# The Proper Care of Actors

**Summary**

Erik is an A-list action star who is notoriously difficult to work with, until the day he gets cast alongside Charles Xavier, rom-com darling who can charm the pants off movie audiences the world over and apparently even one Erik Lehnsherr. The paparazzi catch them out and about soon enough, and their real-life Hollywood movie romance becomes instant tabloid fodder.

**Notes**

The epub format loads images when opened with Stanza on mobile phones.

There is now a Chinese translation of the story, thanks to the wonderful Yaegakisawa.

Chapters: [One](#), [Two](#), [Three](#), [Four](#).

We are extremely grateful to CloudyLimestoneWater for translating Chapters 5 and 6 [here](#).
A million thanks also to Glacier, who did an incredible job of translating Chapters 5 to 7 to Chinese here on AO3.

And finally BloodyHeroin is translating Chapter 7 onward to Chinese here on AO3. Thank you so, so much!

Thanks also to Flavie for translating this to Russian here.
You Had Me at 'Hello'

Chapter Notes

We would like to introduce ourselves as your three authors, Clocks, Clear Liqueur and Afrocurl. The amazing xsilverdreamsx is responsible for all the media coverage that we will be incorporating into the narrative. What began as a prompt in a meme has developed into an action-movie-within-a-romantic-comedy, and will eventually evolve into a fandom-within-a-reality-within-a-fandom and real-person-slash-within-fictional-slash, so if we all start falling into Limbo, please give us a kick. If everything goes according to plan, all the events will be happening in real time. There will also be enough celebrity cameos as we go along to fill a red carpet, numerous pop culture references, and some fandom Easter eggs scattered about. All jibes are made with love. So if you're ready for this, grab your totems and come on in.

Afrocurl - Having found myself being coerced into trying to write this by Clear Liqueur one day, this project is a labor of love that has me laughing more often than not. The rest of the blame falls to Clocks, who started writing this prompt before it was overrun by peer pressure and jokes. The sunshine and lollipops that I find myself wanting after each conversation tell me that this is all going to be perfectly fine. So thank you to both Clear Liqueur and Clocks for being amazing as we navigate a story between three people. I hope that you all enjoy the insanity we're all capable of writing together, laughing with us and not at us as we go.

Clear Liqueur - All my love to Clocks, I could not have asked for a better author to claim my prompt. I could not have written this without you. And also to Afrocurl, for all your invaluable knowledge about the industry, Los Angeles and American history. Thank you both for going along with all my crazy ideas, and if we somehow finish this before we are old and gray it will be all because of the two of you.

Clocks - I too will take the easy way out and blame Clear Liqueur for dragging us into this monster of a project (which is actually oh so fun.) I will also blame Afrocurl for being encouraging and egging us on. And now I will plead the fifth.

Disclaimer: No celebrities were harmed in the making of this fanfiction. The lines between fiction and reality are blurred, but no events in this story are real and any similarities to real events are strictly coincidental. We make no claims of ownership to the characters in the story or the media outlets that our mock articles are based on.

Soundtrack: Eels - Fresh Feeling

Within ten minutes, Erik was quite convinced that Charles Xavier was a complete idiot.

First of all, no one ever, ever made Sebastian Shaw wait, not if they wanted to keep working in Hollywood. But it had already been twenty minutes and there was absolutely no sign of Xavier or that blonde, shrill agent of his who had a habit of flipping her hair and stalking everywhere in knee high fuck-me boots. Erik kept watching the way Shaw made a show of tugging back his sleeve,
eyeing his watch, then letting out a discordant sigh of disinterested impatience. It was a magnificent performance, worthy of an Oscar. Still, Erik wasn’t falling for that bored, apathetic expression. Shaw was madder than hell – it was in the tight, clenched set of his jaw - and Erik couldn’t wait for Xavier to come in and get torn a new one by one of the most powerful producers in the industry.

Also, Erik had actually had the misfortune of being forced to sit through some of the idiotic movies Xavier had starred in over the years. They were formulaic and tired: typical romantic comedies with an insipid, flavour-of-the-month actress playing some Type A career woman with no time for love, and Xavier playing several different incarnations of the same floppy-haired, twinkly-eyed British twit who manages to steal her heart away, usually after two hours of bumbling shenanigans.

But for some reason that Erik couldn’t figure out, audiences seemed to gobble up Xavier with a spoon, particularly when he was cast with Moira MacTaggert, an actress whom Erik grudgingly admitted could at least act her way out of a paper bag.

Erik checked his own watch this time. Almost half an hour. Beside him, Emma was stabbing at the buttons on her phone, probably asking Xavier’s agent where the hell they were. The screenwriter duo, who looked like kids barely out of college, were slouched in chairs opposite Erik, eyes wide with awe as they stared at him. Erik suspected that the redhead might be a rabid fan from the way he kept gawking at Erik like a zoo animal. Erik was used to being gawked at, but he wished that the redhead would at least close his mouth.

Emma must have sensed his displeasure, for she was leaning over and whispering in his ear, "The two of them may look like kids, but they were nominated for Best Adapted Screenplay last year."

Erik made a non-committal, unimpressed noise. The less enthusiastic he appeared, the less hold Emma had over him and the less likely it was that he would be forced to read for the part with this Xavier fellow. "Why is he so late?" he asked Emma instead, who shrugged.

"We are so sorry!" Two figures quickly burst through the door, making everyone sit up. Erik rolled his eyes at the beaming Xavier, who barely looked flustered. "There was an accident on the freeway that caused some bad traffic."

"Really? Bad traffic in LA?" Erik said dryly as Xavier raised a cool eyebrow at him, as if noticing him for the first time. "Who would have guessed?"

"My sincere apologies," Xavier said again, his frank gaze resting on Erik for a long moment before he went over to shake a peeved Shaw’s hand. "I did not mean to keep you waiting, I know how extremely valuable everyone’s time is."

"Aww, that’s all right,” the blonde screenwriter – Alec? - said with a cheesy grin, obviously won over like Xavier’s hordes of female fans. “You couldn’t have known there would be an accident."

"Indeed I didn’t.” Xavier’s acting skills were actually good enough to make him look quite genuinely contrite.

"But I have ordered lattes and gluten-free doughnuts for everyone, they are on the way. My treat."

"Awesome!" Redhead happily said, the traitor, and Erik narrowed his eyes at him. So much for being a fan.

"Just let me know if anyone wants to order iced tea or anything else from the hotel," Xavier’s agent was saying as she sat down beside Charles, passing him his script. "We are totally, totally sorry."

Surprisingly, even Shaw seemed appeased as he sat down again, smiling at Xavier. "Anyway, shall
we get started? Charles, I believe you may have already met Erik Lehnsherr."

"I haven’t had the pleasure," Xavier said as he reached over and warmly shook Erik’s reluctant hand. "Erik, I’m such a big fan."

*I’m sure you are*, Erik thought as he retrieved his hand, ignoring the tingles spreading up his arm, and when Xavier shot him a rather amused, mischievous smile, he almost found himself smiling back.

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Sebastian Shaw was one of the most powerful producers in Hollywood for a good reason. He had a nose for movies that always raked in millions at the box office, be they action blockbusters or sleeper indie hits. Directors loved working with him because he “trusted their vision”, and Erik definitely owed part of his success to Shaw and his regular casting agent, Jean Grey. A few years ago, Erik had been struggling in LA, going for auditions in the day and working as a bartender at night, and it was Jean who had seen promise in him at one such audition for a Ben Affleck movie. The next thing he knew, Sebastian Shaw had turned up on set to watch him in action, and suddenly Erik was being offered a much better role than the bit part he was playing.

For Shaw’s next project, he had decided to take a gamble on Erik for the supporting role. Both Erik and Shaw had benefited greatly, if the $800 million that ‘Cyborg Cop’ had raked in was any indication, along with the slew of movie roles that had landed in Erik’s lap afterwards. All as the lead male actor in action blockbusters, unfortunately, but he could hardly complain.

Erik was now at a point in his career where Emma was beginning to drop hints about taking up more serious dramatic roles, and he knew what she indirectly meant without her having to spell O-S-C-A-R for him. So when Shaw had called about this new project, Erik had been torn about it. He had been expecting maybe a period drama or an indie project, not a serial killer flick, and it was only his indebtedness to Shaw that had made him show up here in the first place.

Now, he was expected to work with this floppy-haired dandy who wasn’t even professional enough to show up on time? Great.

“Erik?” Shaw’s hands were steepled in front of his chin, and he looked concerned. Now the whole room was turning to look at Erik as well. “Is there something about the project you don’t like?”

Erik sighed inwardly. It wouldn’t do to offend Shaw in a room with so many industry people, but Erik wanted to be honest as well. “It’s just that a serial killer picture sounds a little too much like what I’m already doing,” he said. “I’m trying to increase my range.”

From the corner of his eye, he could see Charles nodding understandingly, while his blonde agent rolled her eyes heavenward.

“But it’s not just a serial killer flick,” Alex blurted out, looking rather worked up. “Sean and I wanted to stay away from the old tired cliches. We wrote it so that it’s more about the growing friendship between the two leads. You watched ‘Pride And Glory’, right? It’s something more like that.”

“How is it something like that?” Erik asked, curious despite himself.

“You see, you have Michael, your character, an FBI agent who works alone because of what happened to his last partner,” Sean explained eagerly. “And Charles is up for the role of James, who is one of the best minds from the FBI Behavioral Analysis Unit. He is here to help Michael get into
the killer’s head so they can figure out who his next victim will be, and stop him before he takes more lives. Above and beyond that, the special skills that James possesses allow him to understand Michael’s pain, on a deeper level than anyone ever has, and he helps him come to terms with his past.”

“And you also have the setting of the film,” Alex interjected, continuing, “It begins at the end of the sixties, with the Stonewall riots as the backdrop. Couple that with the in-flight murders being an act of airplane terrorism and we’re essentially addressing two of the key issues in the world today.”

“But the fact remains that this is still another action blockbuster. The hero catches the villain, saves the world. I’ve done a variation of the same movie so many times; it’s starting to feel like Groundhog Day,” Erik barked back, fist clenching on his thigh.

Charles leaned forward, looking at Erik pointedly before addressing the screenwriters, “I understand Erik has some reservations, but I personally think you two did a spectacular job on the script and cannot wait to be a part of the project. I’ll just step out with Raven for a moment to discuss some scheduling concerns and will be back with you shortly to sign the papers.”

Shaw walked over to shake Xavier’s hand, “Thank you, Charles. I believe we have taken up enough of Cassidy and Summers’ time. Let’s adjourn the meeting.”

“So Erik, sit,” Shaw commanded as Erik made as if to rise from his seat, and Erik had to bite back a snarl, the vein on his temple throbbing. Charles took a backward glance as he left the room, eyes resting on Erik’s meaningfully. Shaw waited until everyone including Emma had left before proceeding. “The director specifically asked for you. I expect you’ll reconsider.”

“We’ve had this conversation.” Erik replied, staring him down.

“I don’t ask for favors, Erik. I express my expectations. So let me say it again, I expect you’ll reconsider.” Shaw stalked over, his jaw clenching.

“The only thing I’ll reconsider is walking out that door.”

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“Erik!” Charles called out as he shifted from his position against the facade of the studio, his face slightly flushed from standing under the midday sun.

He paused and turned. “Are you stalking me?”

“Heavens, no, of course not,” Charles replied too quickly, earning a quirked eyebrow.

“Okay, fine, yes. The valet told me your car was parked here. I think we got off on the wrong foot and I would never forgive myself if-- it’s just… Erik, could I have a word, please? Everyone deserves a second take once in a while, yes?” Charles babbled as he strode over and placed his hand on the crook of Erik’s arm, pulling him aside.

Truly, not only was Charles Xavier a complete idiot, but he also had no sense of personal space whatsoever.

Which of course meant that he ended up being pressed against the fire escape by a stupid British import with annoying floppy hair who he most definitely was not beginning to find extremely endearing.
“They’re right, you know,” Charles began, eyes searching his face, “about the potential for box office success. Your fans and mine are from two completely different target audiences, just our core fanbases alone would easily bring in $80 million on the opening week.”

“Are you just going to repeat whatever Shaw said? I don’t give a damn about that money-grabbing-”

“Okay, okay, I’m sorry.” Charles raised his hands in surrender before resting them on Erik’s jacket lapels, and seriously, didn’t his mother ever teach him about personal space? “I was telling the truth earlier, about being a big fan of your work. I took this film for the chance to perform with you, you know?”

Erik snorted, incredulous. “Go on, pull the other one, it has bells on.”

“Wait, you don’t know.” Charles’ eyes widened, the sunlight causing his pupils to shrink to the size of pinpricks, and Erik was sucked into the vortex of his cornflower blue irises so quickly that it almost felt like he was drowning. “You don’t believe just how gifted you are, how much potential you have. You are incredibly good, Erik Lehnsherr.”

Erik had had countless fans walk up to him on the street or at events, singing his praises and declaring their undying love, but no one had ever made him feel the way that Charles Xavier did in that moment, like he was better than whatever the critics made him up to be, like he was almost invincible.

It was ridiculous, how much he wanted to believe Charles, who was looking at him pleadingly. “I can’t make you stay, Erik. But I do sincerely hope that you will take a leap of faith with me. We could take on the world together, you and I.”

“CHARLES--!” A female voice shrieked from the direction of the entrance.

“Dear God, it’s Raven.” Charles pushed away, and when did he end up placing his palm over one of Charles’ hands?

“I’m here, over here. Be there in a moment.” He smiled apologetically before heading away, leaving Erik dumbstruck and reeling from the whiplash of the sudden loss of the warmth of Charles’ touch and the scent of his cologne.

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“Erik, I was just looking for you.” Emma hurried up to him and kept pace by his side, phone in hand. “So I take it this is a no-go. I heard Matthew Vaughn is shopping around a script about superheroes with--”

“I’m not wearing spandex,” Erik cut her off, adding, “Tell Shaw I’ll take the job.”

“Really?” she replied, momentarily shocked. “Okay, I’ll go get the papers.” Emma rushed off with a toss of her hair, sensible heels clicking against the marble tiles.

“Erik!” Charles called out as he came down the hallway from the same direction, Raven in tow.

Charles quickened his pace, only slowing to a halt when he had reached Erik’s side, warm breath escaping in short puffs from his lips. “We were just about to leave, I’m so glad I managed to catch you before we had to set off for our prior obligations.”
Erik nodded, a tender expression gracing his countenance. “That’s fine. I’ll see you next week at the screen test.”

Charles broke into a full grin at that, and Erik could not help but smile when he took his hand in his once again. “I look forward to it. This is the beginning of a wonderful partnership, my friend.”

“You’re too optimistic for your own good, Charles. Don’t you know that I’m the most difficult actor alive to work with?” Erik added with a smirk.

Charles laughed, his eyes not once breaking contact with Erik’s, “I never believe anything I read.”

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CHARLES XAVIER & ERIK LEHNSHERR
Spotted together at 20th Century Fox Studios

EXCLUSIVE

Rumor has it that America’s favorite leading actor, Charles Xavier, will be acting opposite the infamous Erik Lehnsherr in Sebastian Shaw’s latest film.

Xavier, famous for stealing the hearts of American girls with his portrayal of Robbie Turner in “The Blind Date”, looked to be deep in a meeting with Lehnsherr at 20th Century Fox Studios.

According to our sources, the film title has yet to be confirmed, and nothing has been signed yet - but the actors are “excited” to be working together.

See also
- Erik Lehnsherr - Rumors of Throwing Metal Chairs on set of “The Yatchman”
- Charles Xavier and Moira McTaggart: Latest Power Couple?
- Charles Xavier: “Moira and I are just friends”
Jean looked around the small office on the Fox lot, nervous about the upcoming screen test. Despite her many years of experience, there was something about this particular casting session that set her off. There wasn’t a need for it, if she were to be honest, but Shaw had insisted that he needed to have a chemistry test between Erik Lehnsherr and Charles Xavier anyway, adding wryly that he wanted to “ensure his investment wasn’t wasted.”

Jean knew better than that, of course. She had worked with him long enough to know that he was always up to something, and this screen test had his handprints all over it. Something definitely was afoot. If she had to guess, he probably wanted to see if there was any indication that Erik and Charles would not work well together, then twist it in his favour somehow. He was good at that.

Brushing her worry aside, Jean made sure the cameras were properly positioned in front of the windows, taking care to ensure that the cords weren’t going to be in anyone’s way. It was helpful, busying herself with all the small details to wash away the dread at what Shaw was up to.

Satisfied that the room looked appropriate for the stupidity of this test, she walked to the door, and opened it to see everyone assembled in the chairs lining the hallway.

“Come in, everyone. Sorry I’m running late,” she announced, quickly taking in all the various expressions around the room from Erik’s bored, chiseled face to the happy smile from Charles to the bemused expression from Shaw. Two blonde women entered first, happily taking seats next to each other on the far end of the table.

“Not as late as someone,” Erik intoned, walking through the door and giving Xavier a pointed look before setting his eyes to Jean and the room.

“Didn’t we agree to drop that, Erik?” Charles asked, before following the other man into the room.

“You did. I didn’t.”

“Now gentlemen, please save it for the camera,” Shaw drawled, looking pleased for a reason that Jean hadn’t managed to figure out, despite years working with him on his projects. Shaw’s eyes quickly wandered over to the women, eyeing them each in a way that made Jean wish for a shower, but they each responded with small smiles at Shaw, and he smirked back before turning his attention once again to Chares and Erik in front of him.

Both men nodded their heads slightly, and stood awkwardly against the wall opposite the camera.

“Is everyone here?” she asked, as soon as the rush into the room had quieted into a pregnant silence.

“Don’t see Singer anywhere,” Shaw replied, noticing that the room was missing the director’s frenetic energy.

“There’s no traffic today,” Erik rejoined. Charles huffed in response but made no other reply to the repeated jab. Quiet giggles came from the two women, and Jean figured that there was some story about traffic from the pitch meeting last week.

Not that it mattered to her what went on before this meeting.

“I’m sure he’ll be here soon, so why doesn’t everyone just take a seat until he arrives. Erik, Charles, do you need anything right now?” Jean asked, mostly to alleviate the awkward tension.
“I’d love some tea, if you have any,” Charles said, eyes bright as he walked toward the casting director.

“Earl Grey?” she asked, moving towards the small buffet.

“Yes, thank you.”

“Just one of those personal touches you’ll have with everyone here at Atom Studios,” she supplied before producing a small cup of tea.

“Thank you, Jean, for that nice little speech, but I don’t think it’ll be necessary.” Shaw shot her a rather displeased look before continuing, “Both Charles and Erik are committed to the project. This test is just to make sure everyone can be on the right page once production starts.”

“Of course, Sebastian,” she replied quietly, hating how little it took for her to back down whenever Shaw got like this.

Trying to fill the time before the director arrived, Jean tried to busy herself with the camera set up, double-checking that everything would work, especially how to crop out the heads of the assembled group. Each of the agents had a coif that could cut into the frame, so she raised the camera a few inches, hoping that would cut out the hair.

Five minutes later, Bryan Singer walked into the room, looking only slightly disconcerted.

“Apologies, everyone. I was on time but got called onto the *House* set regarding negotiations to bring Jennifer Morrison back for a guest episode.”

“It’s not a problem,” Charles said, looking eager to start, his eyes lit up at the prospect of finally starting the scene. It was one that Jean had picked for the read just to get a sense of how the men would meet each other on screen.

“Only because that was you last week, Charles,” Erik retorted, earning himself a pout, and was she imagining things or did Erik actually look amused?

“If everyone is settled, why don’t we just begin the reading?” Jean asked. She stood by the camera, waiting for some cue.

She was somewhat confused by the curious banter between the two actors, or more specifically, Erik’s bewildering good mood. Lehnsherr’s personality was the talk of all of Hollywood, all the way from his drunken tirade at X17 one night outside of The Roxy after seeing a secret Muse showcase, to the reported nights outside the West Hollywood Gelson’s yelling at the clerk for not having the time to properly bag his groceries. Perhaps the axiom was true: no one was immune to Charles Xavier.

“It seems like we’re all ready, so Charles and Erik, whenever you’re ready, please do start. The camera will be rolling in a minute.”

Moving from the camera to the chair on the other side of Shaw, she carefully watched as the two men, ever the professionals, quickly morphed into the characters she’d been imagining in her head for months now.

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Raven had been to a lot of screen tests with Charles, so she was more than used to the entire process.
The majority of his screen tests went pleasantly enough, because Charles really was supernaturally likable and he got along swimmingly with most of his other co-stars. So far, no other actor or actress had been able to surpass the onscreen chemistry Charles had with Moira, and even the tabloids were fooled, spawning several articles about them dating off-screen. Only Raven knew the truth about Charles, and she meant to keep it that way.

However, as she watched Erik step up to Charles, their eyes meeting, she was taken aback at the sudden charge of electricity in the air, as though lightning was going to strike at any minute. Erik now somehow looked older, beaten down, his angular shoulders now rounded and hunched as he assumed the character of Michael, the embittered, cynical lone wolf, staring intently at a frozen Charles.

MICHAEL: I don’t know what you heard, James, but I don’t work with partners. I do better on my own.

Now Raven’s eyes trailed over to Charles, whose eyes were bright and searching as they locked with Erik’s. Beside her, Emma murmured, “Oh my, they’re rather good together, aren’t they?”

“Yeah, I’m amazed,” Raven said, not even realising she was holding her breath. A quick glance at Shaw, Jean and Bryan confirmed that they too were leaning on the edge of their seats. She looked back to Erik and Charles, who were currently sizing each other up.

To anyone else, Charles would have looked the same, but Raven could see that his posture was different; he stood straighter, more alert as an FBI investigator would be, his eyes sharp and shrewd. His accent was also a little more flat and Americanised as he spouted his next few lines at Erik:

JAMES: That’s what I heard, Michael. But it wasn’t always like this, was it? No, you haven’t always worked alone. I read your file, and I know about your ex-partner.

At this point, Charles stepped closer to Erik, running his tongue over his bottom lip, and Raven could see Erik’s nostrils flare as his burning gaze raked over Charles. Beside her, Emma let out a soft, appreciative, “meep” as she squirmed in her chair.

MICHAEL: You don’t know what you’re talking about, McAvoy. You’d better leave good and well alone.

JAMES: I don’t leave things alone, Michael, it’s part of my job.

Now Charles was gripping Erik’s arm, but Raven was sharp-eyed enough to spot the way his thumb was rubbing over the pulse point on Erik’s wrist, and she could see Erik’s deep intake of breath, as well as how his gaze was darkening. He tilted his head a little to the left, as though preparing to lean in and kiss Charles, and Charles, that saucy minx, was smiling impertinently, staring at Erik’s mouth and licking his lips again, more slowly and deliberately this time.

“Does it say anywhere that they’re supposed to kiss now?” Emma said beside her, flipping through the script. “Because it sure as hell seems like it.”

“I don’t think so.” Raven just couldn’t take her eyes off the magnetism between the two of them, and she was only reminded that it was a screen test when Bryan started applauding both of them.
“Wow guys, that was great,” he said, as Shaw and Jean slowly started clapping too, open-mouthed. “That was a very emotionally charged scene, and the two of you brought this great energy to it.”

Raven could see that Erik was blinking as though he were coming out of a daze, while Charles seemed a little disappointed as he stepped back. Maybe the two of them had completely forgotten there were other people in the room. “Are we done?” Erik said, his voice a little hoarse. “If not, I need the bathroom for a minute.”

“Sure, go ahead,” Shaw said, smiling a little piggishly. He seemed like a man who had discovered something very precious and was now going to keep it for himself. “We’ll continue when you come back.”

As Erik quickly left the room, Charles was walking over to Raven and Emma, running a hand through his hair and looking flushed, as though he had just run a mile at full tilt. “That went all right, didn’t it?” he asked Raven, his eyes a little too bright and his smile bordering on an outright grin.

“Sure it did,” Emma said. “If it were a porn audition.”

Charles laughed a little too loudly. “Oh Emma, you are such a kidder.” His face brightened when he saw that Erik had slipped back into the room and he went off to corner the man, leaving both Raven and Emma staring incredulously at each other.

“Why am I torn between feeling turned on and terrified?” Raven said in wonder, eliciting a peal of laughter from her fellow agent who was patting her on the arm.

“You aren’t the only one, sugar,” Emma mused as she turned to stare at both Erik and Charles, who were standing together again, much closer than necessary. “I think we may have just discovered the cure for menopause.”

Raven had to clap her hands over her mouth before her loud cackle earned her a glare from Shaw.

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Charles knew that a lot of people didn’t take him very seriously. It came with the job, especially when he had made a career out of silly romantic comedies that routinely had plot holes larger than China. He was dolefully aware that his looks also didn’t help; while they made it easy for him to charm little old ladies and convince traffic cops of his innocence, it also meant he had difficulty getting good, meaty roles. Most of all, it made it hard for him to date, because most people thought he was just an extension of the bumbling romantic Englishman he often played on screen. Charles wanted someone who was his equal, who would take him seriously and not expect him to live up to his celluloid equivalents.

And in Erik Lehnsherr, Charles very much sensed that he was dealing with an equal.

He had been just as taken aback as anyone else at the amazing chemistry sparking between them, and after the screen test, he knew for sure that Erik had felt it too, what with the way his eyes had practically devoured Charles whole, making him feel like he was already naked and in Erik’s bed. And it was easy to admit that Erik’s bed was exactly the place he wanted to be. It just wasn’t as easy to figure out how to get there.

Charles threw a nervous sideways glance at Raven walking beside him, chattering about some luncheon she attended with Jerry Bruckheimer. If she knew that Charles was currently plotting a way to get into his co-star’s pants, she would drag him up to the Hollywood sign and kick his ass for the
whole of LA to see. So he had to be careful about asking Erik out on another pretence.

“Just give me a second,” he said when there was finally a pause in Raven’s chatter. He quickly ran back to the studio where he almost bumped into Erik and Emma, who were shrugging on their coats as they were leaving.

“Charles.” Erik looked faintly surprised, and it was obvious his lips were trying not to twitch up into a smile. “Forgot something?”

You, he said inwardly. “Er, yes. Erik, could I have a word? Alone?” Charles asked, glancing nervously at Emma, who stared back expectantly at him.

Erik turned to her, tilting his head towards the door. “Go on, I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Emma sighed dramatically as she slipped on her pristine white gloves. “Men, you’re all so transparent.” She gave them a disinterested wave as her heels clicked down the corridor, leaving Charles alone with Erik.

“Oh, yes. We’re alone now.” Charles smiled up at Erik, who looked amused as Charles rested a hand on his chest. “That’s good, isn’t it?”

Erik’s mouth lost the battle with the smile, which was finally emerging, making him look softer, more handsome. “What do you want, Xavier?”

“I feel like if I leave things the way they are, you’re never going to stop punishing me for my tardiness last week. Let me buy you dinner and make it up to you.” Charles put on his most persuasive, beseeching look that made even the most hard-hearted directors agree to his script changes. “Are you free right now?”

Erik looked down at the hand on his chest, which Charles had stubbornly refused to remove, and to Charles’ surprise, he could feel Erik’s heartbeat rapidly picking up in pace. “If I do, will you promise to stop stalking me outside studios?”

Charles rewarded him with his most winning smile. “I will promise you whatever you want, Erik.” He shifted his hand a little on that warm, firm chest, and he could hear Erik’s soft intake of breath. “Fine, lead the way.”

Raven was still waiting near the entrance, although her eyebrows shot up when she saw Erik trailing behind Charles. “We’re all going for dinner together,” he informed her. “With Erik.”

Raven’s mouth broadened in a huge grin. “Why am I not surprised?”

Charles eyed her evenly as he held up his car keys. “Just for that, I’m not going to let you drive. Erik, would you mind sitting in the back?”

Erik, who had been watching all of this with a certain wry amusement, simply shrugged. “I’m fine as long as you don’t chuck me in the trunk.”

Notes:
1. The title of this chapter is a quote from 'Jerry Maguire'.
2. Bryan Singer owns Bat Hat Harry Productions, which produces 'House, M.D.'
We Should be Lovers, And That’s a Fact

Chapter by afrocurl, Clear Liqueur, Clocks

Chapter Summary

Charles and Erik have dinner, and principal filming begins.

Soundtrack: Colbie Caillat - Fallin’ For You

Chapter Notes

All sections in italics are scenes from the movie. Oh and in case it wasn’t clear, this is kind of a fix-it fic. As always, the amazing xsilverdreamsx is responsible for all the media coverage that we will be incorporating into the narrative.

It wasn’t that Charles was a bad driver. He drove perfectly fine whenever he was in the UK. American roads, however, were an entirely different ballgame that endlessly gave him problems. Then again, who wouldn’t have problems driving on the wrong side of the road? It was madness, that’s what it was, and it wasn’t his fault. Determined to get them to the restaurant in one piece (and hopefully, impress the pants off Erik), Charles turned on the engine and started pulling out of the parking spot near the office, heading towards the exit on Pico.

As the car finally approached the exit gate, it suddenly lurched forward, nearly hitting a pedestrian on the busy street.

“Bloody hell!” Charles yelled, giving the frazzled pedestrian a pointed glare. Really, shouldn’t people watch where they were going?

“Oh? What’s that, someone has a temper?” Erik’s dry, amused voice floated from the backseat.

“More like, Charles has an aversion to American driving,” Raven said. “Prepare for an interesting ride, Erik.”

“Raven, I am not that bad,” Charles said with an exasperated huff.

“You like driving on the left side, I think that says it all.”

A quick glance at the rear view mirror showed Erik’s brow was furrowed in nervousness. “My friend, you have nothing to worry about,” Charles reassured him. “I haven’t had an accident in nearly six months.”

“He’s inexplicably proud of something that’s supposed to be normal,” Raven deadpanned, double checking her seatbelt just in case.
“How about a change of subject?” Erik suggested, sounding calm as ever, but the way Charles could feel his knee knocking repeatedly against the back of his seat betrayed his nerves.

“Delightful,” Charles replied, eyes narrowing as he slowly navigated the evening traffic. “Since I’m busy here, Erik, the choice is yours.”

Erik shifted in the backseat, deep in thought. “I’m stumped,” he admitted, looking to Raven for help.

Raven brightened up as she twisted in her seat to face Erik. “Have you seen that video of Charles in that deleted scene from *The Blind Date*, Erik?”

“Raven, please,” Charles chided her, feeling his face heat up in embarrassment. Here he was, trying to watch the road in front of him at all costs - not that it mattered much, the traffic was horrendous – and Raven was trying to ensure his mortification. “Erik does not need to see that.”

However, judging from the bright gleam in Erik’s eye, it seemed to be too late. “Oh, I very much think I do, Charles.”

“Then let me fix that right now,” Raven added before tapping the screen on her phone. “Here, have a look,” she said, passing her phone over to Erik’s waiting hand.

Charles let out a pitiful, long-suffering sigh as Erik started guffawing over the scene he was watching. *That* scene, then. Charles was already more than familiar with the deleted clip from *The Blind Date* that had him dancing and shimmying to a Bob Seger song in nothing but his boxers. The last time he had dared to check, that video (uploaded by someone with the nick ‘Mystique88’) had already garnered more than 800,000 hits on Youtube.

“Okay Erik, that’s enough.” Charles wanted to hit his head on the steering wheel repeatedly.

“Oh, I don’t think so.” Erik was boneless with laughter, hitting the ‘Replay’ button with far more glee than Charles felt comfortable with. “It’s like watching a pale, skinny, dancing…swan.”

“I know, right?” Raven was in fits, and Charles found himself wishing his car came equipped with a giant red ‘EJECT’ button he had seen in Looney Tunes cartoons.

“Okay Erik, I really think that’s enough,” Charles said when he saw Erik sinking into the backseat, face red with laughter. “And thank you, Raven, for that distraction. I’m sure Erik doesn’t want to be haunted by the image of me dancing in my boxers.”

Now Erik was smirking at him. “You seem awfully sure to presume to know what I want and don’t want.”

Raven must have taken pity on Charles, because she was finally retrieving her phone from Erik again. “Well, I just think it’s funny to let Erik see this side of you, Charles. Don’t you agree, Erik?”

“Very much so,” Erik gave him a languid smile in the rear view mirror that made something hiccup in Charles’ chest.

“Well, I’ll be glad to tell you that I’m not exactly the golden boy that everyone in Hollywood wants me to be,” Charles muttered, making a left turn.

“It takes tequila to see that side of him,” Raven added, ignoring his sideways glare.

“Again, thank you, Raven. Erik doesn’t need to know *all* of my horrible qualities.”
“Actually, I like knowing they exist,” Erik said, running a lazy hand through his hair. The handsome bastard. “I’m feeling at a distinct disadvantage right now.”

“That’s what the meal is for, Erik,” Charles said with a grin, before looking at the stop and go traffic along Santa Monica Boulevard. “It looks like we’ll be there in twenty, maybe twenty-five, if all these blasted cars would get off the street.”

“Is that all it’s for?” Raven asked, giving Charles a very pointed look which he was more than happy to ignore as he switched on the car’s stereo as a distraction, relieved as the strains of ‘I Can’t Decide’ by the Scissor Sisters started booming through the speakers.

“Not the band I’d expect from you either, Charles.” Erik seemed agreeable though, nodding along much to Charles’ surprise. He had previously pegged Erik as a hard, angry man who listened to hard, angry rock.

“Well, what can I say?” Charles shrugged. “I like to surprise everyone.”

