”
“Grantaire, you don’t mean that,” Enjolras is aghast.

Grantaire unzips his hoodie, tosses it on the bed, and heads toward the bathroom. “Yeah, I do, E.”

“Grantaire,” Enjolras takes a couple of quick steps toward Grantaire, grabs him by his arm and pulls him about-face. Grantaire is dressed in only an undershirt now and his uncovered right bicep is warm under Enjolras’ hand. “Stop.”

Grantaire tries to pull his arm away, but Enjolras only grabs the other arm, refusing to let him go.

“Okay, E,” Grantaire says, eyes firmly on the carpet. “You’ve stopped me from taking a shower, congratulations. Now what?”

Enjolras isn’t exactly sure.

His eyes drop down to the tapestry of Grantaire’s left arm, its familiar patterns and designs strangely soothing in this fraught moment. Enjolras involuntarily circles his thumb over a black and green swirl. His eyes flick over the right arm. The double R’s are still there; the Oscar Wilde line; then the sun tattoo, Grantaire’s newest, is… gone.

Enjolras can’t exactly comprehend it. How does a tattoo just disappear?

“Enjolras?”

He looks up. Grantaire has finally stopped staring at the carpet and is now gazing intently at him.

“Where is your tattoo? It’s—“ Enjolras slides his left hand down Grantaire’s bicep. The tattoo is back. Enjolras experimentally moves his hand back up. The red and gold sun is completely blocked again. He repeats this a few times, Grantaire skin prickling up under his touch, before he realizes.

“It’s not a sun at all,” Enjolras says. “It’s a hand-print,“ Grantaire is staring up at him, face carefully calm. “I figured it out. But what does it mean?”

“You almost figured it out, E,” Grantaire says.

Enjolras’ hand tightens. The skin under his fingers is firm and smooth. There is more muscle than he anticipated. He can feel the blood racing under his fingertips. His hand slides on and off the tattoo a few times, each time it returns, Enjolras marvels at how perfectly his grasp covers the scarlet ink. It’s a perfect match. It’s almost like—

“Oh,” Enjolras says.

“Oh,” Grantaire replies.

“It’s not just a hand print, is it? It’s my hand print.”

“I knew you’d get there sooner or later.” Grantaire is looking down at the floor again.

Enjolras does not let go, but his right hand rests on Grantaire’s cheek and gently pulls his face up so he’s looking at him. His green eyes are wide, but Enjolras can’t tell if it is fear or not. He looks almost hopeful.

“You got this… when did you get this? Back in September?”

“I got it the day after you became president, Enjolras.”
That’s right. Enjolras remembers everyone going out to get drunk and then stomping back into the frat sporting their fresh ink. “But why…?”

Grantaire reaches up, daring to grasp a fistful of golden curls and tips Enjolras’ forehead down to meet his own. “You touched me, E,” he confesses. “That was the first time you’d ever even touched me and I… god, I don’t know. I can’t explain it, but I felt something. It meant something to me and I just needed to not forget. Just in case it never happened again.”

Enjolras can’t see his eyes. He can only see the tip of Grantaire’s nose. “You’ve felt this way since September?” he asks, incredulous.

“I’ve felt this way since the second I saw you, E,” he says.

“Then why didn’t you—”?

“I didn’t want to scare you away. I figured that being your friend was better than nothing so I just, I just accepted what I had. It was good enough.”

Enjolras does not understand. “But you said no when I kissed you.”

“I already explained that.”

“But you lied. Why did you lie, Grantaire?”

“I lied because… I don’t know, dude. You did something stupid when you were high, okay? I didn’t really want to dredge that up and embarrass you. I get it, Enjolras, I do: pot makes people do shit they normally wouldn’t. You were high when you kissed me. It was a freak occurrence. You didn’t want—“

“I did, though,” Enjolras finally confesses.

“You did what?”

“I did want to kiss you, Grantaire. I wanted to that night, I wanted to before then and I’ve wanted to since then.”

“Why didn’t you?”

“Because, you said no. I just figured that if you wanted to kiss me, you’d do it at some point. And you didn’t. So.”

“Enjolras,” Grantaire’s voice is rough. When Enjolras looks down at him, his green eyes are suspiciously shiny. “The only reason I’ve never kissed you is because… because I thought you didn’t mean the first one. I thought that if you’d meant it, you’d have tried again. And you never made a move, so I just, I dunno, I just assumed we lived in the friend zone.”

“Your reasoning is ridiculous,” Enjolras takes a step forward into Grantaire’s space. He can feel the atmosphere change as he steps into his orbit. There is heat and electricity.

Grantaire takes a deep breath but does not move away. “Nice try. Your reasoning is exactly the same as mine.”

“R. Can I… I mean, I want to…”

Grantaire doesn’t let him finish. He closes the last bit of distance between them, reaching up to softly brush Enjolras’ lips with his own. The kiss is soft for a moment until Enjolras seizes
Grantaire, buries both of his hands in that glorious mass of black curls. It feels so good, better than Enjolras had allowed himself to dream. He lets out a sigh that becomes a moan. The kiss moves from soft to urgent in a matter of seconds.