“They put on a great show, by the way,” Erik said, and now even Raven seemed surprised. “You should try to see them next time they’re here. Better than a drag show, if you ask me.”

“I haven’t managed to catch them recently, but I will. I’m intrigued by anything the band does,” Charles admitted, making a mental note to get tickets the next time they were touring.

Raven turned around to face Erik again “Please don’t get him started on anything Scissor Sisters, Erik. It’ll take all of dinner. He loves them and wanted to have sex with half the band after the show in London two years ago.”

“Raven!” Charles exclaimed.

“What, it’s true! I’m just telling Erik about the man he’s going to be spending the next few months working with.”

“Something tells me the next few months are going to be very interesting,” Erik drawled, and when Charles caught his eye in the rear view mirror again, he was mouthing along to the words of the song, smiling broadly as he did so.

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Bossa Nova wasn’t exactly one of Erik’s favourite restaurants, but he had a feeling that was all about to change. He himself usually preferred Italian food (you could take the boy out of Europe, but never Europe out of the boy) but Charles goddamn Xavier had looked at Erik with those pleading blue eyes and said, “Are you in the mood for Brazilian food, Erik?” and Erik had shamelessly said yes, yes he was, and Raven had given him a sharp look that implied Erik would have said yes even if Charles had suggested dining on Sichuan-style stir-fried gator.

Erik told himself that he was just being friendly, that was all. He had to work with this man for at least the next few months, and he meant to make those months as pleasant as he could.

“Come on, Erik.” Now Charles was walking beside him as they made their way to the entrance, close enough that their shoulders bumped. “I’m starving, are you?”

“Exceedingly hungry,” Erik answered honestly, although he didn’t specify exactly what he was hungry for.

There was a long line of people snaking outside the restaurant, and their chatter quickly fell to an
awed hush as Erik and Charles walked by. “Is that who I think--” Erik heard one woman exclaim while her friend made a noise that sounded like a cat whose tail just got stepped on. Charles seemingly took this attention all in his stride, as did Erik. It happened too often for them to get affected by it.

The maitre d’ was standing at the counter with a bored look, but his eyes widened comically when he spotted the three of them coming in. “Right this way, sirs and madam,” he said without even checking to see if they had reservations, and Erik found himself glaring at a waiter who was not at all shy about giving Charles an appreciative once-over.

They were seated at a quiet, semi-private table that was tucked away at the back, at least to shield them from the majority of the gawking diners in the restaurant. Charles was oblivious to the murmurs and stares their presence was causing, happily studying the menu while Raven fixed her hair in the reflection of her iPhone. Resigning himself to a rather bizarre dinner, Erik took up the menu as well, his eyes automatically skimming over anything that was heavy on the carbs.

“I think I’ll order the lamb skewers,” Charles announced after a while, rubbing his hands in expectation. “I heard it’s the restaurant’s specialty.”

“Charles, you’re supposed to be on a diet.” Raven’s tired, dull tone suggested that this was a fruitless conversation that the two of them were used to having.

“Raven, please.” Charles shot her an admonishing look. “We’re taking Erik out tonight for a good time, the last thing I want is to watch my waistline.”

“You don’t look like you have to,” Erik said without really thinking, and it only dawned on him what he had blurted out when he saw Charles beaming at him as though he had invented the cure for cancer. “Er, I mean, you look like you work out.”

“A mortified Erik hid behind his menu, refusing to emerge until the waiter finally came to rescue him.

“Good evening,” he heard Charles say pleasantly, already turning the charm offensive on their hapless server. “Raven, what would you like?”

“The warm spinach salad, and a screw driver.” Raven sounded bored. And a little irritated, although Erik couldn’t quite figure out why.

“Splendid. I myself shall have the wild mushroom soup and the lamb skewers. For drinks, I’ll have a glass of pinot noir,” Charles said. Now, Erik could feel Charles’s warm hand covering his. “Erik, what would you like to have?”

“You. Erik was thankful that years of acting classes had trained his facial expressions and saved him from blurting out nonsense. “I’ll have the seabass fillet and a dirty martini to drink,” he said as he subtly slid out his hand from under Charles’, and maybe it was his imagination, but he thought he saw Charles’ eyebrows knit together in a brief, passing frown. Now his brow had smoothed out again, and Erik dismissed the thought.

“Excellent choices,” the waiter said before retreating, and now Erik took the valid opportunity to examine his fingernails very, very closely.

“So Erik.” Now those ridiculously blue eyes were fixed on him again. “What are you looking forward to most about the role?”

“You.” Erik frowned down at the table cloth. Don’t look at his mouth. Don’t look at his mouth. “It’s
the most cerebral thriller I’ve done, if anything else. Sean and Alex did a great job with the script.”

“Ah, yes, the script. It’s good, isn’t it?” Now Charles was propping his chin up with the heel of his hand, leaning in a little closer to Erik.

“One of the best I’ve read,” Erik admitted, ignoring the surprised looks on Raven’s and Charles’ faces. “What? I’m allowed to like things, right?”

Raven scrunched up her nose. “Eh, you somewhat have a reputation.”

Erik’s eyebrows shot up. “Oh? What for?” He was aware that his voice had dipped to that low, politely menacing tone that he employed for interrogating onscreen baddies.

Now Raven’s eyes darted away, but Charles didn’t seem the least bit flustered. “Like I told you, Erik, I never believe what I read.” And now that warm smile was growing on his face again, and it was only Raven’s polite cough that made Erik realise he was leaning in a little too close. He quickly sat back in his chair, looking everywhere but at Charles.

Thankfully the food didn’t take that long to arrive, and Erik could have smooched the waiter for providing such a divergence. He tucked heartily into his sea bass, letting Raven and Charles discuss an upcoming meeting with some other producer for a future project. He only looked up when he heard his name called, noticing that Raven was staring at him with a cocked eyebrow while Charles looked rather intrigued.

“Is it true, Erik?”

“What’s true?” Erik asked, and oh dear God in sweet heaven, was Charles deliberately wrapping those red lips around one of his lamb skewers, cheeks hollowed in a way that made Erik’s legs spread open slightly of their own accord?

“The time you got completely shitfaced after that secret Muse gig,” Raven said, and Erik noticed that she was smiling for the first time that evening. “Is it true that you threw up on some pap’s shoes?”

As Charles chuckled a little in disbelief, Erik waved a flippant hand at Raven. “All right, so maybe that night, too much tequila was drunk and shoes were thrown up on.” Erik paused for dramatic effect as Charles and Raven now dissolved in laughter. “And that may have something to do with why TMZ now always uses the most unflattering pictures of me whenever possible.”

Charles was grinning at him in delight, while Raven’s irritation seemed to have dissipated for now. “That explains so much, my friend,” Charles said in wonder.

“Just don’t ever try to drink Matt Bellamy under the table,” Erik said with a sigh. “He is a scoundrel and a lush. And I mean that in the most affectionate sense, of course.”

Charles just shot him a sly, teasing grin while Raven rolled her eyes dramatically. “Yes, Erik, because you have a reputation for being affectionate.” There was a glint of amusement in Charles’ eyes.

Erik leaned in, watching as that mouth wrapped around another lamb skewer. “I can be very affectionate if the need arises,” he said, and now the tone he used was the one when he used to seduce his leading ladies.

“Mmm.” Charles only allowed his lips to nuzzle the skewer, and Erik could only watch, not even bothering to look at Raven when she muttered, “Oh sweet Jesus” under her breath.
“You like the lamb, Charles?” Erik took a long pull of his drink. God, he needed it. What was he even saying anymore?

“Why do you say that, Erik?” Charles seemed to have forgotten that Raven was even there, judging from the way his gaze remained steadfastly fixed on Erik.

“Nothing. You seem to enjoy it a lot, from the noises you’re making.” Erik sipped his martini with a smirk.

“I always make these noises when I put something I like in my mouth,” Charles said, and as Erik drew in a deep breath, Raven held up her hands.

“Okay, you two need to get a room. For real.” She looked properly scandalised, the poor girl. “Want me to call the Beverly Wilshire?”

“Don’t be ridiculous, Raven,” Charles said in a very calm voice, but the way his cheeks were tinted pink said otherwise.

“You have a little something over there,” Erik said, touching the side of his own mouth.

“Oh!” Charles exclaimed softly, eyebrows shooting up. Erik watched, transfixed, as he swiped his middle finger over the corner of his lips before curling the tip of his tongue around it and slipping the appendage into his mouth, gaze fixed on his the entire time. Charles let out a soft moan as his eyes rolled to the back of his head, dark lashes fanning over the pale skin of his cheekbones. “This gravy is divine.”

Fucking hell, have mercy, Erik cursed internally for the umpteenth time and knocked back the rest of his drink.

Charles called their waitress over, smiling as though he did not just audition for the lead in ‘Honey, I Blew… Everybody’. “Another dirty martini for my friend, please.”

Erik looked up, wondering what on earth he did to deserve this. “Make that a double.”

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The three of them were in high spirits as they left Bossa Nova, heavily content with the food and even more content with the alcohol. Raven giggled as she carefully made her way to the car, tottering ahead in her boots.

“Am I taking you home, my friend?” Charles asked, slurring ever so slightly.

“Only if you can prove to me that you aren’t going to kill me on the way home,” Erik called out as he swept past him.

“Shall I walk in a straight line or move my index finger to my nose?” Charles didn’t wait for a reply before attempting both at the same time, finishing his walk with a ‘ta-dah!’ and bowing to sarcastic applause from Erik.

“You’re adorable for trying, Charles. But you’re really fooling no one.” Erik teased, walking backwards while facing him.

“Really, you two. Just kiss and get it over and done with already, man.” Raven’s voice was loud enough that the passers-by around them could hear her, turning around to glance at Erik and Charles with wide eyes and whispers.
Still, Erik didn’t seem affected by this. “No idea what you’re talking about, Raven,” he said casually, catching up with her as they neared the car. Rolling his eyes, Charles trailed behind, checking his Blackberry and reading a text from Moira, who seemed to have heard the rumours of him working on a new movie with Erik and asking if they were true, and if Charles was going to take out more life insurance.

“Silly Moira,” Charles muttered under his breath, smiling as he texted back a snarky reply, and he was taken aback to hear a strange voice beside him, ‘Sorry Charles, what did you say about Moira again?’

“What?” He was stunned to realise that there was a small crowd of paps trailing him, cameras trained on him and his phone, probably attracted by Raven’s earlier outburst. He looked around wildly for Erik and Raven, who seemed to have disappeared. “Go away please, no comment.”

“Charles, come on, what’s the situation with you and Moira?” someone shouted, and there was a bright flash in his eyes, temporarily blinding him and leaving him stunned.

“Oh for god’s sake, people.” Charles turned away from the lens, squinting as he waited for the red imprint of the flash to fade. “Can’t you just give us a nice night out alone?”

To his surprise, someone was grabbing his arm and hauling him forward, and Charles found himself cocooned in the safe circle of Erik’s arms. “Back off,” he heard Erik saying curtly to the paps.

“Erik, we just wanted--”

“I said, back off!” Erik shouted, and the din of the papparazzi died instantly, and Charles tossed them a smug look as he allowed Erik to drag him to the car, bundling him and Raven inside.

Charles was still blinking in the driver’s seat, but soon their car was being surrounded by camera flashes again and he realised they had to get out of there, pronto. “Erik, where are we taking you?” Charles asked, revving the engine.

“Hancock Park, off La Brea,” Erik said, still looking rather miffed.

Raven was shaking her head, suddenly giving the paps the finger. “Damn, you guys can’t even go anywhere without getting splashed on the cover of ‘Us Weekly’.”

“Tell me about it.” The frustration in Erik’s voice was something Charles hadn’t heard since that first pitch meeting. “Let’s just leave. I’m not even going to wonder how the fuck they found us, but that doesn’t matter.”

Charles was holding up a hand to shield his eyes from the camera flashes, but the way Erik had rescued him from the paps earlier made him smile a little, at least. “Erik, if you ever need to get into character and practice shooting some human targets, I’m sure the paps will be glad to help.”

Erik surprised him with a really loud laugh, sinking into the back seat in his mirth, and there was one last camera flash before Charles finally managed to navigate the car out onto the street, avoiding the paps as he did so, smiling like an idiot all the way to Erik’s house.

The drive was quiet, with Raven absently texting on her phone and Charles focusing on the road, occasionally glancing at the rear view mirror and noting that Erik was still slumped down in the backseat.

“Erik,” Charles said, after he’d managed to return to La Brea driving south, but unsure of where to turn next. “A little help here.”
Erik sat up quickly, rubbing his eyes. Maybe all the alcohol he had ingested at dinner was finally starting to do a number on him. “Sorry, umm, make a left at Melrose.”

“Thank you, my friend.”

“I should be thanking you for the ride.”

“I did kidnap you after the meeting, it’s really nothing at all.” Although Charles could only see Erik’s profile now, he could see the corners of Erik’s eyes crinkling, which meant that he was smiling.

As the car finally approached Melrose, Charles looked back once again. “Where to next?”

“Oh, it’s the second left, and then it’s a few houses in.”

The car slowed down as it entered the quiet neighborhood with large homes on either side. “Yours?” Charles asked, pointing at a rather ostentatious house on the right side of the street with a brick trim and a terrace on the second floor.

“Spoils of my first project with Shaw.” Erik said, sounding a little distracted.

“Are you fine to make it in? Need me to come in and drag you up the stairs?” Charles swiftly ducked the clumsy, playful swipe Erik had taken at him.

“Believe me, I’m fine,” Erik declared. “Tonight was nothing compared to some of my other nights.”

“Muse?”

“Exactly, among others. Goodnight, Charles.”

Charles heard the back door open, before realizing that Erik had already left the car.

“See you tomorrow,” Charles called quietly, realizing the neighbors didn’t want to hear any yelling at 11 P.M.

The door shut just as quickly as it had opened, and Charles shifted his attention to Raven, who was rolling her eyes.

“Oh Charles…”

“What?”

She shook her head. “Nothing, just don’t make me your beard next time.”

“You have an overactive imagination, my dear.” Charles raised a lofty eyebrow at her, but apparently, from her exasperated sigh, she wasn’t buying whatever he was selling.

“Yeah, yeah. Anyway, you know where I live.” She rubbed his elbow, apparently willing to drop the subject, for now, which meant that she could only be after something. “Take me home, please.”

Charles simply smiled during the ride back to Raven’s apartment before heading back to his own Bel Air home for the night.

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Raven strolled through the set for the FBI office, watching the crew members hurry about making final adjustments to the positions of the desks and lighting fixtures, labeling the marks on the floor
that Charles and Erik had to hit later. Being on the set was the favorite part of her job. She loved how it was possible to alter the perception of reality in filmmaking, have the audience believe only what you wanted them to believe. Even the slightest fluctuations in the lighting could completely change the atmosphere of a moment; the same scene played out in a darkening room could come across vastly altered in the quiet embrace of the morning sun. Things could take on a whole new meaning, seen under a different light. She wondered how it must be like for Charles, playing those numerous roles over the years, shifting from character to character, and whether taking on so many different guises had any effect on the person that lay beneath.

“Oh! Hey, careful.” She heard someone startle as a camera narrowly missed making contact with her face.

“Hi, sorry about that.” She apologized as she stepped away, holding out her hand. “I’m Raven, Charles Xavier’s agent.”

The young man before her put his camera down, and Raven found herself staring into shy blue eyes that could almost rival Charles’ as she shook his hand. “I’m Hank. Hank McCoy. I’m one of the camera operators on the set.”

“Nice to meet you, Hank.” She smiled, tucking a lock of hair behind her ear.

Hank stared for a long moment before blinking himself back to reality and adjusting the equipment on his shoulder. “Sorry, I don’t intend to be forward, but aren’t you too beautiful to be working behind the cameras?”

Raven’s laughter echoed off the low ceiling, her cheeks blushing slightly as she replied, “And I’m sorry that you weren’t.”

“I’ll see you around, Hank McCoy.” She spun on her heels and walked away, spotlights haloing around her flaxen hair, like a dream playing out on a silver screen.

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“Good morning, Chief Platt. Quantico flew me out as soon as you placed the call.” Charles entered the office and shook his hand before seating across from him at his long metal desk placed against the full glass windows that overlooked the grounds of the compound.

“Thank you for joining the team on such short notice. We could really do with a fresh pair of eyes, heaven knows we’ve been running round in circles. It’s a media circus out there. They’ve taken to calling him the ‘First Class Killer’.” Burt sighed as he rubbed his temples, the months of dealing with the case taking its toll.

Charles nodded in understanding, face wrinkled in concentration. “Don’t worry about the reporters; I’ll handle the press releases from now on.”

There was a knock on the door and Charles spun round on his chair to face the entrance, eyebrows quirking up. “Chief, you wanted to see me?”

“Yes, Michael, come in. I would like to introduce you to Special Agent James McAvoy from the BAU. He will be your new partner on the case.”

Charles got on his feet and began making his way over. “Special Agent Fassbender, it is--”

“I told you I don’t want any help.” Erik interrupted, directing his pent-up frustrations at Burt. “This case has become personal. I thought you understood.”
“The Deputy Director is breathing down my neck. This is now an issue of national security and I’m not going to let you turn this into some personal vendetta when there are hundreds of lives at stake. The killer’s murdered 6 people so far, who’s to say he won’t take out the pilot the next time, crash the plane?”

“There won’t be a next time. Every minute I spend here arguing with you is a minute not spent out there tracking him down, so if you’ll excuse me, I have more important things to do.”

“Special Agent McAvoy is highly decorated and one of the best minds at the BAU. Good luck catching this killer without his help!” Burt barked after him as Erik stormed out of the room.

The Chief rubbed his hands across his face, trying to ease away some of the tension. “I apologize. He has been on edge lately, ever since his partner got murdered.”

“It’s all right, I understand. I’ll go talk to him.” Charles touched his arm reassuringly before chasing Erik down the hallway.

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Erik found himself waiting outside Charles’ dressing room once he had changed back into his own clothes, idly smoothing down the front of his dress shirt. He had had an epiphany last night, somewhere between cursing Charles’ very existence and jerking off to images of his obscenely red lips wrapped around certain phallic-looking food items. Charles Xavier was a cruel, pitiless, evil fiend bent on quietly driving him mad, and he would be damned if he let him get his way. Though none of that really explained why he was standing here mooning over him outside his door.

"Why, hello there," Charles greeted when he caught sight of him, expression soft and fond, a smile playing over his lips.

Oh, fuck it. “Hello, Charles.” Erik replied, a touch of deviousness behind his grin.

“If you’re not in too much of a hurry, I ordered lunch. Do you fondue?” Charles stepped closer, tilting his head to the side.

Erik shrugged. “Sure, is Raven joining us?”

“She’s not. I asked but she said, and I quote, ‘No, I would not like to have a mid-afternoon fondue with you and Erik.’ That girl can be quite puzzling sometimes. So I guess it’s just me and you.” Charles nudged him with his shoulder playfully, grinning.

He let out a soft chuckle. “That’s fine by me.”

“Excellent. Come with me then.” Charles said as he pressed his palm right between Erik's shoulder blades and pushed him forward gently, a thumb tracing circles across the expanse of muscle. That same errant hand slid down Erik’s back as Charles hurried ahead to hold the lift, and Erik could feel heat pooling in the base of his spine.

"Where are we going?" he asked as he stepped in behind Charles, leaning in close enough to smell of the scent of shampoo in his hair. Bergamot, probably.

Charles tilted his head up to meet his eyes, smiling coyly. "To the roof, I asked them to deliver it there."

The roof terrace turned out to be stunningly beautiful. Hardwood walkways lined with smooth, round stones led to a lounge set beneath an ivy-covered steel trellis, the space decorated by
manicured shrubs and potted palms. The elevation offered them spectacular views of the Santa Monica Mountains rolling in the distance, keeping downtown LA in their eternal embrace. The mountain range reminded Erik of Germany, of summers spent hiking through the Bavarian Alps. It was the first time he had thought of home in a while.

“So let’s start with the cheese, yes?” Charles asked as he started fiddling with the knobs. “Oh bugger, how hot is this thing supposed to be? They didn’t leave us any instructions.”

“You’ve never had one of these on your own, have you? Never seen the cheese still solid, I presume?” Erik teased as he got up from his seat across the table.

“Am I being that obvious?”

Erik smiled, shaking his head. “Here, let me.”

Charles scooted over as Erik sat down beside him, sliding back in as the cushions sank, a warm weight pressed against his side. Erik unbuttoned the cuffs of his sleeves and rolled them up, clearing his throat as Charles slipped his arm around his back, praying his voice would remain steady.

“Firstly, Charles, we have to melt the cheese at medium heat while stirring, but make sure the wine doesn’t all evaporate. Then lower the temperature to keep warm...”

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Charles eyed the pot as Erik stirred it in a figure-eight direction, the aroma of the emmental and gruyere cheeses filling his senses, notes of kirsch and nutmeg brought out by the wine. He brought a hand to Erik’s knee, massaging a knot of muscle as he asked, “Is it ready? Can I try some?”

Erik skewered a cube of Italian bread and dipped it into the bubbling cheese, rolling the skewer between his fingers to coat the bread evenly. He blew on it lightly before leaning over and placing it in Charles’ mouth. “Careful, it’s hot.”

Charles chewed, the sharp tangy flavor of the warm cheese filling his taste buds before he swallowed. “Oh Erik, this is incredible.”

“Really, Charles, it’s just fondue, all I did was melt the cheese. But I had to quickly learn how to prepare a feast from the barest of ingredients, once upon a time.”

“Back when you were a struggling actor? Why did you go into acting, anyway?” Charles perked up in his seat, eager to hear the tale.

Erik nodded. “Yes, I used to work as a bartender at some of the clubs in WeHo to pay the bills.”

Charles’ eyes grew comically large at that. “Wait, really? I believe I have found my Anam Cara. Raven keeps threatening to send me for AA, she’s no fun at all. My weakness for the bottle is the reason I have a yoga membership, actually. You have to make me a drink sometime.”

“For you, of course.” Erik smirked as he continued. “And as for why, I didn’t come from much. My parents had to struggle to make ends meet, but they always gave me everything I needed. I made up my mind early on that someday I’d make sure they no longer had to live that way, surrounded by pig farmers and tailors.” Erik paused, a faraway look in his eyes.

Something inside Charles sank at that. The more time he spent with him, the more he was convinced that Erik Lehnsherr was a beautiful, beautiful man and, even though he was not one to bear a blind grudge against society, he truly abhorred how much the media had tried to twist the way the world saw Erik, to make him out into the villain he was not. And oh how he wanted to make them see him
through his eyes.

Charles reached out and took Erik’s hand in his and Erik blinked slowly as he turned his attention
to him, smiling forlornly as he shrugged. “And what better way to make obscene amounts of
money than to be an actor, right?”

Charles squeezed his hand gently, tracing his thumb across his knuckles. “And where do they live
now?”

Erik chortled at that, startled him a little. “In a mansion on the outskirts of Munich, tended to by a
small army of domestic helpers.”

Charles could not help but laugh along, the weight lifting as quickly as it had descended.

“And what about you? You’re a powerful performer, Charles. Why did you waste your gift on
romantic comedies?” Erik asked, clapping Charles’ knee with his free hand a couple of times before
resting it there.

Charles smiled. “Oh that’s simple. All I wanted was to make everyone happy.”

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He lounged back on the couch as Charles gleefully dipped strawberries into dark chocolate, though
at the rate he was going, he might as well just lick the chocolate off the pot and call it a day.

The wind was picking up, and Charles was struggling to keep his hair out of his eyes as he slid over
with the strawberries, resting the plate on his lap as he bit into one while popping another into Erik’s
mouth. And okay, fine. Triple-dipped strawberries tasted better than single-dipped ones.

“It’s nice to know that you can at least prepare desserts on your own.” Erik pestered as he reached
for another.

“I beg your pardon. The beef cubes weren’t that bad. I like them a little charred on the sides.”
Charles replied with mock indignation.

Erik laughed, and it surprised him a little, how natural it felt to bask in the presence of Charles
Xavier, with his easy smiles and unbridled affection, and how willing he was to simply share
everything with this man, like he could talk to him for days and still not tire of the sound of his voice.
He wondered where Charles had been all his life.

A soft breeze mussed up Charles’ hair, and Erik tucked the stray locks of his fringe behind his ear,
hair slipping through his moving fingertips like sand in an hourglass. Erik only noticed his traitorous
hand when it was too late, but Charles smiled that lovely smile of his, lips stained an even deeper
shade of red by the strawberries, and Erik decided the hand could live. His fingertips lingered on the
side of Charles’ head, unwilling to break contact, thumb tracing over his brow as his lips moved to
speak. “I think we’d better head down soon.”

* * * * *

Charles sat on top of Erik’s desk, surrounded by an organized mess of papers strewn across the
surface and empty takeout boxes pushed to the corner, poring over the files as Erik went through the
details of the case, the clock on the wall reading a quarter after two in the morning.

“The first victim was Stephen Miles, an architecture professor at Columbia. That was followed by
Maurice and Robert Fischer of the Australian energy conglomerate Fischer Morrow three weeks
later. The fourth killing happened ten days later, a drug dealer that went by the street name ‘Yusuf’. The latest victim was a month after that. Mr. Saito, CEO of Proclus Global.

“And your partner.” Charles added, looking up from the papers in his hands.

“Yes, and my partner.” Erik met his gaze evenly. “But we don’t need him in our victimology. The unsub must have found out about him being on the plane and took him out, together with Saito.”

Erik paused before continuing, “As you can see, the victims come from all walks of life. It could be possible that he picks them at random.”

Charles shook his head resolutely. “No, everything happens for a reason.”

He put the files down and took a gulp of his coffee that had long since gone cold. “The unsub is highly organized and patient. He kills with cyanide, slips it into their drink without anyone onboard noticing. And the flights the victims were on took off from different cities all over the world. It appears that he knows the schedules of his victims and kills them en route to or from their business trips. Miles was on his way to a conference in France, the Fischers were on a flight out to Australia for a Board of Directors meeting. Yusuf was returning from Mexico presumably there to check on his suppliers, and Saito was flying in from Japan to kick off a project with Cobol Engineering. If we can figure out how he is getting this information, we will be able to track him down.”

Charles watched as something loosened in Erik’s demeanor, like all the pain and anger that he was clinging on to with every fiber of his being in order to keep afloat in the darkness was slowly starting to slip away, now that he had given him a small ounce of hope.

He placed his palm to Erik’s cheek, warm and comforting, his thumb massaging at the lines etched around his eyes. He spoke, his forehead almost close enough to touch, barely above a whisper, “It wasn’t your fault.”

“I should have been on that plane.”

* * * * *

Erik stood from his seat as Charles entered the lobby looking freshly showered, a flush spread across his cheeks and neck. "I noticed that Raven left."

"Yes, I guess shooting ran a little late today." Charles made his way over to him, smiling.

Well, then. Surely he could not in good conscience let him drive himself home. If he could figure out a way to have Charles’ international driver's license revoked, he would. That car of his was a deathtrap in his hands and it was nothing short of a miracle that he had managed to survive until this moment without dying in a freeway five-car pile-up. Really, this is what friends do, he reassured himself.

Erik brought his palm up, beckoning as he made his way to the exit. "Come on, I'll drive you home."

Charles beamed at him like the morning sun and wrapped an arm softly around his waist. “Thank you, my friend.”

And later, Erik would repeat that thought in his head like a mantra, with Charles safely tucked under his arm while they walked to the car, warm and pliant at his side, as he brushed his dark shower-damp hair back each time it fell across his eyes.
Notes:
1. The title of this chapter is a quote from 'Moulin Rouge!'.
2. Charles dances to 'Old Time Rock and Roll' in the deleted scene like Tom Cruise in 'Risky Business'.
3. They had dinner at the Hollywood branch of Bossa Nova.
4. Original paparazzi photos.
5. Oliver Platt played the Man in Black Suit in 'X-Men: First Class'.
6. “Do you fondue?” is a reference to Captain America.
7. Charles says that Erik is an excellent cook in 'Excalibur'.
8. Your Anam Cara is the friend of your soul.
9. Our poor murder victims are all from 'Inception'.
They Fell in Love, Didn't They?

Chapter by afrocurl, Clear Liqueur, Clocks

Chapter Summary

Charles and a green-eyed Erik have lunch with Moira, and later on, Charles discovers when his saddest time of the day is.

As always, the amazing xsilverdreamsx is responsible for all the media coverage that we will be incorporating into the narrative.

Chapter Notes

We strongly advise clicking on the soundtrack later on in the chapter.

The previous time Charles had seen Moira was at the premiere of her last movie, 'Somebody Like You'. After that she had flown to London to start shooting a new movie, and they had not had the chance to catch up since then. So it was a very pleasant surprise when he ran into her just outside the studio lot, and she looked so chic and polished as always in a beige trenchcoat. “Moira!”

Her face lit up with the sunniest smile. “Charles!” They embraced each other fondly, and Charles gave her an extra tight squeeze as she laughed breathlessly. “Careful there, tiger. Anyway, what are you doing here?” she asked, tucking her hair back behind her ear. It was much longer now, way past her shoulders. The last time he had seen her, she had been wearing a short bob.

“Oh, I’m shooting ‘First Class’,” he said, smiling as her hand rose to her mouth in horror. “Yes, that movie you were asking me about, with Erik Lehnsherr.”

“I don’t know why you agreed to work with him,” Moira said in wonder, a hand resting on Charles’ arm in concern. “I mean, I heard that he’s so difficult. And such a diva.”

“Erik?” Charles wanted to laugh, thinking of his gruff but ultimately soft hearted co-star. “No, not at all. He’s a giant kitty cat.”

The way Moira’s eyes nearly bulged out of their sockets was comical. “Erik? Erik Lehnsherr? Are we talking about the same person?”

Charles was amused. “Yes, he is extremely charming.” He thought about the other night when they had been accosted by the paps outside the restaurant, and how fiercely protective Erik had been of him. “He is a really sweet chap.”

Moira wrinkled her nose in doubt. “Have you suffered a blow to the head recently?”

Charles laughed, leaning in for yet another hug. “Moira dear, your concern is very touching, but trust me, Erik is a wonderful man and a fantastic actor. Anyway, shall we catch up over lunch?”
He could feel the exact moment she stiffened in his arms, and when he drew away he noticed her staring over his shoulder with a strained smile. A familiar whiff of cologne tickled his nostrils and he immediately spun around to see Erik approaching them, his eyes narrowed a little at Moira.

But when Erik turned to look at Charles, his entire expression, well, opened up - for lack of a better word – and his features seemed to soften, that wide mouth tugging up into a smile, and for a second Charles forgot where he was and who he was with, right until Erik was standing right in front of them and said, “Hello, Charles.”

“Erik, I’m sure you know Moira.” Charles held his breath as the two of them warily shook hands. Realising he still had his arm wrapped around Moira’s waist, Charles quickly withdrew it, and Erik’s shoulders seemed to relax.

“We’ve met before,” Moira said with a tight smile, shooting Charles a pleading let’s-get-out-of-here look. “Anyway, you were saying about lunch, Charles?”

“Ah, yes.” Charles was determined to make his old friend see for herself that Erik Lehnsherr was actually a wonderful man. “Erik, why don’t you join us?”

Moira’s eyebrows jumped up, while Erik shot her a wary glance. “Uh, I don’t know, Charles--”

“Please, Erik?” Charles really shouldn’t be proud of the fact that Erik seemed to crumble every time Charles tried that soft, pleading tone with him, but it really did work every time, and now was no exception as Erik nodded reluctantly.

“Fantastic.” Charles rubbed his hands together in glee, eager for Erik to get to know Moira better. “Shall I drive?”

To his surprise, both Moira and Erik shuddered at the exact same time. “It’s okay, Charles, I’ll take us there,” Erik said with a wink. “I don’t want a few years shaved off my life.”

Moira, despite herself, was smiling at him. “I know, right? He thinks the roads of LA are like a Formula One circuit.”

As they walked off together towards the parking lot, bitching about Charles’ driving skills, Charles couldn’t help but be glad that his driving was good for something.

* * * * *

Charles didn’t really like lunching at The Ivy, which to him was an establishment that embodied all the pretentious flash and false glamour of Hollywood, an epitome of how fake L.A. seemed sometimes. But Moira loved the food there, and Erik didn’t seem to mind, so they had ended up heading there for lunch. They got a good table in the outdoor terrace, Charles sitting next to Moira while Erik sat opposite them, clearly unhappy with the constant camera flashes of the paparazzi outside the restaurant. Charles could see fans discreetly trying to snap their own pictures with their mobile cameras, and he offered them a quick grin before concentrating on the menu.

Once they ordered, Moira took a sip of her iced water before settling back in her chair. “So how do you enjoy working with each other?” she asked, giving Charles a secretive little smile.

He had to give it to her. It was quite a subtle way of finding out whether Erik’s ill reputation was deserved. “Erik is one of the best actors I have ever worked with,” he declared, enjoying the look of pleasant surprise on Erik’s face. “Really professional, really talented. And you know I don’t say that about just anyone, Moira.”
“Oh, really?” Moira’s smile was on the edge of playful now. “You said the same thing about me, Charles.”

“Of course, my dear. And I meant every word. The most professional actress I have ever kissed.” To prove it, he leaned forward and kissed her on the cheek, making her chuckle. However, Erik’s mouth was now a straight, grim line, glaring at Moira as though she were a terrorist that Erik’s action hero character was supposed to dispose of.

Moira must have sensed the sudden tension, because her laugh seemed a little uncomfortable. “Well, someone had to be the professional,” she told Erik, whose fists were slowly tightening in the folds of his poor, abused napkin. “Charles kept missing his cue, because it was his first kissing scene, and we had to keep doing so many takes. That was a very tiring day, I can tell you that.”

“I can imagine it must have been a nightmare for you.” Erik’s tone was nothing but polite, but the rigid set of his shoulders and his equally tight smile were hard to miss.

“How about you, Erik?” Charles asked, just to take the focus off Moira. “I imagine you must have had some bad kissing scenes as well.”

Thankfully the drinks arrived, and Charles’ eyes widened as Erik knocked back a sizable swallow of his scotch before raising his hand for a new one. “I’ve had some good ones, had some bad ones,” Erik said, looking down at his almost empty glass. “I preferred the ones where I didn’t have to kiss anyone at all.”

“Ugh, tell me about it,” Moira said, flipping her hair back as she sipped her Manhattan. “The other day, I had to kiss Tommy Lee Jones. Can you imagine what that is like? I mean, God knows I love Tommy, but it was like kissing a craggy-faced bulldog.”

“Moira, you’re evil,” Charles said even as Erik started laughing. “Don’t be so catty.”

“It’s true!” she protested. “Trust me, it made me miss kissing you, that’s for sure.”

Charles was aware of the exact moment Erik’s laughter stopped cold. Now there was an uncomfortable silence, Erik tipping back more of his drink while Charles played with his napkin and Moira’s eyes flitted back and forth between the two men, sharp and curious.

When the food finally arrived, they began eating quietly, interrupted only by two young women who wanted Moira’s autograph. “You’re like, my favourite actress ever,” the one with long curly hair gushed, before she pointed at Charles. “In fact, all my favourite movies have the two of you in them!”

“Thank you very much for that,” Charles said politely, obliging as the fans asked if they could get a picture together with Charles and Moira, while a surly Erik just continued shovelling food into his mouth.

“Excuse me, could you help us take a picture?” one of the fans asked, and Erik muttered something under his breath before taking the camera and aiming it at them. Charles waited patiently, watching Erik as he adjusted the shot, a slightly pained look on his face.

“Charles, I’m so sorry, could you sit closer to Moira, please?” the curly-haired fan asked, and Charles scooted closer. The pained expression on Erik’s face intensified, but he obediently took the picture before handing back the camera to the fans.

“My apologies, Erik,” Charles said, reaching over and running his hand over Erik’s bare forearm, stroking the soft hairs there.
“Don’t worry about it,” Erik said, giving him a slightly strained smile, and as Moira shot both of them a long, thoughtful glance, Charles wondered whether he had been apologising for the right thing.

* * * * *

Rose_Welton  Rosanne Welton
Waiting for Jo at The Ivy. I think Charles Xavier is sitting a few tables away with some friends.
10 minutes ago

celinet15  Celine Thompson
Omg in Ivy’s right now Charles X and Moira MacT r here
10 minutes ago

XavierGirl  Veron Xavier
@celinet15 omfg Charles Xavier?!?! Seriously??
8 minutes ago

sandeex1  Sandee Kitt
@celinet15 squee! I ship them so hard! R they holding hands?
Can u take pics?
6 minutes ago

JaneyV_  Janet Van D
@celinet15 gurlll pics or it didn’t happen
6 minutes ago

celinet15  Celine Thompson
@sandeex1 Gonna try and sneak one, but Erik Lehnsherr’s here with them. he looks scary. :( 
5 minutes ago

TheWrittenNote  Jason Nortman
@Rose_Welton Lol my sister goes nuts over him every time. Isn’t he in some new movie now?
5 minutes ago

Rose_Welton  Rosanne Welton
@TheWrittenNote Haha maybe? The fangirls here are stalking him, and Erik Lehnsherr doesn’t look thrilled.
4 minutes ago

@celinet15

sorry for the shaky pic yall. but omfg Charles X and Moira at Ivy’s! They’re so cute together!
pic.twitter.com/ikdleunsc45
Erik was quiet on the drive back, and Charles had tried to draw him into conversation several times, but he only received monosyllabic answers for his efforts. Back at the restaurant earlier, Moira’s agent Levene had come to pick her up, sparing all of them an uncomfortable ride back to the studio. Although Charles tremendously disliked Levene, he hadn’t been more glad to see the man appear outside the restaurant. Now it was just him and Erik, silent in the car, and Charles couldn’t help but wonder why he felt like he had done something very, very wrong.

His phone buzzed in his pocket and he pulled it out. A text from Moira: sorry i had to leave u with the bad-tempered bear. we’ll do dinner proper next week?

Charles texted back: Sure, sounds good. And don’t worry about Erik, he was just having a bad day. He’s a lovely man, I assure you.

There was a long pause before Moira finally replied: be careful with him.

Something defensive flared up in Charles, making him snort as he briskly typed: I don’t know what you are saying, but I know Erik will never hurt me. I don’t have to be afraid of him.

Moira’s reply was swifter this time: idiot, look again carefully at my last txt. i said with him, not of him.

Now Charles was more curious and mystified than anything else. He texted, What do you mean? and waited, but Moira didn’t reply at all.

“Everything okay?” Erik seemed cautious but concerned as he glanced over at Charles.

“Just fine.” Charles couldn’t help stealing a few quick peeks at Erik’s profile, realising he wanted nothing more than to make him smile again. “Erik, could you drop me somewhere near Rodeo and Wilshire? I need to make a quick stop.”
Erik nodded. “Want me to wait for you?”

“It’s okay, I’ll grab a cab back.”

* * * * *

Holding the small brown box gingerly in his hands, Charles stood outside Erik’s trailer door, hoping he was in a better mood by now. They had another fifteen minutes or so before they had to be on set, and from the sounds inside the trailer, it sounded like Erik was getting ready. He took a deep breath and knocked tentatively, hiding the box behind his back.

Erik opened the door a crack at first, but when he saw it was Charles, he swung it open all the way. “What do you want?” Erik’s tone was a little weary, but at least he wasn’t closing the door on Charles.

“I just have a little something for you.” Charles showed him the little box, which made Erik tilt his head curiously. “Can I come in?”

“It’s a free country.” Erik stepped back to let him in, taking the box from Charles and examining it. “What is this?”

“Take a look.” He flashed Erik his cheekiest, most playful grin as he made himself at home on the couch. There was a turtleneck draped over it, and Charles was half-tempted to pick it up and see if it smelled of Erik.

Thankfully, his lecherous thoughts were sidetracked as Erik undid the little gold ribbon and opened the box, peering at its contents. “Oh, chocolate.”

“One of the best.” Charles patted the seat beside him. “Come here, there’s a good chap.”

Erik eyed him for a brief moment before letting out a sigh and striding over, making himself comfortable beside Charles as he stretched out those long legs which made Charles’ mouth water. “Why are you doing this for me?” Erik asked, genuinely sounding puzzled.

Charles let a finger trail down Erik’s bicep, listening to the sound of Erik’s breathing quicken. “You seemed to be in a bad mood during lunch,” Charles said quietly, thinking about what Moira had said. “I just wanted to cheer you up.”

For a long time Erik didn’t say anything, just blinking down at the chocolates. Then, slowly, he picked up a piece and took a bite. The pleasure that flooded his expression was gratifying, and Charles watched with a smile as Erik savored the chocolate in silence.

It was a while before Erik finally spoke. “I’m sorry if I ruined lunch.” The flat, gruff way Erik said it gave Charles the impression that he wasn’t a man used to apologizing.

“Oh Erik, you didn’t ruin lunch.” Charles couldn’t resist sliding an arm around the back of the couch, letting his hand stroke soothing circles on Erik’s shoulder. “I was the one who made you come.”

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Charles was only aware of the unintended double entendre after it had left his mouth, and he could feel his cheeks burning as Erik started chuckling, shaking his head. “Really, Xavier, you’re such a tart.”

“Am I?” Charles tugged Erik towards him and to his delight, Erik readily scooted closer, continuing to pop chocolates into his mouth. “Anyway, how are you enjoying the chocolates?”
“Really good.” Now Erik was holding one up to Charles’ mouth. “Try it.”

Charles had already tried the chocolates previously – that was how he knew they were good – but he wasn’t insane enough to turn down the opportunity to be fed by Erik. He opened his mouth, letting Erik pop the chocolate piece inside and savored it as much as he could without making any obscene sounds. This moment was a tender one between them, and Charles didn’t want to ruin it. Swallowing the chocolate, he let himself nuzzle Erik’s hair, and Erik didn’t seem to have any objections, if the big smile on his face was any indication.

There was a rapid knock on the door. “Erik, you’re due on set in a few minutes!” the PA called out.

Erik sighed heavily. “Thanks!” he yelled back, as the footsteps retreated. He shot Charles a regretful look before pulling away, stretching his spine before getting up, and Charles blinked for a while, getting used to the loss of Erik’s body warmth.

* * * * *

“We are so fucking screwed, man.”

Sean was used to Alex’s random fits of panic. In all their years writing together, Sean had always been the more laid-back one, the one who calmed Alex down whenever he got too worked up. It was why he believed that they worked so well together. Alex’s fiery nature was good at inspiring Sean and spurring him on to take chances he normally wouldn’t have taken, while Sean felt that his Zen approach on things tempered Alex’s impulsive tendencies and mood swings.

Now, sitting on the couch and snacking on goldfish crackers, Sean barely batted an eyelid at Alex, who was pacing the room nervously. “Why are we screwed?” he asked nonchalantly.

“Because our first original script is going to be a disaster, that’s why,” Alex said with a sigh. “This movie is going to tank if our two leads hate each other.”

“Oh, that.”

“Yeah, that.” Alex stared incredulously at Sean. “I don’t see how you can just sit there, munching on those damn goldfish crackers.”

“Well, whaddya want me to do?” Sean asked patiently. “Force Bryan to do a recasting? Hold Erik and Charles hostage, then force them to kiss and make up? Jesus man, you’re not making sense. Nothing is going to change with you freaking out like this.”

Alex ran his hands through his short hair. “Dammit, I’m just... sorry, I just have such high hopes for ‘First Class’, you know? I mean, Sebastian goddamn Shaw was the one who greenlit the project, we managed to land Bryan Singer, and then now we have these two awesome actors who just want to kill each other... it’s too painful.”

“I know, man.” Sean moodily popped in a cracker. It was his script too, he had just as much invested in it. “Look, since we’re supposed to go down to the set next week, let’s just see if things are better now. Who knows? Maybe they’re best buds by now.”

Alex conceded with a shrug. “Maybe. Anyway you’re right, no use freaking out about it.”

“Exactly.” Sean held up the bag of crackers at him with a big, wide smile. “Have a cracker and calm down. Things will work out, you’ll see.”
It had been a while since Erik worked with a partner, but Charles was so extraordinarily accommodating that Erik found he had very little to complain about. Charles seemed to know the right time to back off and let Erik take the lead, and when Erik’s mind (and stamina) started to flag, he would step up and take over the helm of the investigation at that moment. It was wonderful, working with a partner who could anticipate your needs like that, and Erik began to wonder if this meant the partnership was going to be permanent.

“Here you go.” Charles handed him a hot, steaming cup of coffee, and Erik could have seriously kissed the man for bringing him the exact thing he was craving. “Don’t overwork yourself to death, Michael, the morgue is full up as it is.”

“Very funny, James.” Erik sipped his coffee, groaning at how good and thick it was; he could see the oily swirls in it. “Oh God, how did you know I needed this?”

Charles only smirked at him. “Didn’t you know I can read minds?”

Erik raised an eyebrow at him. “All right, fine. Read my mind now. What am I thinking about?”

Charles put on a serious expression, raising two fingers to his temple. “You are thinking that I am the best partner in the world, and how handsome and virile I am.”

Erik stilled, a little nonplussed at how close Charles had come to the truth. “You’re a regular comedian, McAvoy.”

“I knew it, Fassbender.” Charles was smirking as he handed Erik a stack of folders. “I was right.”

Erik didn’t say anything.

“Erik, would you mind if we went for a drive? I don’t quite feel like heading home yet.” Charles asked as he strapped himself into the passenger seat, eyes wide and beseeching.

They had fallen into a routine after that first night he had driven Charles home. Erik had offered to pick him up the next morning, seeing as he was no longer in possession of his car. A string of late-night shoots had resulted in him sending Charles home at the end of each day, and a fine layer of dust had settled on the hood before Raven finally threw her hands up in the air in surrender and drove the car back to Charles’ garage. Erik told himself he was just taking a leaf out of those celebrity environmentalists’ books by carpooling; forget the fact that his and Charles’ homes were in opposite directions from the studio.

No, of course I wouldn’t mind. It’s my favourite time of the day, driving you. Erik shook his head, draping his arm around the back of Charles’ seat as he reversed out of the lot. “Where to?”

“How about Santa Monica?” Charles suggested, smiling as he leant over.

“As you wish.”

It was late enough that the streets were quiet now with barely any traffic, and Erik found that it was hard to focus on the road when he would rather watch the streetlights glimmer in Charles’ eyes as they drove down Wilshire Boulevard, while he rambled on about the thousands of ways that they could play out their scenes for tomorrow and whether or not Bryan seemed like the type to allow for slight deviations from the script.
“I’ll back you up, but you’ll have to be the one to ask him. He likes you better.” Erik said, pausing to
direct his attention to Charles, “Everyone likes you better.”

“That’s not true.” Charles objected, “I like you better.”

Erik’s grip tightened on the wheel, heart lurching in his chest even though they were still cruising
down the boulevard. *Don’t read into it, Lehnsherr.* Erik snorted, attempting to cover it up, “That’s
because you’re biased. And a little out of your mind.”

* * * * *

*Soundtrack: Herbert Grönemeyer - Der Weg*

Santa Monica Pier rose up in the distance, the technicolor lights of Pacific Park setting the darkness
around it aglow, its reflection rippling on the water’s surface. Erik turned into a slip road just off the
pier, away from the pedestrians and their prying eyes.

“What would you like to do?” Erik asked as they pulled over.

Charles looked out at the pier, picturing the throngs of crowds, and felt overcome by a sudden wave
of exhaustion, dreading the parade this would turn into once they stepped out of the safe cocoon of
their vehicle. He unlatched his seatbelt and lowered his seat slightly, turning on his side. “Let’s just
stay here.”

Erik slid his finger across the control panel and music began wafting through the speakers, a male
voice carried on soaring strings and quiet keys. Charles loved the warm rasp of German, like a lover
in a hotel bed, whispering in his ear, breath soaked in cigarettes. He watched the Ferris wheel
rotating in the distance, lifting the couples inside up for a fleeting touch of heaven before bringing
them back down again, over and over in a cosmic circle, and the coaster as it hung from the
precipice, right before taking the plunge, and let the foreign words drift him across the Atlantic, back
to Europe with her quaint villages and charming cities. If he closed his eyes he could almost see it,
strolling through the cobblestone streets of Vienna under carnival lights, with Erik at his side, left
alone by the rest of the world.

He took a glance at the playlist, populated with an assortment of songs in various languages. “Do
you understand all of these?”

“I speak five languages.” Erik replied a little smugly.

“Erik, that’s amazing.” He said, eyes wide, “What is this song about?”

“Grönemeyer wrote this after his wife passed away. It’s about how he intends to go on despite the
pain he feels, even if life isn’t fair.” Erik paused, searching Charles’ face, “I don’t know if I could, if I
lost the most important person in my life.”

And there he was, the man Charles was irrevocably falling for. Erik, who was long-suffering when it
came to him despite his quick temper with outsiders, who was fiercely protective to a fault, who was
utterly terrified of letting people in and yet loved unreservedly, until the end of time. He reached over
and placed a hand lightly on Erik’s knee and spoke, barely above the swell of the music, gaze
unflinching, “I believe you would. You’d continue on, but never forget.”

*Habe dich sicher in meiner Seele. Ich trag dich bei mir bis der Vorhang fällt.*

*(I have you safe inside my soul. I’ll carry you with me until the curtain falls.)*
“Do you want to head back?” Erik asked as Charles stifled a yawn, burying his face in the crook of his arm.

“No, I’m fine. Stay. Tell me more about your mother.” Charles replied, eyes bleary and struggling to keep open.

“Okay.” Erik said after a pause. “My clearest memory from my childhood was the first time I lit the Hanukkah menorah. I was four, and my father was out of town due to work. We had the menorah placed by the window, and she held my hand as we lighted the candles, one at a time.”

“That sounds… lovely.” Charles mumbled, eyes slipping closed.

“Then she picked me up and sang ‘Ma’oz Tzur’, and I remember thinking, surrounded by the candlelight and the smell of latkas in the air, that…” Erik stopped, aware that Charles still had not reopened his eyes.

“Charles?” He called, but there was no response, only the gentle rise and fall of his chest. The look on his sleeping face was delicate in the moonlight, and Erik wondered what it would be like, to see the sun rise in his eyes.

Il vous aime, c'est secret, lui dites pas que je vous l'ai dit.

(He loves you, it's a secret, don't tell him that I told you.)

Erik watched him sleep for a while before stepping on the accelerator, leaving the flickering lights of the pier in the rear view mirror.

“Charles, wake up, we’re home.” Erik’s breath ghosted over the shell of his ear as he whispered, and a shiver ran down his spine despite the warm hand on his side.

Charles murmured as he stirred, wanting to stay suspended in that moment a little longer before opening his eyes, with Erik close enough to lose himself in his heady scent. “I’m sorry I dozed off,” he said, finally.

“Get some sleep. I’ll see you in the morning.” Erik said as he shifted, pulling away.

Charles nodded slightly, “Goodnight, Erik.”

He climbed out of the car, smiling softly at him as he leant in, his hand on the door. Erik bent over, resting his palm on the passenger seat, still warm from his body heat. “Goodnight.”

It’s my saddest time of the day, saying goodbye. Charles stood at his front door and watched as Erik pulled out of his driveway, waiting until his taillights faded into the night.

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Notes:
1. The title of this chapter is a quote from 'The Notebook'.
2. The Ivy is on Robertson Boulevard and famous for celebrity sightings.
3. "It's my favourite time of the day, driving you." is a quote from 'Love Actually'.
4. "As you wish." is a quote from 'The Princess Bride'.
5. Full translations of Herbert Grönemeyer's 'Der Weg'.
6. Charles needs to stop dying in canon.
7. Full translations of Carla Bruni’s ‘Quelqu’un m’a dit’ and audio.
8. We have created a @charlesxavier__ (two underscores) Twitter account.
The Curves of Your Lips Rewrite History

Chapter by afrocurl, Clear_Liqueur, Clocks

Chapter Summary

Emma wins a bet when the script takes a shocking, unexpected turn, and no one is more surprised than Charles and Erik themselves, who see it as a good reason to go out and celebrate.

Chapter Notes

The amazing xsilverdreamsx is responsible for the beautiful manip in this chapter. Also, we apologise heartily for the all the teasing, flirting and blue-balling, but we promise the next chapter will be far, far more explicit.

Soundtrack: Des'ree - Kissing You

Alex had forgotten just how intimidating Sebastian Shaw could be. Despite the fact that the man was barely taller than Alex - hell, he was almost the same height as Sean - Shaw possessed the very unnerving ability of looking down his nose at everyone, eyes cold and calculative, forever assessing someone’s (or something’s) value in monetary terms. Not all producers were like Shaw, but the best of them weren’t that much different from him, and Alex supposed he had better get used to this if he wanted a long and illustrious career in Hollywood.

Getting out of the car, Sean didn't seem as apprehensive as Alex himself felt during this set visit, but then again, Sean possessed an excellent poker face that had often carried them through the worst of long, tough negotiations with the most cutthroat suits in Hollywood. The suits were used to dealing with someone like Alex, a young novice eager for recognition and prestige, but someone like Sean - indifferent, infallible and relaxed - often threw them for a loop. It seemed to Alex that Sean already naturally was what Sebastian Shaw was trying to be: aloof and completely detached. Not for the first time, Alex shot his writing partner a brief, reluctant look of admiration.

No one took notice of them as they walked onto the set, but they could see Shaw already getting to his feet. “Boys!” Shaw was grinning from ear to ear like a proud parent as he approached them with his arms thrown wide, and Alex seriously hoped he wasn’t expecting a motherfucking hug, of all things. “Come to see your magnum opus in progress?”

Alex’s jaw twitched, while Sean smiled blandly. Why did Shaw assume this was the best they could ever do? They had barely even gotten started on the best of their scripts. But before Alex could make a snide reply, Sean was already saying, “Oh, you know, we’re not that worried since we knew we left it in good hands.”

“Ah Cassidy, you flatter me,” Shaw declared with a smile that didn’t quite reach his eyes. He was
probably well aware that Sean was playing with him, and he seemed equally determined not to fall for it. “Can my staff get you something to drink? Eat?”

“Not hungry, but I’d love a cup of coffee,” Alex said. “Don’t bother your staff though, I’ll get it myself. I have hands.”

Sean shot him a look that pretty much told him he was going to hear about this back at their office, but Alex couldn’t care less at the moment as he went to fix himself a cup of joe, letting Sean and Shaw catch up while he looked around the sound stage. It must have been one of the more major scenes, for the set was a flurry of activity, ranging from the key grip ordering his team around to the make-up artists touching up Charles’ foundation and teasing his hair. Charles raised a hand in greeting at Alex when their eyes met, and Alex nodded back with a smile. He sincerely liked Charles, who seemed just as genuine off-camera as he was onscreen. It was Erik that Alex was wary of, a ticking time bomb waiting to go off.

As Alex wandered back to where Sean and Shaw were chatting, he almost bumped into someone who was sweeping past him in high heels, clearly in a great hurry. It was Emma, that agent of Erik’s whom Alex had remembered from the first meeting. Emma shared the same shrewd looking-down-her-nose ability that Shaw had, except that Emma was a lot more subtle about it. Now Shaw was waving her over, and Alex caught the way her nose wrinkled in distaste a little. Ah, so she seemed to detest Shaw as well.

Alex liked her a little more already.

“Oh, Emma, darling, you remember the writers, Alex and Sean?” Shaw seemed far more interested in her than he did the two of them, his smile seeming genuine for once.

“Yes, it’s a pleasure to meet you both again,” she said politely, tilting her head a little. “If you’ll excuse me, Sebastian, I need to check on Erik. He hasn’t shown up to the set yet.”

“Of course,” Shaw said, and the three of them watched her walk off the set, prim and purposeful on her search. Now Shaw turned back to Alex and Sean, waggling his eyebrows. “That woman will drive me crazy, I swear.”

Alex hid his smile behind his cup of coffee. It was strange, but seeing the great, mighty Sebastian Shaw act like a complete horndog around a beautiful woman somehow made the man seem more human and fallible in Alex’s eyes. For a brief moment (but only a brief moment) Alex felt a little sympathy for him, but that didn’t last long. Shaw had armies of aspiring actresses and models at his beck and call; one disinterested agent was barely a casualty.

Sean, as usual, said nothing, but the sly quirk of his mouth didn’t escape Alex’s notice.

That odd little moment of solidarity was broken when Shaw cleared his throat, extending his hand towards the director’s chair. “This way, boys. If Erik isn’t on set yet, you’ll have time to talk with Bryan about the shoot so far.”

Bryan was in the director’s tent, huddled over the camera with the DP, discussing how they wanted to frame the next shot even though it was clear that the DP was disagreeing with him. Dissatisfied, Bryan waved over a nervous-looking young man with thick glasses who was tall enough to tower over even Sean and Shaw. Bryan asked him a question, to which the man shook his head, and the DP gave up, throwing his hands up in dismay. “Thank you, Hank,” they heard Bryan saying to the young man, who only nodded before scurrying back to his work.

“Bryan, look who we have with us,” Shaw said, and Alex knew he didn’t imagine the flicker of
irritation that briefly crossed Bryan’s face before he turned to face them all, but he broke into a
genuine grin when he saw Alex and Sean.

“Hey, what’s up?” Bryan said as he nodded at the two of them, who returned his grin. “I bet you
came here expecting a train wreck, didn’t you? Bastards.”

Sean chuckled while Alex simply shrugged. “Well, since Erik isn’t here, I can only assume that
Charles either poisoned him or pushed him down an elevator shaft,” Alex said, making Bryan laugh
and Shaw frown in confusion.

“Is that in the script?” Shaw asked, seemingly perplexed, and this time Alex really had to hide behind
his coffee cup while Sean was turning red with suppressed laughter.

“Uh no, Sebastian, I think it was a joke,” Bryan said slowly, and when Shaw wasn’t looking, he shot
Alex a ‘WTF’ look which Alex only answered with a goofy grin. It was too tempting to make some
kind of smartass remark, but thankfully Alex was distracted by the tall, bespectacled guy he had
spotted earlier who was now walking up to Bryan again, clutching some metal contraption to his
chest.

“Umm, Bryan, I’ve got a question,” the guy named Hank said, trying to maneuver around the small
space without hitting anyone else in the face.

“Sure, Hank, what is it?”

“Do you want me to follow Charles or Erik with the stead cam in the scene we’re doing second? I
wasn’t sure from the sides.”

“Follow Erik, if you don’t mind.” Bryan tugged Hank forward for an introduction. “Alex and Sean,
this is Hank, one of our steady-cam operators, and sometime focus director. Hank, these are Alex
and Sean, the scriptwriters.”

Hank eagerly extended a hand although it was lost behind the rig, hoping for either man to return the
courtesy.

“Nice to meet you, Hank,” Alex said, taking his hand.

“Thanks. I’ve gotta go now, though. Sorry for interrupting, Bryan. It was nice to meet you both,” he
said looking at Alex and Sean before turning around and going back to look for the camera.

* * * * *

“Charles, what’s wrong?” Erik asked as he pulled him to the side. They had just come off their
twelfth take of the scene, and Charles would criticize his own performance each time, nitpicking
everything from the way he delivered his lines to how he played off Erik, constantly insisting that
something was not right.

“This isn’t like you. Is it Alex and Sean? I’ll get them to leave the room if you think it’ll help.” Erik
said as he placed his hands on his shoulders, kneading them lightly.

Charles relaxed as Erik’s fingers dug into his muscles, the tension in them melting away. He tilted his
head up, blinking slowly, some kind of epiphany crossing his features. He brought his hands to rest
on the jut of Erik’s hips and nodded, tracing the lines of muscle on his sides with his thumb and
smiling, features softening. “Come on, let’s try again.”

* * * * *
Erik’s gaze bore into him, eyes glistening with tears that were threatening to fall. He looked beaten down, dragged across hot coals for so long that every last defence he had put up had been torn asunder, leaving behind only a broken man struggling in vain to carry the weight of the world on his shoulders. Yet, beneath all that, there was the faintest trace of something else, the thing with feathers, fluttering across his features increasingly often these days, the more time they spent in each other’s company. Erik asked hesitantly, his voice hoarse, “What do you know about me?”

Charles shifted forward to close the distance between them, placing his hands on Erik’s chest, and felt his heartbeat quicken through the fabric of his shirt, like the trembling heart of a captive bird. He splayed his fingers apart before slowly sliding his hands up to rest on the sides of Erik’s throat, fingertips buried in his hair. His thumbs caressed his jaw while he searched his eyes for any signs of trepidation, any indication that the other did not recognise the inevitability of what was to pass. Charles tilted his head to the side as Erik did the same, eyes half-lidded, and whispered softly against his lips, breath warm and moist on Erik’s skin, “Everything.”

The kiss started out tentative at first, Charles licking at Erik’s lips, and when Erik unexpectedly parted his lips, Charles took the opportunity to devour his mouth, and Erik surprised him by slipping in a little tongue and a soft, muffled groan of pleasure.

Unbelievably turned on by the sounds Erik was making, Charles angled his head to deepen the kiss, sifting his hands through the soft silk of Erik’s hair. He could feel Erik’s long fingers caressing his jaw tentatively, before his hands grew more bold and slid down Charles’ chest, sliding back to grip his ass with a possessive squeeze that made Charles moan into Erik’s mouth.

They broke apart, panting wildly, and Charles was sure his cheeks were flushed with colour, his lips reddened and kiss-bruised. Erik’s gaze was fixated on his mouth, and when Charles licked his bottom lip, this time it was Erik who dove in for the kiss, much more urgent and out of control, hands and lips and teeth everywhere, Erik already untucking Charles’ shirt to palm his skin.

“Cut.”

* * * * *

“Holy shit.” Sean exclaimed softly once he had the presence of mind to pick his jaw off the ground. A stunned silence had fallen over the entire set, no one daring to move as they gawked at Erik and Charles, still wrapped in each other’s arms, frozen in time. Erik finally parted first, Charles tilting his head by a fraction as though moving to chase after the lost contact. Their eyes opened slowly, completely in sync, and they simply gazed at the other for seconds that stretched on to eternity, like they were suspended from the rest of the world, holding a wordless conversation only the two of them could comprehend. Charles stepped back, hand trailing down Erik’s chest before he made his way over to them, Erik following just steps behind.

“I am so very sorry that I strayed from the script, but I really do feel that--” Charles began, looking rather contrite.

Sean blinked, finally catching up with reality. Every scene he had written for the movie flashed before his mind’s eye, every line and word and the multitude of ways in which they could be interpreted, and he stood there sincerely wanting to kick himself for not realising this sooner, feeling like an idiot that Charles understood the characters he had created better than he himself. Sean held his hands up, cutting him off. “No, stop. There’s no need to explain yourself, Charles. This is brilliant!”
“It is?” Shaw asked, eyebrow raised.

“Yes! If their characters are in love, it changes everything.” Sean grabbed Bryan’s arm, barely able to contain himself, mentally ripping apart the world he had created and rebuilding it anew, gesticulating wildly as he continued, “Think about it, a gay couple living during the social upheaval of the Sixties and working in law enforcement, back when homosexuality was illegal. Love will tear them apart.”

“This is going to be fantastic,” Bryan agreed immediately, his face lighting up. “Erik, say ‘hello’ to Charles, your new love interest.”

A warm and besotted smile spread across Charles’ face as he turned to Erik, who had remained strangely silent the entire time but now looked like he was about to hyperventilate, face flushed and pinched with anxiety. “Erik, is something wrong?” Charles asked, concerned.

“No, I’m fine. This could really elevate the film, it’s just…” Erik paused, chewing on his lip briefly, then he suddenly murmured, “Could all of you excuse me for a moment?” before hurrying off the set.

“Erik!” Charles moved as if to follow him, but Alex pulled him back by the arm, his grip vice-like.

“Where do you think you’re going? We have to discuss the new direction for the film.” Alex demanded as he dragged Charles back into the circle.

He released Charles and crossed his arms in concentration, narrowing his eyes as if he were trying to burn a hole into the floor. “Okay, so given what happened to his ex-partner, Michael is going to be fiercely overprotective of James, I’m thinking the scene where they track down the killer has to be reworked.” Alex paused, looking back up at Sean, who nodded in agreement. “They will also have to hide their relationship from their peers and, considering James’ training, he is going to be very mindful of how the world perceives them and will want to hide who they are.”

Sean could see it now, the stolen moments and clandestine meetings between the two characters, the constant ache from yearning for something with all your soul but being denied it by a world that was blinded by hate, and raised his index finger as he cut in, “And this will cause friction in his relationship with Michael.”

“But he does it anyway to keep him safe,” Charles added, his voice quiet, his expression pensive.

“Exactly. And it looks like we are going to have to scrap the entire final scene, can’t have a cookie cutter Hollywood ending for a movie like this.” Sean said, his brows knitted in contemplation as he mapped out the closing moments of the film.

“Man, it looks like it’s back to the drawing board.” Alex huffed, burying his hands in his hair.

“Right. Chaps, if you’ll excuse me, I’ll go check on Erik.” Charles gave Alex and Sean a pat on the back each before making his way towards the direction of the trailers.

Alex waited until Charles was off the set before he smacked Bryan on the arm, hard. "Dude! When the fuck did this happen?"

Sean laughed incredulously, planting his face in his hand, still not quite believing what he had just witnessed. “Seriously. For a moment there I thought Alex laced my weed with something stronger.”

Bryan snickered, eyes glancing upwards as he made a show of trying to recall the exact moment, "I think it was the minute they did the screen test. Sorry I didn't tell you earlier. I wanted to keep it a
"I hate you, man." Alex rolled his eyes exasperately as Sean rubbed circles on his back in commiseration. He had the distinct feeling things were just about to get very interesting.

* * * * *

Hurrying back to his trailer as though the hounds of hell were after him, Erik kept taking in huge gulps of air, forcing himself to calm down. He was only vaguely aware of the crew around him who took one look at his face and wisely scuttled out of his way. His head was swarmed with a swirling blur of vivid images, mostly of Charles so close to him earlier, close enough to share a breath. His eyes had been a blue blur, his lips a red, moist bow, even redder after having kissed Erik.

Erik groaned inwardly, grimacing as he hoped no one would spot his tented pants, his goddamn erection almost painful, making it difficult to walk. He was never more glad to reach his trailer, banging open the door and switching on the lights before he slammed it close, leaning against the wall and squeezing his eyes shut.

Charles. Goddamn. Xavier. Erik licked his lips. Good God, he could still taste Charles, the ghost of mint and coffee still lingering in his mouth.