They finally separate. They have to separate. Enjolras keeps his body pressed to Grantaire’s, though. Legs slotted together, bodies pressed tightly. He tips his forehead down against Grantaire’s and smiles. He’s allowed to do this.

He slides his hands slide down Grantaire’s shoulders, discovering the landscape of this body that he’s finally allowed to explore. His hands glide down his arms, enjoying the firmness of the muscles there. He stops when both hands grasp Grantaire’s biceps. Grantaire smiles up at him. “I hope you don’t mind the tattoo, E.”

“I fucking love it. I love it so much, I adore it, I—“

“Stop talking, Enjolras,” Grantaire says and then kisses him. Hard.

Enjolras shuts up.

###

They lie in bed, limbs entwined—naked, sweaty, sticky—and Enjolras still hasn’t let go of Grantaire’s right arm. His thumb absentmindedly rubs a small circle over one of the red sunbeams. The cool green numbers on the bedside clock read “7:47pm.”

“We’re going to be late to the Fancy Party,” Grantaire says.

Oh yeah, the formal. Enjolras had forgotten all about it. Which reminds him of something.

“Why did you take Eponine to this thing?” he asks, his breath lightly ruffling Grantaire’s curls.

“Why did you take Eponine to this thing?” Grantaire retorts.

“I asked first.”

Grantaire sighs. “Fair enough. I asked Eponine because Marius told me that you already had a date.”

“He what?!” Fucking Marius. What the hell was he thinking? “Why would he say that? Why would he think that?”

“I’ve been wondering about that and I think, I think… he thought we were already going together,” Grantaire puts it together for him. “He told Cosette’s sorority sisters that you already had a date because he thought you were taking me.”

“So the night that I was going to ask you… you told me you already had a date because you thought I already had a date?”

“You were going to ask me out?” Grantaire grins down at him.

“I bought you flowers,” Enjolras admits.

“Oh shit, I missed flowers?”

“It was going to be so romantic,” Enjolras sighs. “I was going to sweep you off your feet.”
“Alas,” Grantaire says, planting a quick kiss at Enjolras’ collarbone. “You’ll just have to make it up to me, E.”

“And how exactly am I going to do that?”

“I can think of a few things,” Grantaire grins, sliding his hand down Enjolras’ chest.

Enjolras whimpers. “That’ll do it—“

There is the sound of a key in the door. They have just enough time to dive under the cover before Eponine glides into the room.

“Everything all worked out?” she asks sweetly.

“Eponine, we’re naked,” Enjolras protests.

She shrugs. “Nothing I haven’t seen before,” she says.

“It’s true,” Grantaire agrees, but then—“Wait, when have you seen Enjolras naked?”

“She hasn’t,” Enjolras pulls Grantaire against him and plants a kiss at his hairline. Grantaire forgets all about the problem, because this is a thing now. Enjolras being naked in bed next to him, unabashedly kissing him in front of one of their friends is now a thing that can happen, that is allowed to happen, that \textit{is} happening. He doesn’t have time to worry about anything else, because this is a brave new world and he has to revel in it.

Eponine clears her throat. “Dinner is in, like, ten minutes, guys.”

“We’ll be there, ‘Ponine,” Grantaire murmurs.

“You better be, kids,” she warns, “Courfeyrac will murder us all if you miss it.”

“You’re right, we don’t want to get murdered by an angry party planner,” Enjolras throws back the covers and stands up, glorious in his nudity.

“Oh god,” Eponine turns away, shielding her eyes.

“What?” Enjolras says, coyly. “It’s nothing you haven’t seen before, right?”

“And now I can’t unsee it. Thanks, dick.” She backs out of the room, eyes still turned away. “Get down to dinner, okay?”

They do make it to dinner, only about half and hour late.

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The formal is perfect. Enjolras doesn’t know how Courfeyrac and company pulled off such an exemplary event, but the party planning committee really went all out on this affair.

After dessert, everyone gathers in the ballroom for dancing. Marius has Cosette wrapped in his arms, swaying arrhythmically to the music. Joly and Bossuet have pulled Musichetta into a triangle on the dance floor, and Courfeyrac is doing his best to lead Combeferre in a complicated ballroom routine.

In one corner, Enjolras and Grantaire are tucked into a large loveseat, hands clasped, bodies pressed together from knee to shoulder. They could get up and dance, they \textit{should} get up and
dance, but Enjolras is having a very hard time letting go of Grantaire. “Are you happy?” he asks.

Grantaire drops his head onto Enjolras’ shoulder. “I’ve never been happier,” he replies.

The happy couples on the dance floor are luminous under the twinkling fairy lights. Courfeyrac separates himself from Combeferre with a quick kiss on the cheek, and then bounds over to where Enjolras and Grantaire sit.

“Enjolras,” Courfeyrac exclaims, wedging himself between the two of them. “Was I right?”

“About what, exactly?”

Courfeyrac smiles and throws his arms over both their shoulders. “That this has pretty much turned out to be the best year ever.”

Grantaire’s fingers tighten around his own and Enjolras nods. Courfeyrac is right.

This is the best year ever.

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