Erik desperately tried to shut out all thoughts of Charles, but it was impossible. He simply couldn’t stop thinking about the kiss. The way Charles’ mouth had melded against his own so perfectly, as if they were made to fit together at the mouth, his body so warm and firm, his slightly shorter frame perfectly made to fit between Erik and a mattress. Oh God, he couldn’t stop thinking about Charles in his bed, those dark waves spread over his pillow, those blue eyes half-lidded in ecstasy, mouth slack in unrestrained pleasure as Erik thrust into him repeatedly, their hands locked together, Erik thrusting so hard his hair hung down, brushing against Charles’ pink cheek...

Quickly unbuckling his belt and unzipping his slacks, Erik took out his straining erection in hand and started stroking swiftly, thinking of how hot and tight Charles would be around him, those little hitching moans Charles would make when Erik finally slid home into him, the sloppy kisses they’d exchange, Erik occasionally pulling away only because he wanted Charles to hear the words spilling from his mouth, words he rarely said to another human being because he rarely felt them, but there was no denying it now, he felt them all for Charles his fucking co-star, and he bit back a moan as his strokes speeded up, thinking of Charles’ mouth and hands and body, thinking of him shouting Erik’s name in that prim, proper English accent, ruined raw with too much sex.

“Fuck, Charles.” Erik started panting as he began pulling up every single fantasy he’d had of Charles since the beginning: Charles on his hands and knees, looking coyly at Erik over his shoulder, Charles riding him in bed, knees locked around Erik’s hips as he gasped every time Erik’s thumbs circled his nipples, Charles beneath him, legs wrapped around Erik’s thighs as his hands scratched red lines down Erik’s sweaty back, the two of them fucking until the headboard was creaking, and at the thought of Charles coming first, crying out and splashing onto that soft, creamy belly that Erik wanted to lavish with kisses, that had Erik crying out too as he surged forward, spurting all over his own hand and the floor, gasping, “Charles, oh God, Charles....” as he shook and trembled with the force of his orgasm, slumped back against the wall.

The knock on the door made him jump, even in his post-orgasmic haze. “Erik?” Charles’ voice was laced with concern. “Erik, open up!”

Goddamnmotherfuckingsonof- Erik quickly scrambled for some Kleenex, haphazardly wiping his hands and cleaning up the mess on his floor. “What do you want, Charles?” he shouted back, hoping he didn’t have to open the door.
“I want to talk to you,” Charles said urgently.

“No’s not a good time.” Erik was aware of how hoarse his voice sounded, but his main priority was to keep Charles out of his trailer. If the man came in, he would surely be able to smell sex in the air.

“Please, Erik?” Charles was now employing that pleading little tone that Erik was powerless against. “Just for a second.”

Hastily throwing away the crumpled pieces of Kleenex, Erik quickly washed his hands before running his hands through his hair in a quick attempt to tidy it. Praying to get Charles out of his trailer as quickly as possible, Erik reluctantly opened the door and there stood Charles, hair falling into his eyes, his bottom lip tucked under his teeth, his cheeks a nice, flushed pink. All of Erik’s good resolutions flew out of the window, and when Charles asked if he could come in, he only nodded wordlessly, unable to take his eyes off him. God, Charles looked so gorgeous.

“I wanted to talk about the kiss,” Charles said, his blush deepening, and Erik felt his spent cock twitch. “Why did you run off after that?”

“Um.” Erik was searching for a valid explanation that wouldn’t make him sound all macho-shit, but before he could come up with something, he noticed a faint frown on Charles’ face as he tentatively sniffed the air, then his eyes widened up at Erik.

“Erik, did you--” Then Charles’ eyes darted down to his crotch, and of course Erik had forgotten to zip up his fly, and Charles was now staring down at him, mouth dropping open as his eyes lit up in comprehension. “Oh, Erik.”

Fuck. Erik was just caught jerking off after kissing his co-star. The months before him stretched ahead, long and uncomfortable with Charles avoiding him off-screen, and the promo interviews they’d have to do separately because Charles wouldn’t be comfortable with his closeted co-star having--

It was an understatement to say Erik was stunned beyond measure when Charles practically jumped on him, yanking Erik down for a kiss that was a million times more intense and needy than the one earlier, his tongue invading Erik’s mouth greedily, his arms locked around Erik’s neck. It took Erik only a second, blinking before he gave in to the deep drugging kiss, slamming Charles up against the wall with a breathless groan. Charles didn’t seem to mind, though; he huffed out a half-laugh, half-moan, tipping Erik’s chin up for another kiss that left Erik’s knees weak.

“Wait, wait.” Erik pinned him to the wall, struggling to gasp out the words between kisses as Charles ran his fingers up and down his collarbone.

“What?” Charles’ voice hitched as he asked, muffled into the skin of Erik’s throat, the vibrations and hot breath sending shivers down his spine, and if Erik had not been already spent, he would have fucked him into the wall right there and then.

Erik held his arms out and tried to catch his breath as he looked Charles right in the eye, feeling as though the world as he knew it were spiralling out of control. “Aren’t you straight? Everyone says you’re straight.” Erik asked, thinking back to late nights spent in front of his computer Googling Charles’ name only to be bombarded with countless interviews in which his female co-stars waxed lyrical about how ‘charming’ and ‘lovely’ he was, or his legions of fans all eagerly lining up around the block for a chance to have his babies. The truth of the matter was that he had no idea how he would handle it if what was going on right here was all just some kind of game to Charles. Perhaps drop out of the movie and go live as a hermit monk in the Himalayas.
“What?” Charles exclaimed incredulously, eyes wide. “Oh you are such a complete and royal idiot. Didn’t I tell you to not believe a single word you read?” He said, laughing as he shook his head.

Charles continued, tapping the side of his head. “Fortunately for us, I have impeccable gaydar. It’s my secret superpower.”

Erik’s mouth fell open as he hung his head in dismay, everything that had transpired in the past few weeks playing out before his eyes. I just went through two hours of bumbling shenanigans, he realized with utter, debilitating horror.

He stepped away, shaking his head vehemently as he wagged his index finger, “No, no, no, NO…” He stopped and dragged the palms of his hands down his face, trying his best not to scream. “I’m the insipid, flavour-of-the-month actress.”

Charles raised an eyebrow at that, “Really, Erik. Now you’re just not making any sense. You’re lucky that you’re handsome.”

“And dinner, and fondue, and Santa Monica. Those were all dates?” Erik asked, eyes going laughably wide.

Charles’ entire countenance softened as he moved forward to wrap his arms around Erik’s waist, smiling at him like he lived and died by each beat of his heart. “Oh Erik, every day with you is one long date.”

That smile was ultimately Erik’s downfall. Erik bent down and claimed those lips, tongue licking into his mouth languorously and eliciting a soft sigh. He brushed their lips together as they parted, resting his forehead against Charles’ “Mein Gott, Charles,” he whispered, trailing fingers through his hair. “Let me make it up to you. You like drinks, right? I’m taking you drinking once we’re done here.”

“I must warn you that I’m terrible when I’m drunk.” He chuckled, the laugh turning into a choked gasp when Erik began nibbling on the tip of his earlobe.

“Why am I not surprised?” Erik replied, low and deep into his ear before he made his way down to his neck to suck on his pulse point, Charles rolling his head back to give him better access, breath coming in shallow pants against his hair.

“Erik! Charles! Are you guys in there?” Sean’s voice pierced through the door of the trailer, his incessant knocking reverberating off the walls. Charles groaned as he buried his face into Erik’s shoulder and Erik placed a kiss in his hair before stepping aside to answer the door.

“Wait.” Charles stopped him with a hand on his chest, grinning, and just as Erik was about to ask why, Charles looked down at Erik’s open fly with a chuckle.

“Oh.” Erik’s face felt hot with embarrassment.

“Yes, oh.” Charles kept his eyes fixed on Erik’s as he slowly, deliberately zipped him up, but there was the very real promise that it wouldn’t be long before Charles would be doing the exact opposite, and Erik bent down to claim one last kiss before pulling away to open the door.

“Yes, what do you want?” Erik said sharply, causing Sean to shrink back.

“We just wanted to let you know that we’re heading off. Massive rewrites need to be done and Shaw wants them on his desk in the morning, we’ll sleep when we’re dead, et cetera, et cetera. Oh and Bryan wants you back on the set to do a few more takes,” Alex said, eyebrows jumping as a very
disheveled looking Charles peeked out by Erik’s side.

“Thank you, Alex. We will be right over,” Charles said, combing his fingers through his hair.

“Okay, see you guys some other time,” Sean called out as Erik closed the door on them.

“Really, Erik. There’s no need to be so curt,” Charles said gently as he adjusted his shirt, trying his best to smooth out the creases.

“Dude! They were totally making out!” They heard Sean exclaim from the other side of the door, footsteps leading away.

“We can still hear you!” Erik bellowed, and Charles could not help but rest his weight on Erik and laugh.

* * * * *

The first thing that greeted Charles and Erik as they re-emerged in the studio was a flurry of blonde tresses as Raven and Emma marched over, the latter looking extremely pleased with herself.

“Charles! You ass, you made me lose a hundred bucks!” Raven yelled as she smacked his arm. She took in his tousled hair and slightly rumpled clothes, the slightly raw appearance of the skin around his neck, and immediately started wiping her defiled palm on the fabric of her skirt. “Christ, you fucked in the trailer, didn’t you?”

Charles immediately flushed scarlet. “I did no such thing! And why, pray tell, is it my fault that you lost all that money?”

Emma stepped forward, gesturing to the other blonde. “Raven here bet that the two of you were going to give up on the charade and start macking on each other last week. I, on the other hand, very wisely said it was going to be this week,” Emma answered as she folded her arms smugly while Charles looked like he was about to fall over dead from mortification.

Erik snickered as he placed an arm around him soothingly. “Ah, big mistake. Never bet against Emma, Raven. She always wins. This woman used to work in Vegas, I swear she’s psychic.”

“But really, why did it take you two so long?” Raven prodded, still not ready to let it go, needing an explanation as to why she now had to think twice before buying that gorgeous pair of boots she saw in a window at Rodeo Drive.

“Ah, well. Erik here believed I was straight,” Charles replied, rolling his eyes.

Raven doubled over, laughing hysterically. “What? Have you even seen the way he crosses his legs?” she choked out at Erik between peals of laughter.

Erik blinked at a grinning Charles, perplexed. “Well, I, um--”

“Go! Get back to your places, you fucking shitshows,” Raven cried affectionately as she shoved them off in the direction of the set, shaking her head.

Raven watched with resigned fondness as Charles and Erik stood on their marks preparing to reshoot the kiss, smiling at each other like lovestruck teenagers, and had to grudgingly admit that they really did fit perfectly together, Charles’ untempered exuberance and Erik’s brooding stoicism, like two incomplete halves of a whole. “Emma, I feel like a voyeur.”
Her fellow agent sighed dramatically, rolling her eyes. “Tell me about it.”

* * * * *

For all his forward moves in the last few weeks, Charles happily allowed Erik to take the lead this time for their upcoming night out. At this time, after filming had ended, he would normally be waiting for Erik to drive him home. However, tonight he was looking forward to a night of drinking, a welcome change in the routine.

He was absently looking at a sudoku puzzle Raven had left in his trailer when a rapid knock startled him. “Ready to go drinking?” Erik asked as he opened the trailer door.

“Of course. You lead the way.” Charles padded towards to the door, unable to stop himself from smiling like an idiot the moment he laid eyes on Erik. Well, at least Charles was certain that Erik’s intense gaze was raking over him as well, taking in his smaller and less muscular physique.

“Stop looking like you want to ravish me on set, Erik. The crew will talk,” Charles said with a laugh, falling in place beside him as though it was the most natural thing in the world.

It was a good thing Erik seemed to agree, pulling Charles even closer and pressing a chaste kiss against the corner of Charles’ mouth as they strolled to the waiting towncar.

* * * * *

Erik hated traffic almost as much as he knew Charles did, but for this night, he was willing to brave the ride into Hollywood. Hollywood Boulevard was a nightmare, tourists aimlessly walking down the street and across to find some idiotic trinket of their trip, all while hoping to see someone famous. As the towncar pulled up outside The Roxbury, Erik looked at the long, snaking line of Angelenos, dressed up to the nines and waiting impatiently in the queue. Getting out of the towncar and telling the driver they would call him when they were ready to leave, Erik and Charles were spotted by the door manager who quickly ushered them to the front of the queue, beaming as though he had just won the lottery. Maybe it was true; celeb sightings were good business for clubs after all.

The Ivar Bar had been one of Erik’s favourite haunts before it closed, and with the opening of The Roxbury, he figured it was as good a chance as any to impress Charles. Once they were inside, a hostess found her way to them, moving them up to the VIP section smoothly and efficiently.

“What can I get for you two right now?” she asked when they’d been seated into a very private booth with a large banquet and low table.

Charles eyed Erik carefully, letting him know that the decision was his to make.

“A bottle of Macallan 25.”

“Excellent choice. Someone else will be back with it for you.”

She quickly left the two of them alone, and Erik now was starting to feel more at ease, draping an arm around the back of the seat, and Charles didn’t have to be asked to scoot closer towards him, making Erik smile.

Once the whisky arrived and they poured some out for themselves, Erik sat back to relax, his fingers tracing circles beneath the hem of Charles’ shirt as they spoke into each other’s ears over the steady bassline of the club music, lips accidentally-on-purpose brushing against skin. Charles would swirl his tumbler of whisky absently as he sang along to the choruses of the songs that he knew, all
inebriated smiles and spontaneous giggles, holding the glass up to Erik’s lips for him to sip from time to time.

“Do you really have impeccable gaydar?” Erik asked as they neared the halfway mark of the bottle of Macallan, Charles slung over his side affectionately, his cheeks flushed from the whisky.

He bolted upright in his seat immediately, looking a little manic with glee. “Of course! Let me prove it to you,” he said as he turned to face the rest of the club and proceeded to point at random patrons in rapid-fire succession, “Straight, gay, gay, straight, spaghetti-straight—”

Erik laughed, resting his chin on Charles’ shoulder. “What do you mean by ‘spaghetti-straight’?”

“Spaghetti is only straight until it hits hot water. Now, where was I… Gay, straight, straight, gay—”

“Charles, there is no way that man is gay,” Erik argued when he pointed out a tall, well-muscled man sitting at the bar, face shadowed by a thick growth of stubble.

“Oh, my dear, I’m absolutely positive that he is,” Charles slurred over his shoulder as he got up perhaps a little too quickly, tipping sideways and stumbling around before Erik steadied his hips with his hands. Charles cupped the side of Erik’s face in appreciation before turning away to strut out of their booth and onto the floor.

“Charles, what are you doing? Charles!” Erik called out, the panic evident in his voice as he sprang up from the leather couch, the alcohol rushing to his head as he hurried after him, heart racing from a combination of the loud beats and moderate intoxication as soon as he stepped outside.

Charles grinned, completely unfazed, shouting over the music. “I’m going to ask him for his number, you can be my wingman if you want!”

“No, I believe you. Can we please just get back inside?” Erik begged, suddenly feeling completely sober. Charles was going to get beaten up by that redneck at the bar the moment he opened his mouth unless he did something about it, and the guy looked like he pumped iron for a living. Erik began sizing the man up as he squeezed his way past the press of bodies around him, mentally prepared to have this splashed all over TMZ and wondering how he was going to explain this to his attorney during the eventual lawsuit.

They ended up flanking both sides of the man, and Erik leaned against the counter attempting to appear calm even as every muscle in his body was tense and ready for action. “Hello, my name is Charles,” the man who would surely be the cause of his heart giving out someday greeted with one of his most charming smiles.

The stranger’s eyes flicked up to meet Charles’, blinking before trailing up and down his body and nodding in reply, “Logan.”

Charles leaned in, trying to speak over the track that was playing. “I couldn't help but notice that you were sitting alone. Would you like another drink?”

Logan shrugged noncommittally and Charles gestured to the bartender to bring over another bottle of beer.

“I love what you've done with your hair,” Charles said as he toyed with a tuft of his mane, and Erik did not know whether to praise his acting abilities or shake his head at the shamelessness of it all because, honest to God, he would not be caught dead leaving his house with that windblown disaster on his head. And if not for the fact that he was standing there in fear for Charles’ safety, he would have paid more attention to the irrational spike of jealousy that had seized his chest, or at least until
Charles had glanced up at him with a look of sudden realisation before immediately dropping his hand.

The bartender tossed a coaster on the counter before placing the ice-cold beer on it, beads of condensation forming around the neck. Logan finished up the bottle he had been nursing and Charles hooked him with one of his smoldering gazes after he placed it off to the side, asking, “Can I have your number? We could get together for a drink sometime.”

There it was, the moment of truth, and Erik sucked in a breath, ready to lunge forward and hold Logan down at the first signs of aggression. “Sure,” he said instead, and holy hell Charles was right. He grabbed a pen from the bar and scribbled his digits on a napkin before saluting Charles with his bottle and stalking away, leaving a very dumbstruck, open-mouthed Erik in his wake. Charles picked up the napkin, waving it in his face as he shifted over and looking incredibly smug for someone who could barely walk straight.

“Fine, you win,” Erik huffed petulantly.

The corners of Charles’ mouth tugged down slightly as his eyes scanned Erik’s face before he held the napkin up with both hands and promptly ripped it into shreds, tossing the torn pieces in the air. He placed his hands on Erik’s shoulders and pressed their bodies flush together as he whispered, close enough to hear above the thumping bass, breath hot against his ear, “I only want you.”

Erik splayed his hand over the back of Charles’ head as he kissed him, fingers tangled in the soft waves of his hair, claiming his mouth like how he wanted to mark every other inch of his body before sucking on his lower lip, whisky-laced and swollen from the bruising kiss. Erik dropped one last kiss onto the corner of his mouth before pulling away, Charles panting slightly in his arms.

“You know he only gave you his number because you’re Charles Xavier.” Erik said with a smirk.

Charles laughed, flushed and happy. “Whatever helps you sleep at night, my friend. I bet he does musical theatre,” Charles retorted as he tossed his head back. He then proceeded to prop his elbows up on the bar top as he arched his back while looking up at him through his dark lashes, running the tip of his tongue along his lips before smiling coyly, and Erik seriously pondered the repercussions of spreading him out across the countertop for the world to see. “Now, how about that drink you promised me?”

Erik covered Charles’ body with his own and pressed his palm to the small of his back, eliciting a sharp gasp from Charles who arched himself higher to get closer to the other man. “Wait right here,” he said to the shell of his ear right before he drew away, smiling with satisfaction when he took in the flustered look on Charles’ face as he walked off. He made his way to the end of the bar and went up to the bartender at the side, slipping him several Franklins. “I’d like to make my friend a drink,” he said, nodding at Charles who waved back from the barstool that he now perched on.

“Of course, Mr. Lehnsherr,” the bartender replied as he lifted the bar flap to let him behind the counter. Erik grabbed an assortment of bottles of hard liquor from the shelves as he sauntered back over, lining them up in a row of in front of Charles.

“How would you like to be my lab rat for the evening?” Erik grinned as he asked him, not looking away even while he rinsed out a cocktail shaker in the sink.

“Oh you can try anything you want with me all night.” Charles propositioned, leaning across the bar top.

Erik chortled, shaking his head. “You’re terrible.”
“Oh they have Chartreuse, it’s very good.” Erik said when he noticed the vintage bottle of pale green liqueur hidden beneath the counter while drying the cocktail utensils. He picked it up and wrapped his hand around the nape of Charles’ neck. “Open up,” he said when Charles closed his eyes and tilted his head back obediently, and his lips immediately parted. Erik held the back of his head steady and poured a good-sized shot directly into Charles’ mouth, guiding him back upright as he swallowed, eyes not missing the way his Adam’s apple bobbed up and down. He slid his hand along Charles’ jaw and swiped his thumb from the corner of his mouth to the centre of his lips, Charles flicking the wet tip of his tongue to lick the stray drop of liqueur off Erik’s skin and sending a buzz through him that had nothing to do with the alcohol in his system.

Fuck. Erik threw his head back and gave himself a shot, letting the burn of the Chartreuse distract him from doing ill-advised things like ripping Charles’ clothes off in public.

“Mmm Erik, that was so good,” and oh heaven forbid Charles say anything that would make the odds of him losing his self-control any less.

"Chartreuse, the only liqueur so good they named a colour after it." Erik supplied as he put it aside, picking up a bottle of Ketel One vodka and a cocktail shaker and juggling them in time with the music. He tossed the vodka backwards over his shoulder, the bottle spinning through the air before he caught it in his other hand, followed closely by the shaker.

“Oh my God, Erik! You didn’t tell me you could do tricks!” Charles practically squealed, looking at him like he had just discovered an accidentally misplaced prototype of the iPhone 5.

He shot him a wink as he poured a shot of vodka in the shaker before wiping it through the air and emptying it into a separate shaker. Erik then grabbed a bottle of Blue Curaçao and tossed it high, only to have it land upright on the back of his hand, and this immediately earned him applause from Charles, who looked positively giddy with excitement. He poured a shot into the shaker, spinning it about before emptying it into the one containing the vodka. Then, without missing a beat, he picked up a bottle of Patrón tequila, Oronoco rum, and Tanqueray No. 10 gin and began juggling the three together, the bottles flying upwards in time with the pounding of the drums. He caught two of the bottles by the neck with one hand and the final one in his spare hand, and was startled by the sounds of loud cheers. He turned around to find that they were now surrounded by a small crowd of revellers, all eager to see this new side of Erik Lehnsherr: Flair Bartender Extraordinaire.

But Charles was still there, the only soul that mattered in the sea of empty faces, expression soft and proud as Erik walked over to pour a shot each from the three bottles in his hands. Charles bent over the counter when he was done and placed his hands on his face as he kissed him earnestly, not giving a damn about the people around them.

“You’re amazing.” Charles said as he held his gaze, the words only meant for his ears, drowned out by the club anthem that was being played before they could be privy to any curious onlookers. Erik brushed his lips against his forehead as he stepped away.

He topped off the drink with some Sweet-N-Sour mix before securing the lid on the shaker and flipping it in the air. Erik caught the shaker with his shoulder and rolled it along his arm, the metal defying gravity and yielding to his will. He flicked it off his wrist and caught it, rattling the stainless steel tumbler vigorously along to the beat of the music before serving the drink out over ice.

Charles raised his glass and took a large gulp, making a vaguely obscene noise. “How is it?” Erik asked as he took the drink from his hand to have a sip and goddamnit was it strong, though it did taste rather good, if he could say so himself. Charles did not reply, and instead just grabbed the drink from him and knocked the entire glass back. “Charles, you’re not supposed to drink it so fast!” Erik cried out, rather horrified.
Charles paid no heed to his words and merely lifted the glass precariously high in the air, arm swaying as he proclaimed, “This drink, I like it! Another!” The glass slipped from his fingers and was sent plummeting through the air, and Erik was rather proud of himself for being able to catch it before it went smashing onto the floor.

Erik raised his eyebrows at him, which only led to Charles bursting into drunken giggles as he sprawled across the bar top, pleading, “Come on Erik, it’s... I’m really quite fun. Fine. Humour me?”

“Only if you don’t down the next one in two seconds flat.” Erik warned as he began mixing it, without the bells and whistles this time.

“Suuure, darling. I’ll take my time with you-- It. Nice and slow.” Charles agreed, propping his head up on his hand.

“Maybe you need some water.” Erik suggested as he placed the cocktail in front of Charles and poured another for himself.

“Rubbish.” Charles protested as he took a sip of his drink. He held it up and stared at it, seemingly noticing the neon blue colour from the Curaçao for the first time. “This drink is very groovy.”

Erik swallowed several large mouthfuls of his cocktail before placing it down, laughing as he ran a hand through Charles’ hair. “Charles, do you even know why-- What you’re saying?”

“Y-yes, it’s very groovy... like my eyes?” Charles mused, blinking up at him.

A fond smile spread across Erik’s face as he leaned in close to Charles, his skin already flushed from the alcohol, “I like your eyes, very much.”

* * * * *

Charles simply couldn’t stop guzzling the delicious sky-blue cocktail that Erik had mixed up for him. The Curaçao gave it a bitter, citrusy zing which was rather addictive, but even then it couldn’t mask how strong the drink was. Still, Charles didn’t mind. It was worth it, getting to watch Erik in his element, those long, elegant fingers wrapping around various bottles of alcohol, masterful and in control.

The giddy lightness swimming in his head was a strong warning that he was well on his way to getting smashed. Raven had always warned him that he was an uninhibited drunk who got up to quite a bit of mischief whenever he got hammered. Right now, as he watched Erik right in front of him, sipping his own cocktail, there was nothing Charles wanted more than to snog him silly, then drag him home and chain Erik to his bed.

“Erik,” he called out, and when Erik looked questioningly at him, Charles beckoned him to step forward. As Erik drew closer, Charles couldn’t resist grabbing him by the lapels of his jacket and tilting his head so that their mouths met at an angle for an imperfect, sloppy, messy kiss. He could feel Erik’s muffled groan rumbling through him, and that groan only intensified when Charles let a thumb brush against Erik’s left nipple through his shirt, making Erik surge forward so that he was almost leaning right over the counter. If the bar hadn’t been in the way, Charles would have pushed Erik to the floor and jumped on him there and then, the public and paparazzi be damned.

“Oh my gawd,” Charles heard a familiar, nasal voice somewhere to his left, and he pulled his mouth off a disoriented Erik to see the one person he dreaded most. Perez Hilton was hovering nearby, his mouth twisted in glee, holding up his camera phone and snapping as many pictures as he could.
“Charles, darling,” Perez was saying even as he continued taking photos, “I always had my suspicions about you, but Erik Lehnsherr? This is a fucking goldmine.”

“Go away,” Erik growled at Perez, who only smirked and took more photos, and now Erik looked dangerously close to swinging over the bar and pounding the crap out of the celebrity blogger.

Sobering up a little, Charles wished this wasn’t happening when he felt so tipsy. Shooting Erik a warning look, Charles immediately walked over to where Perez was. “Look, Erik and I were just being friendly--”

“No way,” Perez said with a snort of incredulity. “I’ve been here for the past twenty minutes and I’ve already seen you sucking face, like, twice. Also, I saw you literally give him a shot in the mouth, how much gayer can you get? So don’t try and bullshit a bullshitter.”

“I wasn’t--” But it was already too late as Perez tucked his phone away and waltzed off with his friends, one of whom made kissy faces at Erik and Charles before they all burst into mocking laughter. Erik still looked pissed off, although Charles was already resigned to his fate. They had been pretty reckless so far, and it was only a matter of time before a picture of them kissing would end up on Twitter or someone’s blog.

“Forget it, Erik,” Charles whispered soothingly into his ear, rubbing circles on Erik’s chest. His very warm, very firm chest, and Charles wanted nothing but to sit down somewhere and rest his head on that marvellous chest. “Come on, let’s get our drinks and get back to our booth.”

The frown line between Erik’s straight eyebrows loosened. “Are you sure? That annoying little shit will--”

“Erik, it’s too late now. I just want to enjoy the rest of the night with you.” Charles brushed his lips against the curve of Erik’s ear. “Please? For me?”

The shiver that ran through Erik was visible. “All right. For you.”

It was a little unsettling, how easily obedient and pliant Erik was with him, but Charles was far too buzzed and happy to start questioning it. The familiar strains of Pitbull’s ‘Give Me Everything’ were booming throughout the club, turning the dancefloor into one united heaving mass. Charles and Erik managed to cleverly navigate their way around the crowd, arms wrapped around each other’s waists as they stumbled back to their private booth, laughing and giddy. The Macallan 25 was still there, waiting for them, and Charles happily sloshed more into their glasses while Erik sprawled on the couch, those intense blue-green eyes watching him intently. Maybe Erik was better at holding his liquor than Charles was.

“Say when,” Charles said as he continued pouring the whisky into Erik’s glass, but his hand started trembling when Erik slipped off his shoes, then ran a socked foot up and down Charles’ leg, a sly grin growing on his face. The handsome bastard.

“When.” Erik’s voice was low, smooth velvet, as smooth as the whisky. “Come here, Charles.”

Picking up both their glasses, Charles made his way over to where Erik was sitting, but instead of sitting beside Erik, Charles boldly perched himself on top of Erik’s warm, broad lap, smirking at the way Erik’s eyes widened. “Here you go, Erik,” Charles said as though nothing was out of the ordinary, handing Erik his glass calmly.

Charles tried not to laugh as Erik knocked back his drink immediately, grimacing a little at the burn while Charles savoured his more slowly, wriggling his bum about to make himself comfortable on
Erik’s lap. “Charles.” Erik’s voice sounded a little rough and strangled. “Do you know what you’re doing to me?”

“Oh sorry, I just thought it’ll be more comfortable sitting here, my friend.” Which was the biggest lie in the world, of course, because the couch was so big, and Erik’s lap barely had space. But it was warm and firm, and since he was this close, Charles could smell Erik’s scent, a lovely, sharp mixture of his usual cologne coupled with the musk of light, clean sweat from his exertion at the bar earlier.

To get more of Erik’s scent, Charles rested his head on Erik’s chest, feeling soothed by the soft, erratic heartbeat thumping below his ear. “Mmm Erik, you smell so good.” Charles took in a deep breath, then nuzzled against Erik’s crisp shirt.

Erik shifted a little, and Charles could now feel his nose pressing into Charles’ hair. “Could say the same for you,” Erik murmured, those long fingers carding through his hair, gently massaging his scalp. It felt so good and strangely erotic, and Charles turned his face inwards so he could plant kisses along the long, lean line of Erik’s neck, making him gasp.

“Fuck, Charles.” The plain, rough need in Erik’s voice just made Charles even harder. “I’m this close to pushing you down on the couch and having my way with you.”

“Good,” was all Charles said before he slid his lips up Erik’s jaw, and their heads tilted just enough for their mouths to meet in a long, sweet kiss. Charles could feel something poking him in the back of his thigh and he smiled triumphantly into the kiss, which just made Erik nip at his swollen lips.

Erik was staring at him as though he couldn’t quite believe Charles was real. “Mein Gott, your mouth,” Erik said, before nuzzling at Charles’ lips again and they were deep in another kiss, longer and hungrier this time, and Charles felt Erik’s tongue sliding possessively into his mouth, as though Erik wanted to taste every single inch of him.

Well, Charles thought, two can play at this game.

He broke off the kiss, leaving Erik blinking, dazed and a little drugged. Before Erik could regain his senses, Charles quickly swung his feet down and clambered onto his knees, throwing a leg across Erik’s thighs so that Charles was straddling him. He grinned down at Erik, whose pupils were so dilated that his eyes almost looked black in the dim lighting of the private room as he stared reverently up at Charles. “Wait, what are you doing?”

“Shhhh.” Charles placed a finger on those firm, warm lips, but his control almost slipped as Erik’s lips parted to let that finger slide into his mouth, up to the knuckle, before taking in another one. Charles’ jaw dropped as Erik slowly sucked on his fingers, eyes fixed on Charles as though to say, You’re mine, you’re mine, no one else can have you because when the night is done, you’ll be in my bed, crying out my name, legs locked around my hips, and Charles wanted all those things so desperately that he slid his fingers out immediately and replaced them with his mouth, seeking out Erik’s tongue and sucking on the tip of it, pulling it into his mouth and feeling more than hearing Erik’s moan vibrating through him.

One of his hands slid down Erik’s chest, deliberately taking a detour past his right nipple, then it slid under Erik’s shirt and Charles pressed a thumb inside Erik’s navel, which made him gasp, squeezing his eyes shut. So this is what you look like when you’re about to come, Charles thought with a smug sense of satisfaction, happy that reality matched up with his many fantasies concerning Erik. It was hard to tell which made him more tipsy, the alcohol or the feel of Erik’s hard, flat stomach beneath his fingertips.

When he started unzipping Erik’s pants and sliding his hand into his briefs, Erik broke off the kiss,
panting, “Fuckfuckfuck, wait, Charles--”

“It’s okay, hush,” Charles whispered against his cheek, but Erik was still resistant, and Charles wondered if he had ever made out so publicly before. And perhaps it was the intoxication, but a side of him was giddy with the risk of being caught. Charles curled his fingers around the curved outline of Erik’s erection, trapped in his briefs, but Erik started shaking his head frantically, gripping Charles by the wrist and stopping his errant hand.

“No, Charles, I mean it, stop.”

* * * * *

Erik was desperately trying to calm his mind, inhaling deeply and trying to ignore the fact that the air was spiced with the clean, oceanic scent of the cologne that Charles often favoured. He tried not to open his eyes either, because he didn’t think he could withstand the sight of a rumpled, sweaty, tipsy Charles straddling him, brow furrowed, looking so confused and hurt. After a few long moments of silence, Erik at long last felt like he wasn’t going to come in his pants at the slightest movement from Charles and finally peered up at him.

It was worse than he thought. Charles looked so despondent, so sad, the light in those clear blue eyes entirely diminished. He wasn’t looking at Erik, and now he made a move as if to climb off Erik’s lap, his movements a little clumsy with drink.

Erik quickly slid his arms around Charles’ waist, locking him in place. “Wait, I didn’t mean it like that.”

“I don’t understand,” Charles said dully. “You asked me to stop, so I’m stopping.”

“I know.” Erik’s frustration was making his words bottle up in his throat, so he forced them out. “I mean, you got me wrong. It’s not that I don’t want this.”

Charles stilled, but at least now he was peeking up at Erik again through those dark, sooty lashes. “What do you mean?”

“I mean, I do want this.” Erik gestured between both of them, making Charles smile a little, and Erik scooped up one of his hands, squeezing it. “I know I sound silly, but I, uh, I mean--”

“Erik.” Now Charles didn’t seem so sad anymore, the corner of his mouth quirking up in a reluctant, rather drunk smile. “We’re adults, we can say how we feel.”

“I didn’t want our first time to be some grope-and-feel in some private room in a club,” Erik blurted out so quickly that he wasn’t sure if Charles heard him, but judging from the brilliant smile slowly dawning on Charles’ face, maybe he did. “I mean, you’re not, you know...this is not a one-time thing.” Erik pressed that hand to his cheek. “Not to me, anyway.”

Not only had the light returned to those eyes, but now they seemed soft, unreal. “Oh Erik, of course I understand.”

“Good.” Erik couldn’t help grinning at him, and this time their kiss was sweeter, more chaste. His erection was still being persistent, but he knew by the time they finished their drinks, he would be able to walk out of the club without attracting attention for the wrong thing. “Come on, drink up, then I’ll take you home.”

“Good.” Charles grinned, wobbling a little on Erik’s thighs before Erik helped him onto the seat beside him, his head resting on Erik’s shoulder as they finished the rest of their drinks. Erik couldn’t
help nodding along to the new Rihanna song blasting on the dancefloor, and he grinned to himself when he realised how appropriate it was for his current situation with Charles. *We found love in a hopeless place.*

He bent down and pressed a kiss to the top of his hair. Charles nuzzled back against him, heavy and content as Erik texted the limousine service to send a town car to pick them up.

Erik finished off the rest of his whisky, there's a special rung in hell reserved for people who waste good Scotch. Once he saw Charles tipping back the last of his blue drink, Erik called for the bill, then left a very generous tip for the waitress. Having been a bartender himself, he knew what a big difference tips made to the service staff, and sure enough, she flashed a huge, megawatt smile at both him and Charles as they stumbled out of the club. At least it was less likely now that she would blab if Perez and his ilk came back to interrogate her on what had happened.

As the two of them made their way out, Erik was obviously the more sober of the two of them, but he was starting to feel the effects of the Macallan as well as the cocktails he had mixed for Charles and himself. He could find his way out of the club, but he was having difficulty walking in a straight line. Charles was far worse off, practically clinging to Erik for support, face flushed red with alcohol as he grinned at nothing in particular. Erik put on his favourite pair of aviators before fishing Charles’ own shades out of his pocket, slipping them onto his face.

A bouncer guarding the back door nodded as he saw them coming, speaking into a walkie talkie before he swung the door open. Erik smiled at him and tucked a twenty into his shirt pocket, patting it down before steering Charles out into the alley.

It didn’t take long for camera flashes to start surrounding them again, but Erik was quite tipsy and in far too good a mood to bother snarling or snapping at the paps. Still, he moved his body a little to shield Charles from the cameras. Hurrying towards the town car idling outside the club waiting for them, Erik quickly opened the door and helped Charles into the back seat before sliding in himself, closing the door and greeting the driver, a regular member of the staff who already knew where Erik lived. He gave the driver Charles’ address, and the rest of the ride was quiet and uneventful, Charles dozing against his shoulder as Erik stroked his hair.

They reached Charles’ place first, and Erik hesitated before telling the driver to wait for him. It was far too tempting to stay over, but Charles was so drunk that Erik knew sex would be out of the question. It was going to be an epic night of blue balls for him, but he would rather go through that (again) than a few drunken, hazy fumblings with Charles that wouldn’t be particularly memorable. No, Erik had fucked up his fair share of relationships, and this was one he wanted to start off right.

They made it inside the house, and Charles flopped onto his bed while letting Erik take off his shoes and socks. “Erik, m’here and into bed wit- me.”

Once Erik was done, he put the shoes and socks aside before lifting the quilt and covering Charles with it. “Charles, I have to go,” he said gently, but at least Charles had enough presence of mind to frown.

“No, my friend, stay....sex.” Charles yawned deeply, snuggling under the quilt even as he made bedroom eyes at Erik, who wanted to simultaneously laugh and kiss him.

“I’ll see you in the morning,” Erik said, bending down to leave Charles a lingering kiss on the forehead, and when he pulled away, Charles’ slightly parted lips were so red and moist that he couldn’t resist kissing him there as well, cupping his face tenderly and feeling Charles smile into the kiss.

“No...drunk...” But Charles was already drifting off into slumber by the time Erik crept out of the
bedroom and out of the house, locking it behind him. It was so painful to not go back and crawl in beside Charles, so warm and snug under the covers, but Erik really didn’t trust himself.

Heading outside and back into the car, Erik stared out of the window, wishing the alcohol didn’t leave his head feeling so muddled so he could think. But really, the only thoughts he seemed to be capable of was the way Charles had felt in his arms, and Erik smiled all the way back to his own house.

* * * * *
Erik Lehnsherr Gets “Friendly” With Charles Xavier!

Hold the press! Is Erik Lehnsherr perhaps tipping over the Kinsey scale by a whole mile?

Lehnsherr certainly wasn't checking Charles Xavier's teeth when we caught him making out with his co-star!

The two were all over each at the Roxbury Club in LA over the weekend.

Talk about being there for our entertainment!

Tags: charles xavier, erik lehnsherr, caught kissing, roxbury

RELATED STORIES
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Notes:
1. The title of this chapter is a quote from ‘Velvet Goldmine’. Ewan McGregor’s character says it to Jonathan Rhys Meyers’ character before they kiss. The line is in turn a quote from Oscar Wilde’s ‘The Picture of Dorian Gray’.
2. The Roxbury is a newly reopened club that used to be on Sunset Boulevard and one of the West Coast’s premier celebrity playhouses.
3. Hugh Jackman’s opening number at the 2009 Oscars where he ends it by singing, “I’m Wolverine!”
4. "Chartreuse, the only liqueur so good they named a colour after it." is a quote from ‘Death Proof’.
5. Erik prepared a modified AMF (short for ‘adios motherfucker’) for Charles, without the soda. Your resident alcoholic author (no prizes for guessing who) tried this out and it really is damn bloody strong.
6. “This drink, I like it! Another!” is a quote from ‘Thor’.
7. “There's a special rung in hell reserved for people who waste good Scotch.” is one of Michael Fassbender’s lines from ‘Inglourious Basterds’. ETA: Michael Fassbender bartending for Hugh Jackman during the 2013 San Diego Comic-Con.
I Woke Up One Morning and I Just Knew

Chapter by afrocurl, Clear Liqueur, Clocks

Chapter Summary

In the aftermath of Perez Hilton outing Charles and Erik, everyone deals with the repercussions, and after Charles has dinner with a concerned Moira, he makes the most important decision of his life. (Oh yeah, and we finally earn our ‘Explicit’ rating HELL YES.)

Chapter Notes

We did a little reallocation of roles. Afrocurl will instead be writing the articles from now on, Clocks and Clear Liqueur will continue to handle the narrative.

We cannot thank xsilverdreamsx enough for all the hard work that she put into doing so many articles to go along with this update.

Soundtrack: The Temper Trap - Sweet Disposition
Erik Lehnsherr and Charles Xavier Get Cosy Down

Two of Hollywood's leading men, Xavier, were seen leaving The Ro wrapped around each other. Inside the pair were closed off in a private but they did appear briefly when Lehnsherr's arm wrapped around the back of a chair. Others noted how much the couple, tugging at each other's sleeves together, Lehnsherr's arm frame.

The pair have been seen out sipping since they started filming *First Class* with Sean Cassidy and Alex Summers together as new partners in the Fox

Photos of the pair leaving the club around the industry, prompting all comment from the duo's respect course, we all know that silence is coming out and admitting the truth.

Related: Celebrity Photos, Erik Lehnsherr, Charles Xavier, First Class

Disclaimer: Fake article. Characters owned by Marvel, website owned by Popsugar
Erik always enjoyed the route up Mulholland Drive, offering panoramic views of the San Fernando Valley, though it was not the scenery that had captivated him but rather the passenger that he came to pick with pleasure on a daily basis. The guards at the entrance to Charles’ gated community now knew to expect him, offering a friendly greeting each time he drove by. Erik actually returned with a genuine smile that morning, throwing them for a loop, not that he really cared about their reaction anyway, his mind focused solely on what awaited him just beyond the top of those familiar front steps.

He knocked on the door lightly and waited, but there was no response. “Charles,” he called out as he rapped on the carved oak panels again, getting a little worried and thinking that perhaps he should have stayed after all, if only to make sure Charles didn’t die in his sleep from alcohol poisoning. He was just about to pull out his phone and give him a ring when he finally heard shuffling on the other side of the door right before it swung open, revealing a very rumpled-looking British lush.

“Good morning, Erik.” Charles stumbled into his arms, and for a moment Erik seriously wondered whether Charles was hungover or still drunk. Charles slid a hand round the back of his head and drew him in for a kiss, and all that slipped from his mind once he had Charles’ warm mouth on him, body pressed wantonly against his. And okay, fine, Charles did taste slightly of alcohol, which quite frankly only made him more delicious.

“How are you feeling?” Erik asked when they regained some self-control, taking in Charles’ pallor and unshaven face. Charles had ginger stubble, and perhaps that was truly a sign of how far gone Erik was since he found it absolutely adorable.

Charles scrunched up his face in response. Okay, both drunk and hungover, then. “I’ll live, I made myself a Bloody Mary for breakfast. The best cure for a hangover is more alcohol.”

He raised a cool eyebrow at that, rather amused. “I really don’t think that’s how it works.”

Charles laughed, putting on his best mock aristocratic accent, all clipped phrases and lengthened vowels. “I come from a long line of alcoholics. Trust me, my dear.”

“Let’s go, Charles,” he announced, shaking his head as he wrapped an arm around Charles’ waist to help him down the stairs. Charles whistled when they reached the bottom, only just noticing the sleek silver Porsche parked in his driveway.

He trailed his fingers on the bonnet, waggling his eyebrows. “Oh Erik, are you taking me all the way in your ride?”

Charles really was completely incorrigible. “I don’t take this car out often, but we left the other one in the studio yesterday,” Erik explained as he held the door open. “Watch your head,” he cautioned as Charles climbed in, unsure of how he would navigate the low suspension in his current state. Erik went round the back once Charles had settled in and got into the driver’s seat, slipping on his shades, the engine purring to life once he turned the ignition. He backed them out of the driveway slowly, eyes fixed on the mirror.

Charles groaned loudly the moment they drove onto the street, hit with the Californian sun in all its blazing glory. “Oh God, oh God. Erik, go back, please go back. Sun, too much sun. Someone’s slicing through my brain, Erik, help--”

Erik laughed, taking off his Ray-Bans and putting them on Charles instead, earning himself a huge sigh of gratitude. He reached for the bottle of water he had brought with him and handed it over. “Let me introduce you to the Lehnsherr Hangover Cure: rest and plenty of water.”
“Don’t you need these?” Charles asked in concern, pointing to the shades he was now wearing.

“No, I’m fine, you should keep them. They look good on you,” Erik replied, gently massaging Charles’ scalp before getting his hands back on the steering wheel. Turning into a mother hen instead of saying, “I told you so!” was a second sure sign that he was too far gone.

Charles placed a hand on Erik’s thigh, rubbing it softly. “Thank you. Please don’t drive too fast, especially not down the hill. I think I’m going to be sick.”

* * * * *

Emma instinctively knew something was wrong when she blearily opened her eyes and realised her phone was buzzing away furiously on the nightstand while it was barely light outside. Groaning loudly, she rolled over and picked up her Blackberry, squinting at her screen. If it was Sebastian goddamn Shaw asking her out for yet another breakfast date, she was seriously going to march down to the set later and kick him in the nads.

Her frown disappeared when she realised it was an L.A. phone number she did not recognise. She waited until it stopped ringing, then checked her missed calls. Her eyes widened when she realised she had 66 of them, and they were ALL numbers she did not recognise, except one from Sylvia, a reporter from the New York Times she had met once when Sylvia wrote an article on Erik.

“Oh my God.” Emma sat up in bed, the strap of her slip falling down her shoulder, but she barely noticed it. The sudden explosion of unidentified numbers could only mean one thing; the media was trying to get hold of her, and there could only be two reasons they were trying to call her so early in the morning. Either her client had been nominated for an Oscar (which was highly unlikely, given that Erik’s last major role had been that of a talking shark in a Pixar movie) or he had been caught doing something incredibly, incredibly idiotic.

“Erik, you stupid cow.” Emma flopped back in bed with a sigh of frustration. She was willing to bet that Raven’s phone was currently besieged with calls as well.

Not wasting any more time, Emma quickly showered and got dressed, but she took care to do her hair - a lady always did her hair, no matter the circumstances - and she roared off to the studio in her Lamborghini. During the short drive she had managed to calm down a bit, and by the time she reached the lot, she was capable of an actual plan that did not involve skinning Erik alive and turning him into one of her fur coats.

She ran into Raven outside the parking lot, and one look at Raven’s face, red with fury and incredulity, was enough to tell her that Raven must have woken up to the same thing she had. “Do I even want to guess?” Emma asked tiredly, whipping off her oversized sunglasses.

“Perez fucking Hilton!” Raven hissed, shaking her head in dismay. “Of all the people to get caught by, of all the places to get caught! Sucking face in public at the fucking Roxbury!”

“Oh sweet mercy.” Emma massaged her temples, reminding herself of her plan to leave Erik’s genitals relatively intact. Charles Xavier may be known for his sweet, friendly reputation, but she didn’t dare put it to the test by damaging something of immense value to him. “Why, why, why do men always think with their dicks? Why?”

“I’ll be damned if I know,” Raven said in a huff, folding her arms and leaning against the wall, frowning in contemplation. “I must have been crazy, thinking that working for a gay client was easier than a straight one.”
Emma fluttered a dismissive hand at her. “Oh honey, honey, they’re all the same, straight or gay or whatever. If you find an actor who is a eunuch, hold onto him tight and never let him go.”

Raven shook her head. “It’s too late for that. Now I’ve got to clean up the mess Charles has left behind.”

They started walking together towards the set, and Emma was aware that the people passing them in the corridors were giving them a wide berth. Which was probably wise, given how furious Raven seemed and how Emma herself probably looked none too pleased. “Has Charles’ publicist gotten hold of you yet?” she asked Raven, who nodded.

“I told her ‘No comment’ first, because apparently Charles is too plastered to pick up the phone,” Raven said, her expression grim. “What about Erik’s?”

“Oh, Erik fired his last publicist,” Emma said airily. “Apparently she ‘didn’t do a good job’ because she couldn’t explain what he was doing, drunk as a skunk after the Muse gig. Erik was all, ‘You should not have made me sound like such a drunk!’ and I told Erik that he doesn’t need a publicist, he needs rehab.”

Raven snorted. “Sounds like he and Charles are a match made in AA heaven.”

Emma tilted her head a little. “They are actually quite a gorgeous couple.” At the wary sidelong glance Raven shot her, Emma held her hands up in surrender. “I know, I know, we’re both pretty cheesed at them now, and rightly so. But if you think about it, they both seem really sweet on each other.”

Now Raven just looked worried. “Do you think...it’ll last?” At Emma’s enquiring look, Raven hesitantly added, “I just don’t want Charles to end up getting hurt if Erik’s just a wham-bam kinda guy.”

Emma cleared her throat as she took off her white gloves. “I have just as much concern that Erik will get hurt as well.”

Raven rubbed her face with her hands. “Well, it’s too early to tell. Let’s deal with this shitstorm first.”

Emma was about to reply when she spotted Charles and Erik staggering onto the set, Erik looking relatively normal while Charles hung off his side, definitely looking the worse for wear. Pointing them out to Raven, the two women marched over to where Charles and Erik were standing by the catering table, helping themselves to donuts. “You two are so f*cked,” Raven hissed at them. As Erik’s eyebrows jumped and Charles looked hopefully at Erik, she quickly added, “No, no, no, stop looking at him like that, I meant the other kind of ‘fucked’.”

“What did we do?” Charles mumbled, adjusting the Ray-Bans he was wearing which Emma recognised as Erik’s. “And please stop yelling. Why is everyone yelling?”

“No one is yelling.” Emma said calmly. She fished out her Blackberry, opening Perez’s blog and scrolling to the damning article and picture before handing it over to Erik and Charles. “See for yourselves exactly what you’ve gotten into.”

There was a moment of guilty silence as Charles scrolled through the blog, Erik resting his chin on Charles’ shoulder, their heads pressed together. Then, to Emma’s amazement, Charles started grinning.

“Look, Erik, I can see you slipping me a bit of tongue. You rascal.”
“Yeah?” Erik shot Charles a fond look before kissing his cheek, and Raven let out a noise that sounded like a kettle about to explode while Emma rolled her eyes.

“Oh my god, you two just don’t give a shit about your careers, do you?” Raven said bitterly before she stalked off, leaving Emma with the two bewildered men.

“She’s right, you know,” Emma said wryly, as Charles frowned after the departing Raven. “With the reckless way you two are behaving, one would think you don’t care about your careers anymore.”

“That’s not true,” Erik said defensively, before casting a tender glance at Charles. “I’ve just found something I care about much, much more.”

“Oh brother,” Emma murmured as Charles practically melted at those words, standing on his tip toes to kiss Erik on the nose. She sighed dramatically as she plucked her phone out of his hands, scrolling through her contacts list. “Fine, fine, I know some of the best publicists this side of L.A., let me make a few calls.”

“You’re a gem,” Erik said, giving her a wide grin as Charles settled against him again, and Emma really couldn’t begrudge him this little happiness as she turned away, dialing one of the numbers.

After all, she had never seen him this happy before.

* * * * *

Raven was seldom angry, but when she was, she preferred to stay clear of everyone so that there would be no poor unsuspecting soul to lash out at. Right now she was hurrying briskly down the corridor and heading towards the green room, pissed off with Charles and Erik and Perez Hilton and everyone in Hollywood, essentially. What the fuck was Charles thinking, behaving so recklessly and wantonly in public like that with another famous male actor? No, he wasn’t thinking, and that was the problem. She sincerely hoped his career - and by default, hers - wouldn’t be over just because of this.

She forced herself to take a deep breath, willing her mind to be calm first. She needed to sit down, she needed to think and dear God she needed an iced coconut latte. The thought of her favourite drink cheered her up a bit, and she wondered if there was enough time to send Marie out to Barry’s to buy the coffee for her.

She was in the middle of fishing out her cellphone to call her assistant when she turned the corner and collided with someone much taller than her who was carrying two drinks, the ice rattling in the cups as Raven steadied the other person. It was Hank, blinking owlishly at her as he scrambled to hang on to his drinks. “Whoa, I almost dropped those.”

Raven had been on the verge of snapping, “Watch where you’re going!” but one look at Hank’s eager, puppy-ish expression and the words instantly died in her mouth. He seemed so, well, delighted to see her. So instead she gave him a strained smile, patting his arm. “Sorry, I’m just...distracted.”

“Oh.” A frown marred Hank’s youthful face, making him look older. “You look...stressed out.”

“I am.” She was surprised to find herself admitting this to him, of all people. She hadn’t really gotten to know him that well, but there was something about him, so sweet and trusting, that made her want to be the same. Also, she would be lying if she didn’t admit that he was very easy on the eyes. “I’m just having a rough morning.”

“Ah, I see.” Hank’s tone was sympathetic. Then his face brightened as he handed one of the drinks
to her. “It’s a good thing I was looking for you then, because this is for you.”

“It is?” Raven was surprised as she accepted the drink, its sides slippery with condensation.

“Yup. It’s an iced coconut latte from Barry’s.” Hank studied her face a little anxiously. “It’s what you normally drink, right?”

“Well, y-- wait, how did you know that?” she asked, a little suspicious as she narrowed her eyes at him.

Now his face was flushed a nice shade of pink. “Um, I observed it’s what you’re always drinking on set.”

“Oh, you noticed.” Now Raven was a little awed as she looked at the drink, then back up at him again. His eyes were so blue and vibrant, darker than Charles’, and she found that it was hard not to get sucked into them. “Er, thank you. Sorry if I’m a little freaked out because it was exactly what I was craving, right this moment.”

“It is?” Hank beamed, looking as though he had just won the lottery. “Great, then I’m glad I could help.”

Raven took a long sip of her drink, which tasted divine. “You’re amazing,” she said, the admiration clear in her voice as he blushed even more. “You single-handedly brightened up my morning. Come, walk with me to the green room.”

“Really? Uh okay, sure.” Hank fell into step beside her, sipping his own coffee and staring at his own feet. He seemed so unusually shy around her, which was rather mystifying as she had observed him being completely different at work on the set. When Hank was in his element, he was confident, clear and very sure of what he was doing. Now a different man seemed to stand before her, unsure and coy, and she linked her arm with his. He said nothing, but his smile widened and the tips of his ears reddened.

When they got to the green room, there was no one inside except for two grips who were on their break, shooting pool at the billiard table. Raven went to sit down on the long, green L-shaped couch, then patted the seat beside her. “Come on,” she said to Hank. “I don’t bite. Much.”

He smiled a little as he sat down beside her, hands cupped around his drink. “So who made you so upset?” he asked quietly.

“Charles,” she said with a sigh. “I don’t know if you read Perez Hilton’s blog, but--”

“Yeah, Charles and Erik, I know,” Hank said, taking another sip of his coffee. “I’m not at all surprised, to be honest. They’ve been really obvious.”

Her eyes widened at him. “Wait, what do you mean ‘obvious’?”

Hank pushed up his glasses, blinking at her. “Well, it’s all the looks they’ve been giving each other on set, you know? And all the little touches they keep exchanging. I mean, my job is to keep an eye on the cameras and watch the dailies. A lot of people don’t even notice me sometimes, and that’s fine.” He offered her a smile. “Maybe that’s why Charles and Erik didn’t realise they were kind of broadcasting their attraction to the entire set.”

Raven shook her head at him, still in awe. “You really are amazing, Hank.”

“Nah.” Hank studied his drink earnestly. “I’m just an ordinary guy, doing my job.”
“Not to me,” Raven said a little too quickly, and when he raised an eyebrow at her, it was her turn to feel rather embarrassed. Was she going to become like Charles now, throwing herself at cute guys? Not that she wanted to admit Hank was cute; she just wasn’t the type of guy she would normally go out with. Besides, it wasn’t as though he was interested in her or anything like that. He was just being friendly, and she shouldn’t misinterpret his friendship as anything else. “Anyway, thank you. For the drink. And for listening to my ranting.”

Hank only offered her a shy shrug. “It was my pleasure.” And it did seem like he meant it, a smile growing on his face. “Don’t stress out too much about Charles and Erik. They’re happy, the movie is going to be huge and people will eventually move on to other news. You’ll see.”

Raven couldn’t help laughing a little. “I highly doubt people are going to forget two famous actors who have just outed themselves and are essentially dating each other.”

“Maybe,” Hank conceded. “But just wait until Brad and Angelina adopt ten more babies, and this will hardly be news anymore. Look at Ellen and Neil Patrick Harris, they’re fine. I mean, Zach Quinto just came out, and no one’s stoning him or pelting him with Bibles when he goes out in public.”

Hank did have a point. Raven squeezed his knee, genuinely glad that she had run into him this morning. “I suppose you’re right. Thank you for everything, Hank.”

“No problem.” Hank stood up, offering her a hand. “Come on, let’s head back to the set.”

Touched by the gentlemanly gesture, Raven found herself taking his hand and letting him help her up, and as they walked back together to the set, she couldn’t help throwing him a grateful glance, hoping that everything he had said was right.

Still, even if he wasn’t, at least she now felt much better.

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The day before had gone by in a blur, a collection of hours lost in the wreckage of his spinning head, aching limbs, and random bouts of nausea. But Erik’s chest had been warm when he had buried his face in it, his arms comforting when they lay tangled together on the couch in Charles’ trailer, and Charles knew that he would gladly suffer through all that again just for the feel of Erik’s fingers as they carded through his hair. Work itself had been merciful; Bryan and Shaw had spent the day in a meeting with Sean and Alex discussing the script changes and had left him and Erik to their own devices, mindful of the media circus that had sprung up around them overnight.
Now here they were back on the couch, with Charles’ head resting against Erik’s chest as he held the reworked script in his hands, the changes annotated with post-it notes for easy reference. Charles read the text printed across the pages aloud as Erik looked on over his shoulder, the rich cadence of his voice filling the space around them, the occasional press of lips against the crown of his head letting him know that Erik was with him for every word he narrated.

“We shouldn’t keep denying ourselves, don’t you see? I’m like you.” Charles felt Erik’s arms wrap around him as he read his line, and allowed himself a moment to dream of what it would be like to spend the rest of his days just like this, caught up in nothing but Erik, reading to each other as they drifted off to sleep, Erik’s chest rising and falling in time with his own, and found he wanted absolutely nothing more than just that.

“Charles?” Erik’s voice snapped him out of his reverie, just that one syllable possessing enough power to draw Charles back to him, like the enchantment of a siren’s song.

“I’m sorry, I lost myself for a bit.” Charles said as he turned to kiss the side of his jaw. He fished his phone out of his pocket as he sat up, staring at it thoughtfully. Erik had switched it off after the third time Charles had let a call go straight to voicemail yesterday, crying pitifully about the noise and declaring that he would very much like to crawl into a hole and die. It was admittedly not his finest hour.

“I should probably turn it back on,” he mused as Erik got up as well, resting his head on Charles’ shoulder. He pressed the power button and tossed the device aside in dismay as it continued to ring for a couple of minutes with a cacophony of text, voicemail, and email alerts. He picked it up when it was done, rather surprised that the poor phone had not simply given up the ghost and short circuited, and scrolled through the barrage of messages quickly.

“Some of these are from Moira, I should call her, she seems awfully worried.” Charles said as he pressed the phone to his ear, his free hand stroking the back of Erik’s neck.

It rang twice before Moira answered, the relief in her voice evident, “Charles, I have been trying so hard to get you. Are you okay?”

“I do apologise, my dear. Yesterday wasn’t a good day, and I’ve been rather preoccupied today. But yes, I’m excellent,” he paused, rubbing the side of his head against Erik’s, “more than excellent.”

“Really?” she asked, sounding rather disbelieving, “How about dinner tonight? At The Palm?”

Charles shifted to face Erik, raising his eyebrows as he repeated, “Just me and you, at The Palm tonight,” he waited until Erik nodded his consent, “sure, I’ll see you at 8 P.M.”

“Take the Porsche, it’s time I brought the other one back.” Erik offered as he held out his keys after Charles had said his goodbyes to Moira, but hesitated as a realisation dawned upon him, “You do know how to drive a stick shift?”

Charles took the keys from him, smiling, “Yes, darling. Thank you.” He reassured and planted a chaste kiss on Erik’s lips, adding with a smirk, “Would you like me to demonstrate to you how good I am with a stick?”

Erik laughed, shaking his head as he rubbed his thigh affectionately, “And drive safely, I mean it.”

“Yes, yes,” Charles said as he waved his concerns away, leaning over to grab the script before he crawled back into Erik’s waiting arms, “Now, where were we?”

* * * * *
“Hello, Moira. So sorry I’m late, I got held up at the studio,” Charles apologised as he kissed her forehead in greeting, though what he really meant to say was that Erik had spent a good fifteen minutes in the lot making sure that he could accelerate, reverse and park to his satisfaction, and that was then followed by a goodbye-kiss that stretched on into a desperate tangle of tongues and limbs, and Charles had been extremely close to screwing dinner and going home with Erik instead.

Moira smiled in understanding and motioned for Charles to take a seat, “It’s all right, I went ahead and ordered a bottle of pinot noir.”

“Excellent, what would you like to have? The usual?” Charles asked as he called the waiter over to their table and Moira nodded in reply.

“Good evening, sir, how may I help you?” their waiter greeted after making his way towards them.

“Hello, good evening. Could you take our orders, please? A lobster for the lady, and I’ll have a filet mignon, medium rare. Thank you.” Charles smiled brightly as he placed their orders, the waiter thanking them and pouring some wine for him before walking away.

Charles held the glass up to Moira before placing it to his lips and taking a sip, the liquid smooth as it slid down his throat. “Thank you for asking me out to dinner. I understand your concerns regarding Erik, but I assure you he is a very wonderful man.” Charles began, his eyes taking on a faraway look at the mention of Erik’s name, oblivious to the smile spreading over his face.

Moira sat straight up at that, startling him back to reality. “Charles, this isn’t about whether or not I think you’re right for each other. You’ve always been a good judge of character, so I’ll just have to trust you on that. Have you even seen any of the reports?” She asked, looking alarmed.

“No, I’ve been avoiding them, quietly honestly,” he replied despondently, tugging a little on his hair as he combed it back with his fingers.

Moira took a large gulp of her wine before proceeding, “Well, let me inform you that the headlines getting the most mileage aren’t those that are some variation of ‘Are Charles Xavier and Erik Lehnsherr Dating?’. No, ‘Charles Xavier is Gay’ – that’s what’s trending right now on Twitter.”

“Oh.” Charles whispered as he wrapped his hands around the back of his neck and hung his head, his elbows resting on the table. That was it, then. All those cold, empty years spent starving for someone to touch him, all that for nothing.

No, all that is finally over, he corrected himself, and let out a long, deep breath he never knew he had been holding.

Moira’s eyes softened and she reached over to touch the side of his arm. “It’s not too late to issue a statement, say it was a mistake fueled by alcohol.”

“But it wasn’t, Moira.” Charles protested as he snapped up, latent fury burning behind his eyes. He and Erik were many things, but all that he felt and did for Erik was not, and could never, ever be, something he regretted, no matter the consequences. “Yes, we were terribly reckless, but the truth would have come out eventually. And at least now I don’t have to keep projecting an image of someone I’m not to the rest of the world.”

Moira’s eyes grew wide as she tapped her palm rapidly on the table, “You need to stop being so idealistic, Charles. Think about your career.”

Charles raised his voice, incensed. “What do you think I’ve been doing for the last five years?” He paused when he realised that some of the other patrons had turned to stare at them, ducking his head as he continued in hushed tones, “All this time, I’ve put aside what I want in order to fulfill my
contractual responsibilities to the studios, for the sake of the films. My whole life has revolved around trying my best to please the executives, the fans, everyone. Enough is enough.”

“I’m just looking out for you. Hollywood is such a sexist place, there are barely any good roles for women, you know it as well as I do. I’ve lost track of the number of scripts that have been sent my way for the part of the clichéd love interest. It’s going to be twice as bad for a gay actor, especially when playing the romantic lead. Which studio is going to risk the capital when they aren’t sure if audiences are going to find the idea of you charming your leading ladies believable? They’ll simply cast you as the gay best friend. Think very carefully about it, Charles. All you’re throwing away for what could end up as just a passing dalliance.” She begged, creases marring her forehead.

“You’re right about this industry, Moira, but I’m just so tired of concealing who I am.” He admitted as he looked sincerely into her eyes. For all his freely given affection and cheerful disposition, the truth of the matter was, for the longest time, Charles Xavier had felt utterly, devastatingly alone. Hardly anyone knew him for who he truly was, and if he were to be honest, Raven had been his only real friend through it all. Until Erik. Erik, who did not give a damn about what the rest of the world thought of him, who lived by his own insane set of rules and ideals, had smashed his way through the smoke and mirrors and freed him from his own self-imposed martyrdom of crippling loneliness, and he could no longer imagine a world where he would choose anything else over being by his side.

“I haven’t had anyone for my entire professional career, I don’t want to live like this any longer,” his voice trembled, barely audible above the chatter of the other patrons, “I want to be with Erik, above everything.”

Moira reached over and held his hand as their food was served, eyes reddened and glistening in the low light. Charles found he could barely hold it together, let alone have any appetite for dinner. “Are you sure?” she asked after the waiter had left, quiet and low.

Charles nodded, slowly but with complete resolution. “I’m sorry, I can’t leave him.”

She smiled reassuringly as she squeezed his hand. “Then go.”

* * * * *

A blinding flash exploded in his eyes the second Charles stepped out of the restaurant, leaving him dazed and disorientated. “Goddamnit, how did you people even find me?” he cursed under his breath as he took in the large swarm of paparazzi that had gathered around him, blocking the way to the car.

“Charles, did you just break-up with Moira?” one of them shouted from the side.

“What? No, please, just let me go,” he implored as he tried to jostle his way past the front line of paps, pushing the lenses of their cameras away as they shoved them in his face.

“Are you leaving her for Erik?” another yelled into his ear as someone tried tugging on his sleeve and, good grief, how were they coming up with these stories? Charles shielded his eyes from another burst of flashes as he squeezed by five more paps, one of whom was holding up a voice recorder.

“How long have you been dating Erik?”

"Is he a good kisser?"

"Have you always been gay?"

“Please, just go away,” Charles begged as he finally scrambled his way to the Porsche and unlocked
the door.

“Isn’t this Erik’s car?” one of them asked over the ruckus, and how the hell did they even know these things? Charles slammed the door shut, locking it immediately, and rested his head against the steering wheel as the engine started up, wishing he could just make them all forget his face for a day.

“If you don’t move away, I won’t be held responsible when I drive over your toes!” Charles tried shouting through the windshield, motioning for them to step back. The paps eventually eased up as he inched the car out of the lot, and Charles heaved a sigh of relief as he turned onto Santa Monica Boulevard. That was, until four bikes rounded the corner and began tailing him, professional DSLR cameras hanging off the necks of the riders.

“Oh bloody hell! I’m sorry, Erik, but it’s either this or showing up at your doorstep with all of them,” he muttered his apologies as he shifted gears, slamming down on the accelerator as the light turned amber.

* * * * *

Soundtrack: Mumford and Sons - Sigh No More

After a long day of shooting, Erik usually had his own routine for winding down in the evening. Dinner, then followed by a hot shower, the length of which was determined by his mood (and these days, his showers tended to last longer and longer, depending on which fantasy about Charles he was entertaining at the moment). Then he would slip into his favourite bathrobe, fresh and relaxed, then read his emails, watch a bit of TV and let his iPod playlist run on shuffle.

However, today was different. He studiously avoided checking his email; the last time he had dared to take a peak, there had been 146 new messages, and judging from the subject titles, they were all about the goddamn Perez article. There was nothing good on TV (and Erik was avoiding the E! channel like the plague) so he just lay on the couch, listening to the Mumford & Sons album and thinking about Charles, who was probably still having dinner with Moira. Erik couldn’t help speculating on what they were discussing and was willing to bet that she was currently chewing poor Charles out about him.

Erik stared at the ceiling, humming along to the song. He knew the Perez article and the resulting media circus was all their fault, of course. He and Charles had been reckless, had kissed in public with no regard for the consequences and now they were paying the price. Still, despite everything, Erik couldn’t bring himself to regret anything when it came to Charles. Maybe it was a little too soon, but already he knew his feelings for Charles ran far too deep.

Erik closed his eyes as his favourite Mumford & Sons song came on, and the lyrics couldn’t be more apt. Love it will not betray you, dismay or enslave you, it will set you free, be more like the man you were made to be. This was how Charles made him feel; as clichéd as it sounded, he made Erik want to be a better man. He made Erik want a lot of things, actually, and right now Erik wanted Charles to right here on the couch next to him, his body warm and snug, nuzzling against Erik.

The music rose to a swell as the chorus came on, and it was so loud that Erik didn’t realise there was knocking on the door until it turned to loud, angry thumps. Putting the song on pause, Erik could hear Charles shouting, “Don’t do this, Erik!” before there was another series of muffled, rapid knocks that sounded as though Charles was slamming his palm against the door.

“What the--” Erik hurried to the door, swinging it open just as Charles’ fist was about to land on the wood. His eyes widened when he saw Erik, and a flush crept into his cheeks as his eyes slid down
Erik’s body, taking in the fact that he was wearing nothing but a bathrobe.

“Charles?” Erik asked, but the skidding of car tyres distracted him, and he quickly peeked outside, realising the paparazzi had followed Charles from the restaurant and were hot on his heels. Tugging Charles into the house, Erik quickly shut the doors and made sure the windows were closed, the curtains drawn, before turning to face a flustered Charles. “What’s going on? I thought you were having dinner with Moira?”

Charles sighed at the mention of her name. “I was. I mean, yes, we were having dinner. And we were talking about you.”

Erik wasn’t at all surprised. “I figured. Not that I’m not ecstatic to see you, but why are you here? You must have left really early.”

Charles raked a hand through his hair. “I know, Erik. She was talking about how detrimental it would be to my career – our careers – if we came out, and how difficult it already was for her as a woman in Hollywood to get proper roles.” Charles started pacing around Erik’s living room, rubbing his temples in distress. “I mean, I get it, she was just concerned for me, but she started hinting that maybe I shouldn’t pay permanent consequences for what may be a temporary thing.”

“Temporary?” Erik was aware how his voice came out sounding strangled, and his heart was pounding in his ears. “You...think we’re temporary?”

There must have been something in his expression, for when Charles looked at him, he immediately walked over to where Erik was standing, cupping the sides of Erik’s face. “Erik, no, that is precisely why I left.”

“I don’t understand.” Erik couldn’t help leaning into Charles’ touch, sliding an arm around his waist to draw him closer so they only stood inches apart, and this made Charles smile up at him.

“This is not easy for me to say, Erik,” he began, his thumb brushing over the corner of Erik’s mouth. “I know you’ve heard a lot of rumours about me dating Moira or my female co-stars or whatever else. And I know you may find me a bit too friendly with other people sometimes.” Charles took a deep breath before he continued. “But the truth is, I’ve been on my own for years. Yes, there’s Raven, who has been like a sister to me. But other than her, I haven’t had anyone in my life for a very long while.”

Erik was confused, letting his free hand stroke through the dark waves of Charles’ hair. “What do you mean? I think I get you, but--”

“Don’t you understand?” Charles huffed out a short, nervous laugh before his eyes met Erik’s, and they were so blue, so tender. “Erik, I’m madly, desperately in love with you.”

For a long moment Erik just stared at Charles. Maybe he had heard wrongly, but judging from the anxious, lip-biting way Charles was watching him, it definitely seemed like Erik had heard exactly what he wanted to hear. Love. Charles Xavier was fucking in love with him, and damn if Erik wasn’t just as crazy about him, feeling warmth bubbling up in his chest like a new spring as he began grinning from ear to ear like a lunatic.

Erik tipped his head forward so that their foreheads were pressed together, and Charles’ eyes were now just a blue blur. “Tell me again.” His voice was barely above a whisper, but he knew Charles heard him, judging from the brilliant smile dawning on his face.

“I love you, Erik Lehnsherr. I think I’ve felt this way about you for the longest time,” Charles
murmured, closing the few inches between them for a soft, chaste kiss that had nothing sexual about it at all, and Erik’s heart felt like it was a few sizes too big for his chest. Then Charles was pulling away again, his eyes now slightly reddened. “Erik, you have every last bit of me, heart and body and soul. Please say yes, please.”

Erik couldn’t stand to hear Charles pleading like this. “Don’t beg me for something you already have,” Erik said softly, unable to stop himself from stealing another kiss, burying his hands in Charles’ soft curls. “I was yours, Charles, from the moment you stepped into that meeting room twenty minutes late.”

They shared a chuckle at that, and then Charles was tilting his head and kissing him proper this time, his hands sliding up and tugging Erik’s hair as his tongue dove into Erik’s mouth. And Erik welcomed the onslaught, his own hand drifting down to palm that firm bottom and squeezing it, making Charles moan into his mouth. Mine, he thought, and the delight that accompanied that realisation was beyond compare. “Mine,” he growled possessively when Charles broke their kiss, and this sent a shiver through Charles’ body which made Erik want to slam him up against the wall. “You’re mine, mine, Charles. I love you so much—”

“Oh, Erik.” Charles’ lips were a shiny, sinful red, wet with Erik’s saliva, and his hair was tousled and mussed from Erik’s hands. Charles looked every inch like Erik’s property, and when he licked his lips, Erik trailed his hands up the curve of Charles’ spine and seduced him into another kiss, one that held back a little so Charles was kept wanting, and sure enough he was making little noises of protest that just made Erik harder. “Erik, please—”

“Whatever you want, I’ll give it to you,” Erik whispered against that luscious mouth, licking against the seam of Charles’ lips before they parted and they were kissing again, hungry and open-mouthed and sloppy, the room filled only with the slick sounds of their kisses. Sliding his palms down again to grip Charles’ ass, Erik grinned at the desperate sound Charles made, half-moan and half-whimper. Erik slid his mouth down to kiss the sweet line of Charles’ throat, mouthing against his neck. “Tell me what you want, Charles, I’ll give it to you.”

And then Charles was tugging him down, down until he was sprawled beneath Erik on the soft faux bear rug that lay in front of the dormant fireplace, and Erik huffed out a laugh before Charles swallowed it in yet another kiss, hands fisting in his hair. Erik was lost, completely dizzy with the feel of Charles’ smaller frame trapped below his own body, and every time Charles pulled away to breathe, Erik sucked on his engorged lower lip, already raw from being scraped against of his teeth. Then Erik chased after his mouth to lull him back into yet another endless, drugging kiss, slow and sweet and wet. He took an exquisite delight in sucking on the tip of Charles’ tongue, and this made Charles buck under him, his hand already slipping between Erik’s legs to run a hand up the inside of his thigh, and Erik could feel the knot of the bathrobe loosening.

“You know what I want? You, I want you.” Charles gasped as Erik moved down to his neck to suck on the delicate skin below his jaw, feeling his pulse throbbing beneath the tip of his tongue. When Erik bit down gently on the smooth, soft skin, Charles rewarded him with a high, keening gasp. “Oh God, Erik, please for the love of God, I want you to fuck me, please—”

It was an incredible high, hearing Charles beg like this beneath him, body squirming under Erik’s on the downy faux fur. Erik lifted his head so he could gaze down at Charles again, taking in those electrifying blue eyes, that bruised, red bow of a mouth and the pink flush of his cheeks, giving Erik a prelude to what Charles would look like after he’d been fucked. Dropping a kiss to that plush mouth, Erik began undoing Charles’ jeans, which was quite a feat as Charles was so hard that his jeans were rather tight, the seam of the crotch distended. “Lift your hips and help me get these off,” he whispered soothingly to Charles, who obediently arched his hips off the rug. Having managed to
unzip Charles’ jeans, Erik shot him a wicked smile before sliding them off along with his briefs, more than turned on at how willing Charles was to get his clothes taken off by him.

“And now, my shirt needs to come off.” Charles had a predatory glint in his eye, and before Erik could guess what he was up to, Charles had grabbed him and pushed him down before climbing on top of him, triumphantly straddling his hips. He was now teasing his first button open, staring down at Erik with hooded eyes. “Would you like me to take my shirt off, Erik?”

Erik helplessly nodded, his mouth going dry at the sight of Charles slowly undoing his shirt buttons, and Erik could already see the red tip of Charles’ erection poking out from beneath the tails of his shirt. He desperately wanted to have his mouth on Charles, sucking him until Charles shot down his throat with a cry, but he was far too distracted by the little striptease Charles was giving him, his gaze burning into Erik.

When Charles reached his waist, Erik placed his hands on top of Charles’, murmuring, “Mine,” and feeling his face go hot when Charles shot him a pleased grin, and they both slowly undid the buttons together. Erik watched his shirt finally fall open, sliding off Charles’ white, smooth shoulders, and Charles tossed it recklessly over to some far corner of the living room.

Erik took this moment to fully appreciate the sight of a very naked Charles Xavier sitting on top of him. Suddenly Erik felt far too clothed, and he moved as if to take off his bathrobe, but he felt Charles’ hands on his own, stopping him. From the intent look in those blue, blue eyes, he seemed a man determined to do it himself.

Erik laid back on the rug, his lips tugged up in a lazy smirk as he watched Charles get to work.

* * * * *

Charles moved his hands to the knot on Erik’s robe, tugging slowly at the ends of the belt until it came undone before sliding his palms down his firm, broad chest, the plush fabric slipping off to pool around him. He took a moment to admire the lean, taut muscles of Erik’s abdomen by running his fingers appreciatively over them, extremely pleased to note that no digital musculature enhancement seemed to have been required in his filming of ‘Sparta’. Even better was the way Erik was reacting to his exploratory touch, those pale blue eyes lidded as he gazed up at Charles, hungry and almost wolfish.

The most obvious proof of how much Erik liked his touch, however, was the hardness poking against Charles’ thigh, leaving a smear of moisture on his skin, marking him as his.

“Charles.” Erik’s voice was low and husky, and Charles readily bent down to claim that generous mouth in a kiss that turned into two, three more kisses, and then Erik laced his fingers around the back of Charles’ neck, keeping him there so he’d have no choice but to go on kissing Erik. Not that he minded, of course, having that long, talented tongue slide into his mouth and tasting every last inch of him. Charles shifted himself on top of Erik to get more comfortable, but both of them groaned when his cock brushed against Erik’s, and Charles could see Erik squeezing his eyes shut again as he pulled away, gasping, “Oh fuck, Charles.”

Erik grabbed Charles’ thighs as he flipped them over, grinding down as he slid a hand to splay across his chest, pinning Charles on the ground. Charles bucked his hips up as Erik thrust against his erection, moaning as the friction sent shivers up his spine, his fingers digging into Erik’s shoulder blades.

“Yes, fuck Charles. Brilliant idea,” Charles declared between gasps as he pushed Erik’s arm away to bend up, planting one last kiss on those swollen lips. “Take me upstairs. Now.”
“But Charles, Schatz—”

Charles pressed a finger against Erik’s reddened wet lips, trying not to think about how he was the one who had made them that way. “No, no, no, I don’t care, we’ve been putting this off and I keep throwing myself at you and you keep being a gentleman. Now take me upstairs, throw me onto your bed and fuck me so hard that the bed breaks, and even then you’re not allowed to stop fucking me, do you understand?”

Erik’s eyes were wide as he stared at Charles in disbelief, then he broke into the most pleased, predatory grin ever as his eyes raked over Charles’ naked form. “Oh believe me, I understand.” Now Erik was tangling his fingers in Charles’ hair, sifting through the strands. “And you’d better understand too that I intend to pick you up and carry you off to my bed, and I’m going to take my time with you.” Erik was bending down now, leaning in closer and closer so that he and Charles were nose to nose. “And you can beg all you want for me to get inside you, and trust me, by the time I’m done, you won’t be able to walk. All you’ll do is remain in my bed, spent, and beg me to fuck you again and again.”

“Yes,” Charles whispered before Erik was even finished, running a hand over his own erection just to tease himself with the promise of everything Erik was offering. “Yes, Erik, please.”

Erik seemed to take a deep breath, then he nodded as though to clear his head. “Put your arms around my neck.”

Charles did as he was told, and he let out a surprised gasp when Erik cleanly lifted him off the rug and held onto him, carrying Charles in his arms as he made his way to the staircase. Charles snuck a peek at Erik’s face, and his expression was so determined and possessive that Charles couldn’t resist stealing a kiss, and of course the feel of Erik’s lips responding to his was an open invitation to attack his mouth even more, tilting his head so that he could deepen their kiss. Erik’s low, desperate groan rumbled in his throat, and this just made Charles hold onto him tighter, his fingers curling across the broad nape of Erik’s neck.

Erik pulled away with obvious reluctance, blinking a little as he wobbled on the first few steps of the staircase. “Charles, dammit, I can’t see.”

“Sorry, darling,” Charles murmured against his mouth, but it was moot because they were kissing again, unable to stop, and it was Erik’s fault entirely for having such addictive lips. They stopped on the stairs just to kiss, and suddenly Erik growled before Charles found himself slammed up against the wall, Erik ravaging his mouth so thoroughly that he felt deliciously used and ravished. “Erik,” he managed to get out before Erik’s mouth latched onto his shoulder, hot and wet and leaving Charles arching up into him, scrabbling onto the wall for leverage. Charles wished he could see himself from a third-party perspective, pinned against the wall like this under Erik’s lean, lithe body, and he knew that if he asked Erik to fuck him against the wall right here, right now on the stairs, Erik would do it. He would hold Charles’ thighs open, slick him up, and then fuck him, hard, the back of his head thumping against the wall with every one of Erik’s thrusts.

However, as enticing as the thought of getting fucked against the wall by Erik was, Charles was even more interested in the idea of finally being in Erik’s bed. There was something about the thought of lying on sheets that smelled of Erik, feeling them warmed by his skin. Yes, Charles really wanted that, and he gripped Erik’s broad shoulders to get his attention. “Erik, wait....bed, please, your bed...”

Erik lifted his head to stare at Charles, his hair mussed and his expression dazed. “Oh. The bed.” Something in his eyes seemed to clear as he gradually regained his senses for a moment. “Yes,
there’s lube by the bed. We need lube.” The frown line between his eyebrows deepened. “We don’t have lube here... no lube is bad.”

Touched by Erik’s concern for him, Charles allowed his thumb to smooth out that tiny frown. “Next time, I promise, you can fuck me up against the wall,” he murmured against Erik’s mouth, teasingly staying out of range for a kiss. “And in the shower, and over the kitchen table, and on the couch... there’ll be lots of next times, I promise.” He finally allowed Erik to kiss him, and he was delighted to realise that the more intense the kiss, the more Erik was hitching him up the wall, and he finally had to tug Erik’s hair to get his attention again. “Erik, the bed is waiting.”

Erik pulled away, eyes unfocused as he licked his lips, chasing the taste of Charles. “Right, uh, right.” He held Charles tighter to him, and this made both of them groan as their cocks brushed together momentarily, a delicious prelude to the rest of the night. Quickly, Erik steered them up the rest of the stairs and down the corridor, nudging open the door to a clean, minimalist bedroom done up in hues of blue. A book was propped up on the nightstand beside the lamp, and Charles vaguely recognised it as the book that one of his own movies had been based on.

However, what stole Charles’ attention was the massive king-sized bed dominating the room, the sheets a cool, dark blue and the pillows just a shade lighter. Erik bent down, turning on the lamp before gently depositing Charles on top of the sheets, and Charles melted into blissful softness. Erik’s bed felt like a cloud. Running a hand over the smooth fabric, Charles was pretty sure Erik was a fan of 1000-thread-count sheets like him. He wondered if Erik would mind that his fancy sheets were soon going to get covered in sweat, lube and come.

Judging from the way he was looking down at Charles now, hovering above him as his gaze travelled down Charles’ naked body, the sheets were probably the last thing on Erik’s mind right now.

“Come here,” Charles said, wrapping his arms around Erik’s neck and tugging him down for a slow kiss. Charles had already decided that his favourite part of Erik’s anatomy was his tongue: Charles would want to feel it laving at his nipples, then down his stomach, then flicking at the head of his cock, tasting the pre-come already beading there. Charles moaned into the kiss, wanting all of Erik at once in so many greedy ways - inside him, sucking him, so tight around him... and Erik seemed to smile into the kiss as though he could read Charles’ mind and see the scandalous images imprinted there, born on the very day they first shook hands.

As Erik’s mouth slid away from his own and down to suck on Charles’ collarbone, Charles found himself wondering if Erik really could read minds. But the fanciful thought quickly flew out his head the moment he felt Erik’s long, elegant fingers wrapping around the base of his cock, choking a gasp out of him as his eyes flew shut. “Oh god, Erik, Erik--”

Erik only nipped at his collarbone in response, his hand tightening around Charles’ erection as it began a slow slide upwards, his thumb trailing along the vein as he pulled his mouth away, inspecting his handiwork on Charles’ reddened skin. “I like this,” he said conversationally, as though the bastard weren’t fist ing Charles’ cock at the same time. “People will know who you belong to,” he remarked as he slid the tip of his thumb under his foreskin, and Charles let out a startled sob as his eyes flew shut and his back arched off the sheets.

Erik, torturer that he was, released his cock at that, and Charles fought hard to muffle his groan with the heel of his hand. His mouth resumed its slow path down Charles’ chest, leaving a wet, warm trail which made Charles shiver. “I thought it was very clear from the way I look at you,” Charles replied, after he had finally found his voice.

Erik’s mouth stilled in its journey, and Charles bit down on his lip as Erik placed a very tender,
chaste kiss on his navel. “I love the way you look at me,” Erik confessed, pressing his cheek against Charles’ stomach. “I--I love you.”

Charles stroked Erik’s hair, playing with the soft, fine strands as Erik nuzzled his abdomen. “I love you, too,” he said, smiling down at Erik as he brushed a thumb over the sharp edge of Erik’s cheekbone. “So much so that I’m afraid it’s too fast.”

Erik dropped another kiss to his stomach. “Don’t be.” He started moving down again, resuming to slowly stroke Charles’ persistent erection which was starting to leak precome all over Erik’s hand, not that he seemed to mind. “Not when we both feel the same,” he said with a grin as he made himself at home between Charles’ thighs, letting go of his cock so he could use his hands to spread them wider. “Oh, I could get used to this.”

“Don’t take too long.” Charles was aware that his voice sounded a little rough and husky, but oh God Erik fucking Lehnsherr was between his legs, his mouth a mere kiss away from his straining cock, and Charles didn’t think he would last beyond a few licks. He gripped Erik’s shoulders in warning, trying not to get distracted by the warm, firm muscle. “Erik, I don’t think I’ll last much longer.”

Erik put a finger against his lips, grinning wickedly at Charles before he began pressing kisses along the crease of Charles’ left thigh, leaving Charles wanting to weep from the torture of it all. Studiously avoiding Charles’ bobbing erection, Erik swiftly moved on to continue kissing along the right crease, a low throaty chuckle in his throat as Charles began thrashing about under his hands, desperate for Erik and Erik’s mouth and Erik’s cock inside him. Thankfully Erik must have taken pity on him, for he was finally sitting up, though still remaining between Charles’ legs. “Liebling, open the top drawer, there should be a tube inside there. And condoms.”

Impatiently Charles twisted around to rummage through the drawer, grinning in triumph as he finally fished out a foil packet and a half-used tube of lubricant. His grin faltered a little when he noticed this, and it didn’t escape Erik’s sharp eyes. “I have to confess, I’ve been having an affair,” Erik said, lifting Charles’ right knee and pressing a kiss behind it. “A six-month affair with my right hand.”

Laughing, Charles tossed the tube and foil packet to Erik who caught the items with a smirk. “You are a terrible, terrible man, Erik Lehnsherr.”

“But you love me anyway.” Erik’s smirk loosened into a smile as he kissed the back of Charles’ knee again before lowering his leg, then unscrewing the cap of the tube. Charles watched as Erik coated his fingers with slick, then his eyes flickered up to meet Charles’ gaze, intent and bottle-green in the dim light, pupils blown wide. “Just relax.”

Charles nodded, biting down on his lip. He had not been lying when he said he hadn’t been with anyone for the longest time, and he couldn’t help being a little nervous, even if he instinctively knew Erik would take care of him. He rested his head on the soft pillow, not knowing where to put his hands so he tucked them behind his head.

Erik kept his watchful gaze on Charles as his fingers began to circle his entrance, just teasing first, slicking the area with lube. Charles tried his best to settle down, and he smiled when Erik’s clean hand squeezed his knee in encouragement. There were times when Charles was caught off-guard by Erik’s handsomeness, and this was one of them. Erik had the sharp, good looks of the classic Hollywood stars of the past, but there was a rough edge to his attractiveness, a smouldering James-Dean type of danger that all Hollywood bad boys possessed. And Erik had it in spades, which explained why he pulled off gritty action hero roles so well.

Now, those eyes were smouldering at Charles as Erik slowly slid in a long finger, watching Charles
intently. Charles’ breath hitched a little at the intrusion, but he nodded. “More, Erik.”

Erik lifted an elegant eyebrow at him, but he obediently slid in a second finger, and this time it felt fuller and infinitely more satisfying. Charles exhaled slowly, giving himself time to get used to the stretch. “Don’t worry, Erik, I’ll let you know if it hurts.”

The tight expression on Erik’s face relaxed. “You must tell me at any point if I’m hurting you,” he said, caressing the inside of Charles’ thigh. “How does it feel like?”

“To be honest?” Charles said, as Erik nodded. “Can’t wait to get more of you inside me.” Charles’ gaze dropped to Erik’s erection curved up against his belly, moisture already pooling at the tip. “Erik, I really, desperately need you to fuck me until I can’t walk.”

Erik’s nostrils flared as he slid his two fingers in deeper, twisting them around a bit. “Love the way you feel around my fingers.” His voice was a little strangled, particularly when Charles arched his hips up at Erik a little. Erik scissored his fingers, gently coaxing the tight ring of muscle to loosen up for him. “And I can’t wait to feel you around my cock.”

Charles couldn’t stop the low moan from escaping, twisting his fingers in the fabric of the pillowcase as Erik slowly slid in a third finger, and he hissed at the slow burn. “Oh fuck, yes Erik, please please please--”

“I know you want it bad.” Erik said roughly, working in his fingers as he searched for something. “I know you want me inside you, but I’ll be damned if I hurt you because I was impatient.”

Charles swallowed the sudden thick lump in his throat. “Hang on, Liebling,” he murmured soothingly as he withdrew his fingers again, this time to tear open the foil. As the condom slipped out, Charles recovered enough to sit up and grab it from him, already starting to pant.

“Wait, let me do it,” he insisted, and Erik watched as Charles circled his thumb around the head of Erik’s erection, sweeping up the moisture pooled there before bringing it to his mouth and licking it off, smiling provocatively. The taste was salty and a little bitter, and entirely Erik. Erik’s eyes widened, and they were kissing again, slow and languid. Pulling away, Charles slowly rolled the condom over the tip of Erik’s cock, and they locked eyes as Charles slid the latex down inch by agonizing inch, Erik’s lips parted as he watched, a voyeur to his own seduction.

Even after the condom was properly on, Charles couldn’t stop stroking Erik, admiring the length and girth of his cut cock. Erik was thick and easily nine or ten inches, bobbing against his stomach, and Charles was beyond eager to feel Erik all the way inside him. He poured more lube onto his hands and continued to slick Erik up, but after a few more strokes, Erik stopped him.

“If you keep that up, I’m not going to last,” he murmured through gritted teeth, and Charles chuckled before finally letting go. He laid down on the bed again, but his breath hitched when Erik grabbed his hips and pulled him lower, nudging his legs further apart. “Oh Charles, if only you could see yourself, all spread apart for me like this.”
“Only ever for you,” Charles said softly, and Erik bent down to kiss him quickly before grabbing a pillow, then placing it under his hips. Satisfied, Erik took a deep breath before guiding himself inside Charles, and he could feel the head of Erik’s cock breaching the tight ring of muscle. Charles reminded himself to relax, and it helped that Erik was lovingly nuzzling his cheek, the way his body was trembling slightly against Charles’ a good sign of how much Erik was struggling to restrain himself and go slow.

“Tell me if it hurts,” Erik whispered, and Charles nodded, his hands sliding down Erik’s smooth, strong back in an effort to distract himself. He felt very full and stretched, but it wasn’t as painful as he had first envisioned.

Charles pressed his face into the crook of Erik’s neck and breathed in deeply, allowing himself a few moments to get used to the feeling, while taking in the intoxicating combination of perspiration and bath oils on his skin, and underneath it all, the heady scent that he had come to recognise as distinctly Erik. Charles finally nodded again. “Okay Erik, move.”

Erik’s hand brushed back a few stray curls from Charles’ damp forehead. “You sure, love?” And oh God was he sure. In that moment, he felt for certain that he had been waiting all of eternity just to be right there, laid bare beneath Erik, coming undone in his hands.

Charles closed his eyes. “Erik, if you don’t move right now, I’m going to have to finish the job myself by getting my DVD of ‘Sparta’ and having a good old wank to the sight of you in a loincloth.”

Shaking with laughter, Erik pressed a kiss to his forehead before nodding. “I want to see you do that anyway, one day.”

“Deal. Now move, please.” Charles arched his hips up, and they were both taken by surprise as the movement took Erik’s cock in even deeper, nudging something inside Charles and giving him another of those delicious electric shocks. “Oh God, Erik.” Charles was now scrabbling frantically at Erik’s back. “Do that again, again!”

“This?” Erik smirked at him, thrusting in hard and making Charles arch off the bed, moaning loud enough to startle Erik’s neighbours. “Mein Gott, Charles...so hot, so tight--” Now he was backing all the way out until his cock was almost out of Charles, and then slowly he was sliding in again, inch by delicious inch, making Charles writhe and cry out with pleasure.

“Erik, Erik, harder, please.” Charles knew he was begging, but he didn’t care, as long as he got more of that fantastic cock inside him, and then Erik was plundering his mouth in another kiss, starting to thrust with abandon and Charles gripped that wonderful, tight arse, squeezing it as Erik fucked him long and slow, his thrusts dragging in and out and making Charles giddy with lust and love, the muscles in his abdomen and lower back coiling tighter each time Erik plunged into him. One particularly hard thrust had Charles bucking up, his toes curling as a shot of pleasure seared down his legs.

When Erik’s warm hand wrapped around Charles’ straining erection, that was when he lost it. “Oh Erik, love--” And then Charles was coming between them, hot and wet onto Erik’s stomach, his own stomach, Erik’s hand and part of his thigh, and Erik just swallowed his words in kiss after kiss, eyes half-lidded as they watched Charles ride through his orgasm. Charles melted completely under Erik’s body, feeling him thrust a few more times before Erik stiffened in his arms, then let out a cry against the crook of Charles’ neck, moaning his name in disbelief as though he couldn’t believe Charles was right here, under him. After a long moment their mouths found each other, kissing tentatively as they fought to get their breathing under control again.
“Oh my word.” Charles blinked up at the ceiling, wondering if he could convince Erik to install a mirror. “Erik, that was....Erik.” He declared unintelligibly, all coherence clearly fucked out of his head.

He could feel Erik’s huff of laughter against his cheek. “And that was very...Charles.” He withdrew slowly with a wince, pulling off the condom and knotting it at the end before throwing it into the bin. “Hang on a second.”

Erik gave Charles a peck on the lips before heading to the bathroom, and Charles could hear the sound of the tap running. Stretching out on Erik’s bed, Charles felt peaceful, languid and well-fucked, which was exactly how he imagined he would feel after he and Erik had made love for the first time.

When Erik emerged from the bathroom with a damp washcloth, he surveyed Charles with a soft smile. “Hi,” he said as he sat by Charles’ side, wiping the drying streaks of come on Charles’ stomach and thigh, cleaning him slowly and carefully. Charles watched him, his heart close to bursting with love for this man. How could anyone ever believe in Erik’s reputation as an ill-tempered grouch? Charles was beginning to get the idea that Erik must not have let many people in this far, and he couldn’t help feeling special and privileged.

“What are you smiling about?” Erik was grinning as he tossed aside the washcloth, then stroked back Charles’ hair. “You look like you’re up to no good, and I’m worried.”

“Just thinking about you,” Charles said truthfully. “And what a lovely man you are. And how so many people can’t see that.”

The corner of Erik’s mouth tugged up in a crooked smile. “I don’t allow just anyone to see this side of me. Only the people I love.”

Charles smiled sleepily at him. “And I’m one of them.”

“Right now, you’re the only one,” Erik said seriously. “Aside from my parents, that is.”

This made Charles reach up and kiss him again, but he had to pull away because he was starting to feel the tiredness seep into his bones. “No one knows what a romantic sap you are, Erik,” he said with a sigh as he flopped back onto the pillow, catching sight of the book on the bedside table he had seen earlier. Now that he could see the title, he was laughing.

“What is it now?” Erik asked, looking a little amused.

“I see you’re reading ‘Becoming Penelope’, I never pegged you as the romance novel type.” Charles grinned teasingly as Erik climbed back into bed, indicating the book on the nightstand. He held Erik’s face as he kissed him, relishing in the return of the warm weight of Erik’s body.

Erik laughed, shaking his head before dropping a kiss on the love bite blossoming on Charles’ collarbone. “I only bought it because you were on the cover.”

An image of Erik waiting in line at a bookstore checkout doing his best to conceal his item and mortification flashed across Charles’ eyes, and he tried his utmost not to giggle too loudly, making an attempt to stifle his laughter in Erik’s hair. “I’ll probably never be in a rom-com again.” Charles commented, matter-of-factly.

Erik snorted at that. “Good. I don’t think I can stomach watching you kiss yet another actress.”

“Oh, Erik…” Charles lifted Erik’s chin with back of his fingertips, nudging him to shift up with his
free hand. Erik complied, propping himself up on his elbows as they gazed into each other’s eyes, fringe falling loosely down around them. Charles cupped his face, his chest tightening as he began to speak slowly, desperately hoping Erik understood that he meant every word he was about to say. “No matter how many roles we play, together or apart, I will always, always love you, Erik Lehnsherr.”

Erik exhaled deeply, his eyes softer and brighter than Charles had ever seen. “And I will never stop being madly in love with you.”

He bent down to claim his lips, and Charles parted them willingly, inviting his tongue in and caressing it with his own. When they finally broke the kiss, Erik laid down on him with his face buried in his neck, and as Charles wrapped his arms tightly around his chest and closed his eyes, it felt as though he had been holding him for all of time.

* * * * *

Erik didn’t usually wake up feeling like he was on top of the world. In the mornings he was usually more familiar with the desire to murder anyone and anything that stood between him and the coffeemaker, especially if there was an early call and he was due on set at the buttcrack of dawn. However, when he opened his eyes this particular morning, he was smiling like an absolute lunatic.

He didn’t have to report to the set that early – and more importantly – Charles was currently wrapped up in his arms, snoring pleasantly, his hair tickling Erik’s nose. Erik bent down to press a kiss to the dark mop of hair, and the pleasant burn in his thigh muscles was also a sweet reminder of what happened with Charles last night.

Erik knew he should stop his kisses, but Charles looked radiant in the morning light, and he simply couldn’t resist the siren call of Charles’ pale skin and pink cheeks. Soon, Charles was stirring in his arms, “Mmm, Erik?” he murmured, gazing blearily at Erik. “Morning.”

“Hi.” Erik stroked the dark waves back, unable to stop smiling. He couldn’t remember the last time he had been this happy. “Had a good sleep?”

The sunny, sleepy smile Charles flashed him was beautiful. “The best. It seemed that someone tired me out last night.”

Now Erik couldn’t help smirking at him. “Oh, I wonder who that could be.” He was about to dive in for a proper kiss, but Charles batted him away gently with a laugh.

“Let me brush my teeth first, my breath is probably disgusting. And a shower, too.” Charles squeezed his shoulder and extricated himself from Erik’s arms, which was quite a feat as Erik wasn’t quite willing to let him go yet. After a playful bout of mock wrestling, Erik finally relented and fixed his eyes on that beautiful pale ass, which still bore red marks the rough size and shape of Erik’s fingers. Charles threw him a knowing smirk over one shoulder before disappearing into the bathroom, and Erik sighed with contentment as he heard the shower running and Charles’ soft, muffled singing.

When Charles finally came out of the bathroom, he looked considerably more awake as he towelled himself dry. “Are our clothes still downstairs, Erik?”

“I think so.” Erik sat up, untangling himself from the sheets and feeling a burst of satisfaction as he noticed Charles’ hungry gaze. “You can wear something of mine if you like.”

The way Charles’ face brightened suggested that he really liked this idea. “Wearing your clothes? All right, then.”
Hopping out of bed, Erik walked over to open the doors of the wardrobe, showing Charles his everyday wear. “Help yourself, I’ll go brush my teeth.”

“Thank you.” They exchanged a quick kiss before Erik took his turn in the bathroom, and by the time he emerged, Charles had picked one of his blue long-sleeved shirts.

Erik watched as Charles slid on the shirt, but the sleeves were a little too long, his pale hands peeking out from the cuffs. Erik simply couldn’t describe how wonderful it was to see Charles wearing his shirt, the open collar displaying the scattering of reddened love bites which bore the crescent shape of Erik’s teeth. As Charles started to button the shirt, Erik stepped forward and brushed aside Charles’ hands, doing up the buttons himself.

There was an amused glint in Charles’ eyes. “I can do it myself, you know.” But he made no move to stop Erik, who was leaning in closer, so close that their noses brushed.

“I know, Liebling.” Erik moved in just an inch closer, watching as Charles’ lips slowly parted, as though he was expecting a kiss. “Just let me do this for you.”

Wickedly turning away from Charles’ plush mouth and chuckling at the deprived groan that followed, Erik made his way down to one of his favourite places, that soft crook where Charles’ neck met his shoulder. He began kissing him there, fingers fumbling a little with the buttons, but from the way Charles’ breath hitched, he didn’t think Charles gave a damn about the shirt or its buttons, only the mouth softly kissing his neck.

“If you don’t stop right now,” Charles warned him, his voice breathy and a little desperate, “we’ll be late for work.”

“Oh.” Erik planted one last kiss before smiling against his neck. “I’ll just tell Bryan that it’s your fault for being so damn irresistible. He won’t get mad at you, since he likes you better.”

“Don’t be silly, Erik.” Charles’ hand tightened in Erik’s hair before stroking the back of his neck. “Anyway, I like you best of all.”

Lifting his head, Erik pressed a chaste kiss to that beautiful bow of a mouth before smiling at Charles. “I can’t imagine why.” He was about to dive in for another kiss when they both heard the gurgle of Charles’ stomach rumbling. “When was the last time you ate something?”

Charles scrunched up his nose. “Um, lunch yesterday, I believe? I didn’t eat anything during my dinner with Moira.”

“What?” Erik’s concern for Charles was far stronger than his libido. “That’s it, put on some pants while I make you breakfast.” Fishing out another bathrobe from the closet, Erik put it on quickly and tied the belt. “Make yourself at home, I’ll see you downstairs.”

“You really don’t have to cook for me, Erik--” The tail end of Charles’ protest was lost as Erik waved a hand dismissively at him, heading out of the room and rushing down the stairs.

The living room was exactly as they left it last night, and it was rather amusing to find their clothes still scattered around the faux bear rug. Smiling as he picked up the various articles of clothing and neatly folded them, he paused before folding Charles’ shirt, then pressed his nose against the fabric. The heady scent of Charles warmed him and Erik smiled as he put it aside on the couch with the rest, then made his way to the kitchen.

As they were pressed for time, Erik made a quick meal of fried matzah, since all he had in his pantry was eggs and leftover unleavened bread. As he heaped the food onto the plates, he realised Charles
still hadn’t come down. “Charles?” he called out, and he heard an answering yell in the living room.

Making his way there, Erik could see the top of Charles’ dark head resting on the back of the couch. His heart jumped at the sight, and as Erik made his way in, he could fully see Charles now, flipping through a large photo album, Erik’s clothes a little too big for him. Erik had to swallow the sudden lump in his throat. Charles looked so entirely and completely his like this, dressed in his clothes and sitting on his couch, bathed in the beams of sunlight flooding in through the French windows.

Then he looked up from the photo album, and those deep blue eyes were fixed on Erik, a smile dawning on his face. “Hey, you.”

Erik had to shake his head to clear it. He didn’t think one person could ever have this effect on him, and he had spent most of his adult life guarding against this very phenomenon happening. If one person had total control of your heart, it meant that the same person could very easily hurt you. Years down the road, would Erik see this moment in time as his biggest mistake, or the best decision he would ever make in his entire life?

“Erik?” Charles was tilting his head questioningly. “Why are you staring at me like that?”

Erik finally managed to find his voice. “Nothing.” He walked over and sat down next to Charles, trying not to think about how easily the two of them were already melding together into a tight embrace, arms and legs folded against each other. Charles felt like bliss, so warm and solid in his arms. And damn did he smell good, like home. “What are you looking at?”

Charles was shooting him an amused, curious look. “Your baby pictures. Erik, I didn’t think you could be any cuter, but this album just proved me wrong.”

Groaning when he saw the old photo of himself splashing about in the bathtub with an army of rubber duckies, Erik buried his face in Charles’ shoulder. “This is so embarrassing.”

“Don’t be silly.” Charles kissed the side of his head. “And look at you here, all dressed up!” he exclaimed, pointing to a picture of him wearing a helmet in a red outfit and dark cape.

“Ah yes, now I remember.” Erik laughed at the fond memory of pestering his mother to make him the costume. “When I was 9, I wanted to go as a comic book character for Halloween. My mother made me the helmet out of tinfoil, then painted it magenta and red. I wouldn’t take it off, not even during meals, and my father threatened to take me out of drama class if I continued to keep it on.”

“That is so sweet.” Now Charles had that evil little glint in his eye again, the one Erik was beginning to recognise was a precursor to trouble. “You know, speaking of Halloween, we should absolutely celebrate it this year. It’s just around the corner, isn’t it?”

“Well yes, it is.” Erik stared at him with a growing smile. “The both of us will probably get a slew of invitations, we could just pick one.”

“Or,” Charles said slowly, “we could throw our very own party, Erik.”

“Really?” The idea was definitely intriguing. “You know, that’s not a bad idea. We could invite our friends, ban the press--”

Charles laughed, the rich sound rumbling against Erik’s chest and making him sigh with contentment. “Oh yes, the press are definitely banned. I’m already having the best idea for a costume.” He turned to raise an eyebrow at Erik. “But I’m not doing this without you, of course. What do you think?”
Erik pressed a kiss to his nose. “Anything you want, Charles. You already know I would follow you into the fires of hell, if you only asked.”

Charles squeezed his hand with the biggest grin. “Splendid, this is going to be so much fun.”

* * * * *

“Here, let me,” Erik offered as he made his way over to him, smiling in amusement as he watched him fumble to push his shirtsleeves up, the fabric slightly too long for his arms. Erik unbuttoned his cuffs and folded his sleeves repeatedly, until they stopped just above his elbows and revealed his pale forearms, Charles loving the touch of his thumbs as they trailed over his skin the entire time.

“Thank you, darling.” Charles smiled as he kissed the corner of his mouth, delighting in how utterly claimed he felt dressed in Erik’s clothes, the delicious ache in his muscles a constant reminder of the previous night’s transgressions.

“We’d better get going,” Erik said as he placed a peck on his forehead, grabbing his keys on the counter as he strode towards the door. He stiffened when he held the knob and shifted to the side instead to slide the curtains back and peek out the window. “Fuck.”

A sudden fear gripped him as he took in the way Erik’s fist had clenched down on the drapes, knuckles gone white. “Erik? Erik, what’s wrong?” He asked, heart racing in his chest.

“They’re still out there,” Erik answered as he turned around, “at the gate, with their lenses targeting the door.”

He sighed, resting his forehead against the heel of his palm. The day had started off so perfectly, and then all those people just had to show up and ruin everything. “I’m so sorry I led them back here, Erik.”

“This isn’t your fault, Liebling. It’s the damn paps swarming around the gate like insects, they’re going to hang us out to dry,” he replied, practically snarling. “Society will not accept us.”

It pained him to see Erik this upset, especially when he thought of how wonderful it had been to be held by him earlier, sharing a laugh over that album of memories and fantasizing about all the new ones they were about to make. Charles went over immediately, wrapping his arms around him and rubbing soothing circles over his back to calm him down as he spoke softly into his ear. “Erik, Erik… The Sixties were a long time ago, mankind has evolved since then.”

Charles sighed as he felt Erik relax in his arms, hands sliding around him to return the embrace. “I really hope that you’re right,” Erik said with his face nuzzled in his neck.

“I’m always right,” Charles answered with a grin as he pulled away, heading to the window to inspect the situation. It was worse than he had expected, the numbers having multiplied like rabbits overnight. “But I really do wish you lived in a gated community.” Charles lamented as he closed the curtains and turned back to face him.

Erik looked thoughtful for a moment before he shook his head slowly and stretched out his arm, expression soft and beseeching as he spoke, “No more hiding.”

If there ever was a moment where Charles could say that he felt time stand still, or the world stop spinning on its axis, that was it right there, standing in the doorway with Erik reaching out to him, and he knew that all of his dreams lay right there waiting for him, in the palm of Erik’s hand. Charles closed the distance and took it, understanding that he was agreeing to so much more, freely signing over everything of himself to the man before him, and Erik smiled softly as he raised the back of
Charles’ hand to his lips and sealed it all with a kiss.

“Are you ready for this?” Charles asked when Erik grabbed hold of the handle, his other hand staying firmly clasped in Charles’, feeling overcome with the sense that they were at the start of something incredible.

Erik tilted his head and gazed at him, full of love and that certain air of conviction that never failed to take his breath away. “Let’s find out.”

Erik twisted the knob and pushed the door wide open as he led them outside, stepping out into a crescendo of shouts and cheers and blinding flashes from the photographers that had camped overnight, but as they turned to look at each other, Charles felt the chaos fade away, until it was just the two of them left in the universe, and when Erik swept him up in his arms and kissed him like the world was ending, he knew that everything in existence could crash down around them, and none of it would even matter, as long as he had Erik by his side.

* * * * *

Notes:
1. The title of this chapter is a quote from ’(500) Days of Summer’.
2. Oh look, Erik in a poster for ’Shark Tale’.
3. The pictures used for the feature on boyfriends sharing sunglasses are not manips.
4. The Palm is known for its celebrity patrons.
5. Stolen from Charles’ spank bank, Erik Michael Fassbender in a loincloth on the set of ‘300’ listening to his iPod.
6. James McAvoy needs to throw us a bone and do more romantic comedies.
7. Gratuitous use of quotes from the X-Men movie canon. Majorangecat drew this amazing picture of Logan eating spaghetti. The next chapter is going to be a multifandom orgy, otherwise known as Halloween.
This is Halloween

Chapter Summary

Charles and Erik decide to throw their own Halloween party, and Dragneto makes an appearance, along with a slew of other celebrities. The next day, Emma receives a horrific shock along with her morning coffee.

Chapter Notes

So we understand that this chapter is over a week late... and somehow turned out to be more than 18k words of drunken shenanigans and smut. You could say it’s a standalone chapter, and if you’re feeling lost there is a guest list in the notes at the end, though be warned that it includes massive spoilers. We would like to welcome Etharei to the writing team! Clocks and Clear Liqueur would like to personally thank her for being a superhero and saving our asses. If not for her, this chapter would probably only have been done by next year’s Halloween. xsilverdreamsx’s artwork is stunning, as always!

Etharei: Hi! I'm Rei, and I'm very pleased and honoured to be joining this merry band of fic-spinners and porn-wranglers. Hope you continue to enjoy Erik and Charles' shenanigans!

Soundtrack: Adam Lambert - 'Down the Rabbit Hole'

Charles had insisted on helping to bring in the morning papers and mail whenever they were staying over at Erik’s place, and it was not until two days ago that he had understood why. Charles had guiltily pulled out a hastily torn envelope (after he had very enthusiastically volunteered to perform a string of sexual favours that had whitened Erik’s vision) from the Superior Court saying that his Porsche had been caught running all the red lights between The Palm and his house, at twice the speed limit. Erik had wanted to go on a tirade on Charles’ reckless disregard for his own safety, but Charles had started worrying his already very red and swollen lips and unleashing the full power of his devastating blue eyes, and Erik could barely muster giving him a long exasperated sigh. Charles, upon informing the court that it was him driving the car, had then been immediately slapped with a Court Order revoking his license for a year, and Erik was not above admitting that it had been one of the best news he’d ever heard in his life.

Aside from that, they hadn’t run into much trouble the past week after issuing the joint statement confirming their relationship and asking the media to leave them in peace, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that they hadn’t been running around at all, never able to get home fast enough for Charles’ liking. Charles really was insatiable, or as he so eloquently put it, “just making up for lost time, darling.” Erik wasn’t keeping count, but he was pretty sure that they had by now fucked in every room in both their houses at least twice, and there had been times when he simply wanted to just admit defeat and beg for some rest and sustenance, at least until he could see straight and
hopefully not die from an aneurysm. Not that he was complaining, oh no, not at all. In fact, he really should send Raven a gift basket for dragging Charles along with her for yoga classes, especially after what Charles had come up with last night.

Or perhaps Charles really was an evil mastermind, lulling him with too much sex; because that was the only logical explanation he could come up with as to why he was standing there, in front of Charles’ full-length dresser mirror, looking like that.

“Do I really have to wear this?” Erik stared at his reflection, truly quite horrified.

“Whatever happened to the boy who used to play dress-up?” Charles asked from the other side of the bedroom as he walked over with a professional makeup kit.

“Firstly, that was a costume. Secondly, this isn’t even a dress. It’s a sequined handkerchief held up by a couple of straps. And thirdly, simply putting on a fedora and holding a gold-tipped cane doesn’t make you look anything like a pimp. Besides, after a few drinks, you’re just going to be Charles in a fur coat using a very expensive walking stick because he can no longer stand straight.” And no, Erik was most definitely not being petulant.

Charles chuckled, clearly getting a rise out of watching him suffer. “You’re wrong, my friend. I’m getting out of that coat the moment we’re done taking pictures. And it’s just backless, all this fuss coming from someone who once spent three months in nothing but a loincloth.”

Charles ran a hand up and down his spine, tracing the thin blue straps that crisscrossed over it with his fingertips, and oh, there were definitely some benefits from wearing so little clothing. “Okay, fine. But if there is a wardrobe malfunction it’s completely your fault.”

“Of course, you can spank me if that happens. Now sit on the bed, close your eyes, and let me do your makeup,” Charles said as he pulled out an eye shadow palette.

Erik complied and soon Charles was applying powders onto his lids and cheeks, his free hand tilting Erik’s face from time to time. He then felt a fine brush running along his lashline before Charles blew on his skin lightly, followed by a soft pencil dotting gently on the mole on his left cheek. Charles’ hands were warm where they brushed against his skin.

“Part your lips,” Charles said, and when he did, Erik let out a startled moan as Charles pressed his mouth onto his, hot and wet and desperately devouring every gasp he made as Charles traced patterns down the back of his neck with his fingers, palms spread out across his throat, licking at his lips and into his mouth. He pulled away before Erik regained the presence of mind to push him down onto the sheets.

“That’s to last me until the end of the night. I don’t want to ruin my masterpiece,” Charles stated, smiling slyly when Erik opened his eyes in a daze. He took out a tube of lip gloss and applied it to Erik’s lips, still moist from the kiss.

“One last step, Erik. Look down,” he said as he swept mascara across his upper lashes, “and up,” he paused, using the tip of the brush on Erik’s lower lashes, “and all done.”

Charles could not stop grinning as he picked up a paper bag by the side of the bed and pulled out a fiery red wig, styled in a bob, and Erik had to stop himself from leaning over and kissing the dimples that formed on his cheeks whenever he smiled like that by reminding himself that Charles would be none too pleased if he messed up his handiwork so soon.

“I borrowed this from Raven. There was a stage when she used to hit the town wearing this, playing
the mysterious stranger sitting at a bar and adopting a different personality each night. She looked really good with this hairstyle, actually. Anyway, I promised we would take absolute care of it.” Charles prattled on as he adjusted the hairpiece, smoothing it down when he was done and smiling incandescently.

“What?” Erik asked, before curiosity got the better of him and he climbed out of bed to take a look in the mirror. He was immensely relieved when he found that Charles had picked neutral shades for his eye makeup, unsure of how he would have reacted if he had, God forbid, decided on something like purple. Charles came over and clipped on a pair of large gold loop earrings as Erik scrutinized himself, absently adjusting the straps of his dress. Oh if only his younger self could see the things he was willing to do for this man.

Erik turned his full attention back to Charles when he slid himself in between him and the mirror, still smiling affectionately as he held both his hands and declared with utmost tenderness, his gaze steady and fond, “You’ve never looked more beautiful, darling.”

* * * * *

Thanks to Emma’s wealth of connections, Charles had managed to book ‘Rage’ on West Hollywood for their Halloween party, despite the late notice. As their driver pulled around to the back entrance, there was already a long line snaking outside the club as usual, despite the sign on display saying the club was closed for a private function. Charles could see the hefty bouncers smoking under the red neon ‘RAGE’ sign, ignoring people who were pleading to get onto the guest list. Charles knew for a fact how short this guest list was. Even then, the club would still be quite packed.

He smothered his own giggles as he cast a sly glance at Erik beside him, all dolled up to the nines in his wig and dress. Erik was being rather quiet, but the way his large hand was sprawled on Charles’ knee, squeezing and kneading it gently, spoke volumes about how he felt at the moment. A little nervous, perhaps, but generally content. Charles was a little disconcerted that he could already read Erik this well despite the fact that they’d only known each other for about a month, give or take. Then again, they had fallen deeply for each other in that space of time as well, and they had been spending almost every day together. So maybe it wasn’t exactly a surprise.

As the car began nosing down the alley, Charles turned to Erik again, sifting his fingers through the red strands of Erik’s wig. “It’s not too late for you to back out, you know.”

Erik grinned at him, his lips smooth and shiny with carefully-applied gloss. “If I take off my costume, then you’ll be no one’s pimp.”

Charles leaned in, trailing the pads of his fingers up the long, lean line of Erik’s neck, his breath warming the skin and sending a visible shiver through Erik. “Then maybe I’ll take off my costume too,” he whispered, before softly kissing Erik’s neck. “Then everyone will see all the lovebites you’ve left on me.”

He could feel Erik tilting his head to give Charles access, parting his legs a little as an automatic response to Charles touching him. “No one sees you naked but me.” The undertone of steel in Erik’s voice was obvious. “Are we clear?”

Charles huffed out a laugh as he nuzzled into the crook of Erik’s neck. “Was that ever in doubt?” he said as he slid a hand between Erik’s legs and under the hem of his dress, lifting his head to watch greedily as Erik tipped his head back with a low moan, his Adam’s apple bobbing up and down as he swallowed. Charles would have teased his lips open for a kiss if he weren’t afraid of messing up Erik’s lip gloss, so he settled for planting a series of kisses down Erik’s jawline instead, palming Erik’s half-hard erection in his underwear.
“Charles,” Erik ground out in warning. “If you keep this up, the dress is going to be levitating by the time we step out of the limo.”

The laugh was out before Charles could stop it, and he just buried his face in Erik’s shoulder as he chuckled, sliding his arms around Erik’s narrow waist. “I really do love you very much,” he said, his voice thick with affection.

He could feel the flex of Erik’s cheek muscle against his as he smiled too. “I know, I love you too,” he said quietly, and Charles could feel Erik’s warm hand caressing his back. Their foreheads pressed together, and Charles caught the faint scent of powder and lip gloss, making him smile.

“I believe you, because otherwise you wouldn’t be here willingly, dressed like this.” Charles laughed as Erik let out a long-suffering sigh, tucking a lock of fake red hair behind his ear. He was gratified to see Erik leaning into the touch, nuzzling against Charles’ hand.

“You’re probably the only person who can get away with this.” Erik turned, pressing a kiss to Charles’ palm. “It also doesn’t help that you’ve made my mind hazy with too much sex.”

Charles pretended to look indignant. “Oh? I didn’t hear you complaining last night when you fucked me so hard that we almost fell off the bed.”

Now Erik seemed to be fighting back a grin, a finger tracing along Charles’ collarbone and swirling around a giant, red lovebite blossoming there the exact size of Erik’s mouth. “You seduced me,” he pretended to complain. “I just wanted to read a book and you were the one who started kissing my neck.”

“Mmmh.” Charles was smiling now, bending his head down and taking in the scent at the crook of Erik’s neck. Here he smelled manly, like sweat and musk. “Just like this?” he whispered, before brushing his lips against Erik’s jumping pulse point.

Erik’s wandering hands tightened on his shirt. “Charles--”

The car rolled to a stop, making them jerk forward slightly with inertia, and Charles groaned against Erik’s skin. “Bloody hell.”

“I know, I know.” Erik gave him a soothing peck on the lips, leaving just a touch of lip gloss. “We won’t want to miss our own party, would we? Then all your prep would have gone to waste.”

“Of course not.” Charles sighed as he leaned back in his seat. As always, Erik’s practicality saved the day. “But we’re continuing this later.”

“Sure.” Then Erik, the magnificent tart, actually fluttered his eyelashes at Charles. “Besides, don’t you want to show me off?”

As he watched Erik slink out of the limo, he wondered if he had created a monster.

* * * *

‘Rage’ had an open concept, where visitors were first greeted by the airy patio outside. The bar stretched all the way from the patio to the dance floor further inside, linking both sections and giving the club some semblance of continuity. Charles wandered along this bar now as he and Erik headed inside, nodding to the staff who were grinning as they spotted Erik, and one of them raised their mobile to try and take a picture. A manager immediately chided the staff, but that still didn’t stop them from chortling amongst themselves.
“You’re the belle of the ball,” Charles told Erik, who was starting to look relatively uncomfortable. He squeezed his hand. “Are you all right?”

“I’ll be fine,” Erik assured him. “Schieße, the things I do for love.”

“Come on, distract them with your fine bartending skills.” Charles patted his backside, before guiding him towards the bar as one of the staff let Erik in behind the counter. “Make me something sweet and pretty, like yourself.”

The look Erik shot his way promised Charles that he was going to pay for it later, but Charles was laughing too hard to care. Still, for all his posturing, Erik didn’t really seem to mind, wiping down the counter and adjusting the strap of his dress. “All right, I’ll make you something nice to drink.”

Charles hoisted himself onto the bar top, watching as Erik grabbed several bottles from behind the counter. “What are we having tonight, love?”

“I was thinking of a wolf bite for the occasion,” Erik replied as he rolled a bottle of Midori melon liqueur down his arm like it was second nature, and Charles didn’t think he would ever get over that surge of awe and pride each time he had the privilege of observing Erik in his element, spinning bottles and cocktail accessories about with such precise control, almost as if they were an extension of himself.

“Do you need help?” Charles asked as Erik poured the Midori and some pineapple juice into a cocktail shaker filled with ice.

“Sure, why don’t you add the absinthe?” Erik suggested as he indicated the bottle beside them on the counter.

Charles grabbed it and began pouring, the pale green liquid blending in with the Midori already in the shaker, “Tell me when to stop.”

“Stop,” Erik said, laughing as he placed a hand on Charles’ to tilt the bottle up when he deliberately continued to let it pour. He capped the shaker and shook it, tossing it in the air for good measure before straining the glowing green cocktail into two shot glasses. Erik splashed lemon-lime soda on top before drizzling some grenadine, the deep red looking like swirls of blood.

“To a wonderful night of drunken debauchery,” Charles announced, lifting his glass in a toast and locking eyes with Erik as their glasses clinked.

“I’ll drink to that,” Erik said as he knocked back the shot, and Charles did not miss the stain his lip gloss left on the rim of the shot glass, rather turned on by the fact that he was the one who put it there.

“Oh this is delicious. But don’t let me drink too much, I don’t want to pass out again. I will feel very put out in the morning if I didn’t get to have fun with that dress, you hear? Don’t give in, not even if I beg.” Charles said, leaning in and slinging his arms around Erik’s neck.

“I think I have been trained well in that respect.” Erik smirked, earning a playful shove from him.

Charles reached over the counter and grabbed two dozen shot glasses, arranging them on a large tray. “Let’s bring this over to the others. I’m sure they’d love some.”

They prepared the rest of the shots together, Erik coming back round the counter to carry the tray when they were done. Charles held his free hand as they made their way over to the table, very grateful that they were spared the crush of bodies that they would normally have had to contend with
on a regular night here, and there was even room to breathe and mingle.

“Robert!” Charles called when they reached their destination, Erik going on ahead to place the tray on the table.

“Charles, my boy, I’ve missed you!” Downey greeted as he spun around in his red and gold metal suit. "Everyone, group hug!"

At that, the other four people at the table rushed over, sweeping Erik along with them, and piled themselves onto Charles as Robert picked him up. “Ow, ow, Robert, your suit armour,” Charles jokingly protested, laughing as he put him down.

Charles placed a hand on the small of Erik’s back as he shifted over, beaming at the old friends assembled before them. “Thank you everyone for showing up in your outfits. Erik, have you met Robert?” he asked as he gestured towards the other actor.

“No, I don’t believe I--"

“Erik Lehnsherr?!” Robert exclaimed, eyes bulging out of their sockets. He went over immediately, placing his hands on Erik’s exposed sides as he inspected Charles’ handiwork. “Wow, I didn’t recognise you, will you look at that? I used to have little drinking competitions with your boyfriend; neither of us ever remembered who won. Anyway, it’s such a pleasure meeting you,” Robert said as he spanked Erik’s ass.

“Now, now, Robert. Hands off.” Charles laughed as he batted him away, his heart skipping a beat in disbelief that he had a boyfriend, that Erik Lehnsherr was his boyfriend. Spotting a familiar mess of dark curls, Charles grabbed his old friend. “Hello, Tom! I’m so glad you decided to sell your soul and switch from theatre to movies.” Charles gave Hiddleston a squeeze before turning back to Erik. “We were in a West End play together once.”

“Erik! Come here, mate,” Chris Hemsworth called out as he gripped Erik in a tight bear hug. “You look so cute in your dress!”

“This is all Charles’ doing,” Erik answered, smiling as he shook his head. “Charles, Chris and I share the same personal trainer, as well as Evans. And if you recall, Samuel and I did ‘Serpents on a Jet’ together.”

“So nice to meet you!” Charles was smiling from ear to ear as he shook Hemsworth’s and Jackson’s hands before hugging Evans. “I know this Chris, we were in ‘Three’s a Crowd’ with Jessica Alba.”

“They go to the gym, I just stand there and look pretty,” Robert remarked, preening.

Charles laughed, poking Hemsworth’s biceps to make sure they were real. “I know exactly what you mean. Where are Mark, Scarlett and Jeremy?”

“Mark got called back to do some voicework for post-production, said to send his regards. He was so upset that I thought he was actually going to Hulk-out for a moment. Scarlett and Jeremy had to reshoot some scenes,” Chris Evans said apologetically.

“Oh that’s really too bad... Well, now that we’re all introduced, come try this drink Erik prepared,” Charles said, handing out the shots.

Robert came over, removing his open helmet as he grabbed one from Charles. “I thought you’d never ask.”
All of them raised their glasses as they stood in a circle, looking like the greatest group of remarkable actors ever brought together. “Chin-chin!” Charles said as they clinked their glasses, then knocked back their shots in unison.

Chris Hemsworth chuckled, slapping Erik on the back. “Blimey, Erik, this is excellent. Another!” he declared, as the lot of them downed a second shot.

“This is green, so there must be chlorophyll in it. That means I’m not cheating on my diet. I hereby declare this a health drink! Right, Erik?” Robert asked as he picked up yet another shot.

Charles laughed as he wrapped an arm around Erik and tilted his head to lock eyes with him. “Don’t answer that.”

Erik smiled at Charles before turning to Robert. “It’s practically a salad,” he joked as he took a shot with him, grinning as he watched Robert recover from the burn of the alcohol down his throat.

“Charles, I like him already! Whoever said Erik’s a big emotionless meanie ought to be shot.” Robert laughed as he came over to sling an arm across Charles’ shoulders. Charles grinned, delighting in how well the two of them were getting along, and how much more open to outsiders Erik had become, pleasantly surprised at the conscious effort Erik was making to be gracious to his friends in particular.

Erik smirked, instinctively pulling Charles closer to him as he offered Robert one more shot, “It’s really just the alcohol talking. Absinthe makes the heart grow fonder.”

* * * * *

It was strange how Raven felt so out of place, considering she was the only one in the club who was dressed normally. All night long she had seen zombies, aliens, vampires - hell, even a drunk Sarah Palin staggering to the ladies’ - but so far, no one else had forgone a costume. She smoothed a hand down her black Donna Karan dress, feeling a little self-conscious for once. “Who are you supposed to be?” Emma had asked her earlier, looking regal and swanlike in her Ice Queen costume, and when Raven had told her she didn’t believe in costumes, Emma had seemed confused. But at least Emma hadn’t said anything else, merely excusing herself to go and talk to a very gorgeous and suave Jon Hamm.

Raven checked her watch. Moira would be here soon, so at least Raven could hang out with her. Charles, the drunk traitor, was downing shots with Erik and the Avengers cast, so Raven decided to look for other company.

She was relieved to see Alex and Sean making their way into the club, Sean dressed as one of the Beatles in a Nehru jacket and Lennon sunglasses while Alex’s shirtless state was attracting a lot of attention. They waved to Raven, heading over to where she was standing by the bar. “Nice costume,” she said with a laugh as she gestured at Alex’s bare torso. “Must have taken you ages to make it.”

“Hey, I’m a sexy werewolf, okay?” Alex said a little defensively, while Sean just rolled his eyes.

“Tell me exactly what part of your costume is werewolf-ish,” Raven said, raising an expectant eyebrow at Alex who looked stumped.

“To cut a long story short, Alex just wanted to go shirtless and pick up dudes,” Sean said drolly, dodging Alex’s elbow just in time.

“Can you stop putting words in my mouth, asshole?” Alex glared at him, before turning to the bar
and ordering two Heinekens from the bartender. He gestured at Raven’s empty drink. “Want a refill on that?”

Raven was about to answer him when her gaze was drawn to a tall, tall guy striding through the crowd, dark wavy hair swept to one side, a curl tumbling over his forehead in the shape of an ‘S’. As her gaze raked over him, she realised he was wearing a bright blue Superman costume, the red cape billowing behind him as he made his way to the bar. Out of the corner of her eye she could see Alex staring too, along with quite a few other people in the crowd, and she couldn’t quite blame them. This guy was a gorgeous Superman, complete with the steel blue eyes and boyish grin that had been the trademark of Raven’s childhood crush on the superhero.

It was Sean who broke the silence, his voice filled with disbelief. “Holy shit, Hank?”

“What.” Alex’s head whipped around to stare at Sean, then back at Superman. “Hold up, are you saying that is Bozo?”

“It is!” Sean hissed at him. He leaned over, tapping the Superman guy on the shoulder. “Hey, McCoy!”

Raven was still speechless when Superman turned around, and she realised Sean was right; it was indeed Hank, albeit without his glasses. It was uncanny how different he looked without them, and for the first time she was beginning to believe how people might not have recognised Clark Kent. Hank grinned broadly at all of them, but his smile turned shy when he spotted Raven. “Hey guys, good to see you,” he said, his gaze lingering on her.

“Holy crap.” The admiration was plain in Alex’s voice as he ran a hand down the giant yellow and red ‘S’ logo emblazoned on Hank’s chest. “You clean up real nice, McCoy.”

Sean whistled. “You can say that again. New contacts?”

“Yup, but I hate wearing them though. So I just break them out for special occasions,” Hank admitted, brushing back his hair and making Raven swoon just a little bit more. “You guys don’t think I look dorky?”

“No, of course not,” Sean said. “You know what’s dorky? Turning up shirtless and calling it a ‘costume’, that is major dorkage.”

“You are such an ass,” Alex grumbled as he collected their beers and shoved one at Sean, who accepted it with a grin. “We’ll see who gets the last laugh when I go home with a hottie and you go home to your stupid fish again.”

“My fish are not stupid, they’re awesome,” Sean retorted before taking a swig of his Heineken. “And if anyone is going home with a hottie tonight, it’s SuperHank, not you.”

Raven was surprised at the sudden surge of acidic jealousy that flooded her gut at Sean’s remark, and she frowned as she turned away, ignoring Alex’s and Sean’s bickering. It was just Hank, after all, plain old nerdy Hank who did his job and cheered her up at work and probably went home to his stamp collection and a dozen cats. Just because he was wearing a Superman costume (and looked good in it) didn’t mean she should see him any differently.

“Raven?” she heard him say, and when she turned towards him, he was frowning down at her in concern, his eyes especially large and luminous in the dark light of the club. Now that his glasses were gone, Raven could see for herself the the dark curve of his lashes, framing his gorgeous eyes. “Raven, are you all right?”
“I’m fine,” she said shortly, pretending not to notice the hurt look flickering across his face for the briefest of moments. “I just need some fresh air.”

He nodded, then gallantly waved towards the exit. “Want me to escort you out?”

“Really layin’ it on thick, are we, McCoy?” Alex said with a chortle, and Raven was momentarily irritated that she had forgotten they weren’t alone. “You don’t have to pile on the charm for her, I mean, it’s not some hot chick, it’s just Raven.”

She turned to him, raising a cool eyebrow. “You know, Summers, for all your cynical posturing, it’s really obvious you’re just a scared little boy dying to be loved.”

Sean howled with laughter at that, while Alex just let out a loud scoff. “Whatever.”

“No really, you keep making fun of the rest of the world. But you know what? You want to be a part of it.” Raven knew she had hit the nail on the head when she saw the way Alex’s jaw tightened.

However, he had no reply to that, simply raising his beer bottle to her. “Thanks for the free therapy, but I’m off to check out the goods. There’s gonna be more celebrities here than rehab,” he said, before pushing himself off the bar to wander through the crowd. Now Raven and Hank both turned to look at Sean, who gave them a dismissive wave.

“He’ll be fine. You two kids enjoy yourselves, I’m going to talk to Bryan,” he said with a waggle of his eyebrows, before sipping his drink and heading off to where Bryan was standing by the bar in a Keyser Soze costume.

“That was...unexpected,” Raven said, laughing a little nervously as she brushed her hair back. She could feel Hank’s eyes following her movements, and this simply made her more self-conscious. Maybe it was a good idea to step outside after all. “Join me for some fresh air? I’d like to get to know the real McCoy, I hope I get to see him around more.”

Hank flashed her a huge smile as he readily offered his arm to her. “I’m always around.”

* * * * *

It had taken Shaw more than three hours just to put on his costume. Granted, all he did was sit in a makeup chair while Angel and her team carefully painted half of his face. After putting on the special custom suit, he was more than delighted with the results. It wasn’t as good as the actual Harvey Two-Face make-up on ‘The Dark Knight’, of course, but he thought his attempt still looked very realistic for someone who wasn’t in the actual movie. Getting out of his limo and strutting into ‘Rage’, he looked around for Emma, looking forward to her reaction (which would surely be one of delight).

His grin faded when he spotted her standing near the stage, laughing with some tall, handsome guy in a tux. When he realised it was Jon Hamm, his eyes narrowed, but he was determined that Emma would drop that idiot for him once she saw his outfit.

Maybe it was a testament to how good Angel’s make-up skills were when Emma turned around and shrieked when she saw the ‘deformed’ half of his face. “Oh for God’s sake, Sebastian, you almost gave me a heart attack,” she said, her hand fluttering over her ample bosom.

“Hey, Shaw.” Jon was smirking at him as he sipped his martini. “So you came as Two-Face. What an appropriate costume.” He peered closer at him. “Which side is the deformed one again? I can’t tell.”
Shaw ignored his comment, preening in front of Emma who was at least admiring the makeup. “It took me more than three hours to put on, but it was worth it,” he told her, but she didn’t seem too wowed by this.

“Well, I spent two months getting my costume together,” she said, daintily sipping her own martini while Jon Hamm gave her costume an appreciative leer. “So I think I still win.”

“Of course, my dear.” Shaw shot Jon a death glare, but the idiot was too busy staring at Emma’s chest to notice. The worst part was that she was staring right back at Jon, her lips curving up into a flirtatious smile.

“Anyway, how about me?” Jon showed off his tux with a blinding grin, waggling his eyebrows. “I’m James Bond.”

Shaw made an unimpressed grimace. “What an easy costume, any chimp can just put on a tux and call itself James Bond.”

Jon’s eyes narrowed at him. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

Emma didn’t even bother to hide her epic eye-roll. “It means he’s calling you a chimp, sugar.”

“I see.” Jon shook his head with a condescending ‘tsk’. “Pretty rich, coming from a guy who looks like half of him got run over by a truck.”

Shaw was taken aback when Emma tittered at this, her hand coming to rest on Jon’s broad chest as she chuckled. Maybe she liked Hamm a lot more than he had initially imagined. The thought was rather depressing, and Shaw wondered if a tactical retreat was in taste. He didn’t want to look like he was licking his wounds, but it would be rather embarrassing if Emma left with Jon instead of him at the end of the night.

“Anyway, I should get going and have a chat with Tom Hardy, I thought I saw him around somewhere,” Shaw said politely, smoothing down his half-grey, half-purple suit and ignoring Jon’s smirk.

“Have fun.” The disinterest in Emma’s voice was plain as she turned back to Jon Hamm, the two of them whispering and giggling like two gossipy teenagers. Shaw was about to turn away when he remembered the pièce de résistance of his outfit: Harvey Two-Face’s double-headed coin. He fished it out of his pocket, running a thumb over the smooth surface.

“Before I go, Emma, how about a little bet?” he said, holding up the coin. Emma now looked curious, while Jon merely rolled his eyes and muttered ‘geez’ under his breath. Ignoring him, Shaw continued, “Heads, I’ll see you later. Tails, I’ll never bother you again.”

He could now see her mouth was trying not to twist up into a smile. “Fine, flip the coin.” Her tone sounded disinterested, but he noticed the way her sharp eyes were following the object in his hand.

He flipped. Heads, of course. Jon’s brow crinkled in irritation, but Emma didn’t look bothered at all. In fact, her mouth had finally given in, curving up into a rather secretive smile which was directed at Shaw this time.

“Looks like it’s heads.” Shaw gave her a little bow. “I’ll see you later, my dear,” he added, before walking away and smirking to himself. So much for James Bond.

* * * *
“Erik! Come here, love. We’re just about to have a beer bong competition,” Charles called out as Erik made his way back to the group of increasingly intoxicated superhero actors gathered beside the large stage in the centre of the floor. Evans was seated on a stool by the table, Charles’ fur coat slung over a shoulder, propping himself up on his shield. Robert was leaning against him, pimp cane in one hand, gently petting Evans’ hair, the blonde now looking a little glassy-eyed upon closer inspection.

“What are you playing for?” he asked once he reached Charles’ side, amused by the long plastic contraption in his hands. Trust Charles to come up with an even faster way of getting drunk the moment he let him out of his sight.

“Oh, good question! Chris, I want to lift your hammer when I win,” Charles announced, swinging the empty bong from side to side as he talked to Hemsworth.

Tom laughed as he poured the beer into Chris’ bong, the frothy head rising a third up the neck. “Charles, you mean ‘if’ you win. Your overconfidence never ceases to amaze me. I stole one of those props after the first movie, it’s in my home, you’re welcome to come over and play with it if you like. And just so you know, I have Mjolnir in my pants,” Tom added teasingly.

“Charles, I think I’m beginning to see why you two are friends,” Erik said, deadpan.

“Very well, I shall play for Erik’s beautiful red wig. If I win, he has to exchange it for my blonde mane for the rest of the night,” Hemsworth said as he stretched his neck.

Erik touched his wig self-consciously. The image of an awfully cross Raven from last week was still fresh in his memory and he was very sure that he did not want to relive the experience any time soon. “Charles, I don’t think Raven will--”

“Deal!” Charles declared, cutting him off. “Don’t worry, I’m very good at this,” he half-whispered in Erik’s ear, patting his back reassuringly as a shiver of dread ran down Erik’s spine. He was acutely aware that Charles was quite literally half Hemsworth’s size, and even when he considered Charles’ cast iron liver, the odds were still clearly stacked in Chris’ favour. Well, at least he could always call Emma for backup if things went south.

“What’s wrong with Evans?” Erik asked as he gestured to their fallen comrade, trying to get his mind off the pointless worrying.

“Oh, the chap’s just feeling a little tipsy. Tom defeated him at shots while you were away,” Charles said as he stretched his neck.

“Lies!” Robert yelled dramatically. “And for the record, the truth is... I am Iron Man.”

Chris sat up, grabbing his shield and trying to suppress a laugh as he attempted to shove Robert away with it. “Big man in a suit armour. Take that away and what are you?”

“Young onscreen boyfriend?” Robert replied as they both burst out laughing, Chris sprawling across his shield and Robert collapsing on top of him over Charles’ coat.

“Just give them a little booze and they start method acting. Charles, you see what I have to put up with? *Humans,*” Tom said jokingly as he handed Chris his bong.
“Charles, what happened to your costume? We haven’t even met most of the others yet,” Erik asked in wonder as he helped Charles unbutton his collar, noticing that all he had left on were his shirt and waistcoat, and feeling a tiny little bit abandoned.

Charles smiled as he kissed Erik’s cheek before combing his hair off his face with his hand in preparation for the contest. “I promise I’ll put it back on later.”

Samuel stepped forward wearing Charles’ fedora as Charles and Chris climbed onto the stage, placing the mouth of their beer bongs to their lips. “Gentlemen, if you’re ready.”

Robert hurried forward as Samuel spoke, waving Charles’ pimp cane in the air. “Wait, wait. Samuel, you’re wearing an eye patch for fuck’s sake, I hardly think you’re going to be able to keep an eye on both of them, if you know what I mean.”

“Fine, I’ll take it off if it makes you happy,” Samuel said as he started to lift the patch up, earning gasps from the people around.

Robert threw his hands up immediately, “No, I’ll be the judge,” he stated as he jumped on the stage, revealing his true intentions. “On my right, Charles Xavier: The Lehnsherr Whisperer. And on my left, Chris Hemsworth: The God of Thunder from Down Under. Guys, get set…” He raised the pimp cane with the gold tip pointing upwards, holding it for a long moment and looking at each of them in turn before swinging it down, “...GO!”

The both of them tilted their bongs up in unison at the signal as the crowd began chanting, and Erik watched Chris take several large gulps of his beer before turning his attention back to Charles, eyes going wide when he realised that he was almost done, the liquid sliding smoothly and rapidly down his throat. Charles wiped his mouth with the back of his hand as he raised his empty bong high in the air a second later to deafening applause and cheers, turning a little on his heel to acknowledge the rest of room as he soaked in the attention. Tom gladly passed him Mjolnir and Charles roared triumphantly as he lifted it up, Erik smiling broadly the entire time. Chris went over to slap Charles fondly on the back in congratulations before Charles climbed off the stage into Erik’s arms, beaming as he spun the hammer around by its leather strap.

“Well done, Charles.” Erik smiled affectionately as he placed a chaste kiss on Charles’ lips, the lip gloss transferring onto his perfect bow of a mouth.

“It’s much harder than it looks, actually,” Charles said as he leaned against Erik’s side, body warmer than usual from the alcohol, the flush from his cheeks now spreading down his neck and under his open collar, and if they weren’t surrounded by so many people, Erik would have gladly unbuttoned the rest of his shirt just to see how far that flush really did go. Charles shifted slightly, turning up to look at him. “Would you care to try?”

Erik nodded, quirking a corner of his mouth upwards into a lopsided smile. “Sure, why not? I’ve never done this before, though.”

Charles placed Mjolnir on the table as he picked up a pitcher of beer, pouring it slowly down the side of the neck to minimize the amount of froth. He handed the bong to Erik when he was done and ran his thumb in circles down the knobs of his spine, Erik’s breath hitching at the pleasing burn from the touch of Charles’ warm errant hand against his exposed skin. Charles whispered in his ear, his voice echoing low and deep inside his head, “I can guide you through it.”

Oh God, Charles. Erik tried to ignore the shiver that ran down his back from the feel of Charles’ hot breath against the shell of his ear, his body remembering exactly what that had led to earlier that morning. He raised the bong to his lips as he arched his neck, swallowing the ice-cold beverage
quickly in large mouthfuls, the bubbles fizzing on his tongue, Charles’s hand slowly finding its way up his back and resting on the crook of his neck.

“That’s it, Erik, you’re doing so, so good,” Charles praised him, squeezing his shoulder tightly. “The trick to finishing fast is not to swallow; you have to relax your jaw, open your throat—”

Erik’s eyes flew shut as he choked, trying his best not to spill the remaining beer as some of it went back out through his nose, stinging his nasal passages as it did so. Charles was practically falling over in hysterics as he patted his back while Erik coughed up a lung, the dirty minx surely having done everything on purpose.

“I’m s-sorry, love,” Charles said while wheezing, planting kisses to the back of Erik’s earlobe as he rubbed soothing circles across his back.

Hemsworth reappeared just then, looking concerned. “Are you all right? I hope you weren’t trying to outdrink Charles.”

“Thanks, I’m fine. Charles was just telling me the correct way to do a beer bong... with the completely wrong choice of words.” Erik shot Charles a chastising glance as he straightened back up, playfully slapping his hip with the back of his hand, his breathing finally back under control.

“You should show Chris what an excellent teacher I am,” Charles said as he gestured to his new friend while heavily resting his weight against Erik’s side.

“Very well.” Erik readied the bong back against his lips, taking a moment to switch off his gag reflex as best as he could before tilting the bong up, the beer flowing effortlessly down his throat this time. He spun the bong around when he was done to raucous cheers from Charles and Chris, the latter reclaiming his hammer and rapidly hitting it against the table for added effect.

Erik’s features twisted in effort as he swallowed the last of the beer, clearing his throat. “Charles, I don’t know how you drink this. I need to take you to Munich, have some real Weißbier.”

Charles smiled teasingly, running his fingertips across Erik’s clavicles as he rubbed up against him. “Erik Lehnsherr, are you asking me to meet your parents?”

Erik paused briefly, trying but failing to figure out how they had gone from lewd innuendos to taking Charles back home with him to Germany, and could not stop the warm smile from spreading across his face. “Yes, yes I am.”

The touched look on Charles’ face made Erik lean forward, wrapping his free arm around Charles’ waist as he teased his lips apart, smiling into the kiss, the pleased noises escaping Charles’ throat unmistakable despite the music playing in the club. Charles snaked his arms around his neck, pulling him close and deepening the kiss, bodies pressed flush together.

They were interrupted by a familiar tapping and turned to find Chris smiling sheepishly at them, Mjolnir in hand. “Ah, sorry for spoiling the mood, guys, but I’m still here,” he said apologetically, adding, “Anyway, Erik, I grabbed you a boilermaker. Cheers, mate!”

Erik pulled away reluctantly, taking the mug of whisky-spiked beer from the table and knocking it against Hemsworth’s before taking a swig. “Oh, this tastes much better.”

“L-let me try.” Charles leaned over to grab the handle of the mug from Erik, one arm still wrapped around Erik’s waist. He lost his balance slightly from the sudden movement and tipped the mug over as a result, some of the beer splashing out onto part of his trousers.
“Oh bollocks,” Charles muttered as he tried to shake his hand dry while Erik quickly placed the mug of beer on the table, Hemsworth immediately handing over some napkins to clean up the spill.

Erik chuckled as he took in the sorry state Charles was in, noting that he really did have to start monitoring his alcohol intake if there was going to be any hope of them making it through the night. He tucked Charles’ fringe behind his ear before throwing an arm around his shoulders, nudging him with the side of his head. “Come on, Liebling, let’s go get you cleaned up.”

* * * * *

Moira was beginning to wonder if it had been a good idea for her to come to the party tonight. Sure, it was amusing to see a lot of other famous faces in costume, and at one point she thought she spotted Florence Welch, before realising to her horror (and amusement) that it was Erik in drag - definitely the handiwork of Charles. But other than that, she didn’t know what she was doing here. Normally she would have hung out with Charles and Raven, but they were both preoccupied with other people, so she was on her own tonight.

She made her way to the bar, careful to lift the sides of her gown so that no one would trip on it. It had seemed like a good idea at first, dressing as Aphrodite, but she hadn’t exactly thought it through and failed to predict how cumbersome it would be to wear a long, flowing gown to a dark nightclub filled with tipsy party-goers. So not only was she bored and lonely, but she was also spending most of her time making sure people were not going to fall on their faces because of her dress. Ordering a vodka cranberry, she took a seat by the bar and let out a long sigh.

“What’s wrong? A low, husky voice said beside her, and when she turned, she was surprised to see a tall, young-ish redhead with John Lennon sunglasses looking at her in concern. She found him vaguely familiar, though, and wondered if they had met before and she had forgotten.

“Nothing, just tired,” she said politely. “Sorry, but have we met? You’re quite familiar.”

“Oh no, I don’t think so. I mean, I’d remember meeting you.” At this point, Not-John Lennon’s cheeks were flushed, highlighting the many freckles scattered all over his cheeks and chin as he extended a hand. “I’m Sean Cassidy, I’m one of the--”

“--scriptwriters for ‘First Class’, I know,” Moira finished for him, and now his jaw was hanging open, making her laugh as they shook hands. “Charles is always singing your praises, you and Alex. And I loved the ‘Catcher in the Rye’ adaptation you guys did. It was one of the best scripts, it really should have won the Oscar last year.”

“Really?” Sean was beaming at her. “Man, too bad we lost to Geoffrey Fletcher.”

“Yeah, I know.” Moira gave him a sympathetic grimace. At this point the bartender placed her drink on the counter, and she nodded her thanks. As she sipped her drink, she realised Sean was grinning widely at her. “What?”

“Oh nothing, it’s just that I thought you were going to order a White Russian.” Now he was casting his eyes downward, a little embarrassed.

“Why would I order that?”

“It was the favourite drink of this character you played in one of your earlier movies.” Sean grinned with fond remembrance. “I know I’m gonna sound real creepy and all, but I think I’ve seen all of your movies. And your role as Charlie was one of my favourites.”

“Really?” Moira was amazed. ‘Charlie and the Goldfish’ was an indie comedy she had done ten
years ago, and she only had a copy on VHS. She didn’t think anyone Sean’s age would have seen it. “That was really long ago.”

“Yeah, kinda. But it was one of my favourite movies as a kid. Charlie was awesome. And she loved fish.” Sean shot her a curious glance. “Do you like fish?”

It was an odd question, but chatting with Sean was a much better alternative to being bored and drinking alone. “I have two pet angelfish at home,” she said with a demure smile.

Sean grinned a little awkwardly. “You like fish, I like fish, too.” Now he was clearing his throat, peeking at her over the rims of his Lennon sunglasses. “Maybe we should get a bite sometime, talk about it?”

It was definitely one of the strangest invitations Moira had ever received, but she found herself chuckling as she sipped her vodka cranberry. Sean seemed harmless enough, and she doubted that he would even follow up on the dinner date if she said yes. “Sure, why not?” she said, grinning at him as she tucked her hair back behind her ear.

“Cool.” Sean was pleased, nodding to himself. “Then we can talk more about what a great movie ‘Charlie and the Goldfish’ was. It’s in my top ten movies of all time, y’know?”

Moira eyed Sean carefully as she sipped her drink. She knew Charles had sung his praises, but she still intended to tread carefully. “I’m glad you liked the movie,” she said instead, a stock reply she usually gave to fans who approached her in public. “It was fun shooting it.”

Raising a hand to the bartender and signalling for a beer, Sean perched himself on the stool next to Moira’s. “It was the movie that made me want to become a scriptwriter,” he admitted, taking off the Lennon glasses. Now that she could see them, he had such clear, earnest eyes. “It made me wish there were more movies with such cool, funny heroines like you, ya know? And at that time there weren’t many, so my Mom was like, why don’t you write one? And so I did.” Sean flashed her a rather goofy, endearing smile. “My first script was about a girl and her best friend, who was an elephant, and they solved crimes together.”

Moira couldn’t help smiling back. “I would have liked to watch that.”

Sean lifted his shoulder in an offhand shrug. “Nah, it was kinda bad. Alex couldn’t stop laughing through it. And not in a good way. We wanted--”

They were interrupted by cheers across the room, where it seemed like there was some rowdy drinking game going on between Charles and the Aussie actor who played Thor. Moira craned her neck to take a look, rolling her eyes as Charles started to wobble after what must have been his hundredth drink. When she turned back to Sean, she realised he was still staring at her, but he looked away quickly and said thanks to the bartender as he collected his Heineken.

He’s so young. Moira frowned a little as she watched him nurse his beer. She wasn’t sure how old he was exactly, but he had to be at least fresh out of college. “You were saying earlier?” she asked.

“Oh nah, it’s not important.” He turned when someone yelled his name from across the room, and the corners of his mouth tugged down with regret as his friends waved him over. “I’ve got to go. But hey, we’re doing dinner, right?”

“Sure, of course.” Moira pulled a name card out of her purse that bore Levene’s number. “Call my agent.”

She pretended not to notice the way Sean’s face fell a little, as though he had been expecting her
personal number. Sure, she felt bad for not giving it to him, but she didn’t get where she was by throwing caution to the wind. Thankfully Sean did take the card, but now he seemed to be considering something, and his next few words caught her off guard. “You’re asking me will my love grow?”

“Wait, what?” At first Moira blinked at him, but she started laughing when she realised why the words were so familiar. They were lyrics to ‘Something’, which was one of her favourite Beatles songs after all. “I don’t know, I don’t know,” she replied, more than amused and definitely charmed.

His answering grin was bright enough to light the Hollywood sign. “Stick around and it may show.”

“I might just do that.” Biting her lip, Moira caught Sean’s hand just as he was about to step away. “Wait,” she said, taking Levene’s name card back from him, then scribbling her number on the back. She tucked it into the pocket of Sean’s mod jacket, and his face was now beetroot red. Putting on his Lennon sunglasses again, Sean pretended to take a graceful bow. “So long, my Muse.”

Moira watched him weave his way through the crowd, smiling to herself.

* * * * *

It was inevitable, of course. Charles, clumsy with drink, had spilled beer on his trousers in the aftermath of the whole beer bong fiasco, and he could tell Erik was trying not to laugh at him despite how turned on he was. Charles couldn’t stop staring at Erik’s wide, generous mouth, pink with lip gloss, even as Erik stopped a passing waitress to ask if there was a room where Charles could attempt to dry his trousers. The waitress, dressed as a zombie Marilyn Monroe, pointed them towards a door beside the bar that said, ‘EMPLOYEES ONLY’ and Erik nodded his thanks.

“Come on, love.” Erik placed his hand on the small of Charles’ back, directing him towards the room. Charles stumbled a little as he walked, still a little tipsy and shamelessly clinging onto Erik as they made their way to the employees’ room. A vampire bartender let them in, and Charles blinked in the too-bright fluorescent light of the room, a stark contrast to the darkness of the club. The employee room seemed to be a break area of some sort, filled with rows of bag lockers. There was also a table with napkins and someone’s Ziplocked sandwich as Erik locked the door behind him.

He felt Erik propelling him towards the table, and Charles gladly leaned back against it. “My God, how much did I have to drink?” he murmured, massaging his temples as Erik picked up some of the napkins.

“I’ve seen you take more than this.” Erik sounded amused, kneeling down before him and peering at the wet patch on Charles’ left thigh. “I never thought I’d see you waste alcohol, though.”

“An absolute tragedy,” Charles agreed, although he forgot what he was going to say next when Erik started dabbing at the damp patch with the napkins. From this viewpoint, Charles could see down Erik’s dress, where a woman’s cleavage normally would be, but instead he was treated to the view of Erik’s firm, broad chest and the small points of his nipples.

“Still with me?” Erik asked after Charles had been silent for a while, looking up at Charles through the fan of his eyelashes. Earlier, when he had been putting makeup on Erik, he hadn’t needed to use that much mascara because Erik was already blessed with long, full eyelashes, and now Charles was struck by the sight of those pale blue eyes peering up at him through those dark, sooty lashes.

“Sorry, I’m just...distracted,” Charles said, subconsciously lifting a hand to sift through the red, artificial strands of Erik’s wig. He was taken by surprise at the soft, ‘mmm’ sound that Erik made at this gesture, and it sent a shot of lust straight down to his cock, which was already showing signs of
liking the proximity of Erik’s hand to his crotch.

Erik was still dabbing at the patch, but his artificially thickened lashes fluttered. “Charles, you’re looking at me like you want to devour me.”

Charles chuckled, biting his lip as his thumb brushed against Erik’s cheek. God, Erik was so gorgeous. And his. “How is this different from any other time?”

“True.” Erik seemed to be breathing harder, the rise and fall of his chest more obvious as he dabbed at the beer stain. “But if you keep this up, there’s going to be a different kind of stain on your pants.”

“No idea what you’re talking about, Erik,” Charles said with a laugh even though his crotch was visibly distended now, his growing erection aching to point towards Erik’s mouth. His hand landed on Erik’s broad shoulder, playing with the strap of his dress. Oh please Erik, your mouth, so warm and wet on me, lip gloss everywhere--

By now, Erik had given up all pretense of drying the stain, his eyes fixed on the outline of Charles’ erection trapped in his trousers, just centimeters away from that lush, sweet mouth. “Charles, since I’m down here, is there anything else I can do for you?” he asked, a knowing glint in those clear aquamarine eyes, a naughty twist to that generous mouth that could kiss Charles for hours (and has).

“Oh, I don’t know.” Charles tugged at the strap of Erik’s dress, winding his finger around it so he could pull Erik even closer to him. “Maybe you can show me all I’ve taught you about learning how to ‘open your throat’ and I’ll tell you how you did.”

Erik was now rubbing his cheek against Charles’ clothed crotch, making him gasp. “Oh, I hope I do well. I had a very, very good teacher.” He caught the zipper with his teeth and tugged it down, then pressed his nose against the now exposed swell of Charles’ cock, trapped in his underwear. “Charles, you always smell so good.”

Charles was now panting, his cheeks hot as he brushed back Erik’s fake hair. The sight of Erik nuzzling against his erection in his briefs like that was going to be seared onto his brain forever, an image for Charles to jerk off to whenever he was apart from Erik. “Oh Erik, I want your mouth so badly--”

“Patience,” Erik crooned, and Charles moaned at the vibration it sent through his cock, which had been half-hard all night, watching Erik like this in his dress, his boots, his stockings which Charles longed to rip as Erik fucked him hard later on. Oh yes, Charles fully intended to jump Erik at some point during the night, although this was a nice unexpected bonus.

Now Erik was gently tugging Charles’ cock out of his briefs, pressing a kiss to the flushed head. There was such love in this gesture that Charles wanted to bend down and kiss Erik senseless, but before he could do so, Erik started sucking at the tip of Charles’ leaking cock, making his knees buckle as he allowed the table to support more of his weight. “Oh my God, Erik--”

Erik’s only response was to take more of Charles’ cock into his mouth, and Charles threw back his head with a groan, marvelling in how warm and tight Erik’s mouth felt sucking wetly around him, He could feel Erik’s large hands on his thighs, spreading them a little and steadying Charles, his grip possessive. In turn, Charles slid his fingers into the strands of Erik’s wig, tugging as hard as he liked since he knew it wouldn’t hurt Erik.

“Oh, I-- Oh!” Charles was pleasantly surprised when Erik did something wicked with his tongue, flicking under the glans before trailing along the vein while his hand wrapped around the base of Charles’ erection, stroking him in the slow, firm way Erik knew he liked. Now Charles had to
watch, looking down and moaning when he saw the way Erik’s lip gloss was smeared all over his cock, making it look slick and shiny. “Erik, Erik, please...”

Erik pulled his lips off, his hungry stare fixed on Charles. “If you keep begging me like this, I’m going to come faster than you are.”

Charles huffed a breathless laugh. “How is that possible?” he asked fondly, running his thumb around Erik’s beautiful, puffy mouth, smearing the lip gloss over his chin.

“It’s possible if I do this,” Erik said with a grin, before bending down and taking Charles into his mouth again, only this time, Charles saw Erik’s hand disappearing under his dress, and he understood what Erik was up to as he moaned around Charles’ cock, his eyes squeezed shut in pleasure. The bastard was *stroking himself* while sucking off Charles, and Charles could only watch helplessly as Erik’s hand moved back and forth under his dress.

“Open your throat,” Charles reminded him, panting as Erik made a sound of agreement before trying to take more of Charles in. There was a moment where Erik paused, then his cheeks hollowed as his mouth slid down, and Charles brushed a thumb over Erik’s cheekbone, which stood out even more now that his mouth was currently wrapped around Charles’ erection. He gave an experimental thrust, which made Erik blink a bit before he relaxed, and Charles couldn’t hold back a moan at how wonderful Erik’s mouth felt, a soft velvet heaven.

“Erik, I’m going to--” Charles warned him, even as he watched himself fuck Erik’s mouth, the feel of Erik’s lips around his cock so different now with the sticky drag of the lip gloss, but Erik just winked up at him before sliding further down an inch, his hand gently stroking Charles’ balls still cradled in his underwear. Charles bit his lip, thrusting harder now and he was able to feel how much Erik enjoyed this, judging from the low moans vibrating around his cock. Erik’s wig was probably close to being ruined now but Charles didn’t care, gripping tighter as he surged forward, feeling his cock hit the back of Erik’s throat.

“Erik, oh fuck, Erik, love you, *Erik*--” Charles babbled as he pulsed into Erik’s mouth, and he quickly pulled out for fear of choking him, but this only resulted in him spurring all over Erik’s face, chin and collarbone. Erik blinked, a little surprised at first, but his growing smile was obvious as his tongue flickered at the corner of his lips, licking up the drops of come there. He didn’t even wait as he rose to his feet, kissing Charles soundly, and Charles blindly groped under Erik’s dress and wrapped his hand around Erik’s straining erection, bringing Erik off in a few strokes.

Both of them were panting slowly, coming down from their respective highs, occasionally trading a languid kiss or two. Erik tasted of lip gloss and of Charles himself, and his wig was askew. Charles straightened it with his clean hand, then reached for the stack of napkins. He wiped his hand first, then quickly cleaned Erik up before tucking him back inside his boxer briefs. Erik just watched him, eyes dazed in that sleepy, post-coital haze that Charles was starting to be very familiar with.

“You all right, love?” Charles asked him, and Erik nodded, pressing his open lips against Charles for another kiss, slower this time. Charles couldn’t resist, his fingers brushing against Erik’s collarbone and feeling a smear of wetness there. A jolt ran through him when he realised it was his own come, and he took delight in rubbing it into Erik’s skin, marking him as his.

When they pulled apart, Erik licked his lips as Charles mopped up the rest of the mess. “So how did I fare?” Erik asked, his voice a little hoarse, and Charles was embarrassed to admit just how turned on he was by that.

“You were wonderful,” he told Erik with another kiss. “Top marks, darling.”
Charles clung to Erik’s side as they made their way through the club, limbs loose and still in a daze from Erik’s spectacular demonstration of his freshly-acquired throat-opening skills backstage. He could feel the loud thump of the club music rattling his bones, though the buzz from the alcohol flowing in his veins was muted now, thanks to their physical exertions. They exchanged pleasantries when they ran into their friends, and Charles smiled when he saw a few familiar faces he wanted to catch up with.

“Joe! My regular Joe, how are you?” Charles said in greeting when he spotted Joseph Gordon-Levitt in the corner chatting with Tom Hardy, the latter cutting a rather terrifying image with his leather muzzle and thick jacket, numerous spikes protruding from around the area of his mouth like fangs.

“Charles! It’s been too long. Aren’t you going to introduce me to your stunning escort?” Joseph’s warm, dimpled smile made him look young and boyish, a huge contrast with his police officer uniform and bomber jacket. Charles was mindful and only shook his hand, afraid to get too close, wondering if he and Erik still smelled of sex and actually feeling rather turned on by the possibility.

“Erik, I was in ‘Midsummer’s Day’ with Joe and Zooey Deschanel,” Charles said by way of introduction as Erik shook the other man’s hand.

Erik nodded in acknowledgement. “I’ve seen that movie. I thought it was one of Charles’ better ones, at least it wasn’t your typical love story.”

Charles laughed, hugging Erik from the side. “You’re just happy that Zooey went with Joe in the end. Erik’s not big on sharing you see,” he said as he dropped a kiss to his shoulder.

“Tom, can you even talk in that? Have you had anything to drink?” Erik asked as he eyed the muzzle strapped around his face.

Tom chuckled, the laugh sounding muffled from behind the leather. “I’m fine, I’ve gotten used to it over the weeks.”

“Oh how’s filming for ‘The Dark Knight Rises’?” Charles asked as he extricated himself from Erik, going over to scrutinize Tom’s muzzle and marveling at the craftsmanship.

“It’s a lot of fun working with Tom again. Maybe the most fun I’ve had in my life, physically... with my clothes on,” Joseph replied, giving Charles a wink.

Erik snorted as he rolled his eyes. “Charles, I’m beginning to wonder if you met all of your friends while making a porno.”

“Oh don’t be silly, Erik.” Charles shot him a fond look, before turning his attention back to his two friends. “It must be lovely, getting to do another film together,” he said to Joseph, though his thoughts were preoccupied with fanciful musings of being in more films with Erik, of being in every film with Erik, never having to be separated because of the roles they signed on to play. It wasn’t that far-fetched, was it? Ben Stiller and Owen Wilson seemed it be able to pull it off just fine.

“It’s great. It doesn’t even feel like a job at all, and practically everyone from ‘Inception’ is back, which makes everything so much easier,” Joseph replied, smiling broadly.

“Speaking of the film, Erik, would you like to come by for a cameo?” A low, deep voice said from behind Charles, causing him to jump.

It was then that Charles identified the tall, dark figure clad in Kevlar looming over him, face covered
in a mask. “Holy Batman,” he let slip as he gaped. And now that caped crusader mentioned it, Charles couldn’t help but think that Erik would make an excellent brooding and tormented Batman, with enough sex appeal to play his Bruce Wayne alter ego perfectly as well. He had enough raw sexual energy to even be the next James Bond, if he wanted.

Christian Bale let out a deep throaty laugh, sounding very different from his usual self thanks to the voice augmenting device. “I was wondering when you were going to notice me.”

“He was standing there the whole time, Charles. We should really cut back on your drinks,” Erik said, sounding amused. “Thank you for asking but I won’t be able to, we’re heading out to start filming on location soon.”

“Yes, it’s really too bad. Joe, I take it you’ll be apprehending Tom?” Charles asked casually.

“Nice try, Charles. I can’t tell you, spoilers, you know the drill,” Joe said, smirking.

“Well then, are you going to arrest me, officer? I’ve been a very bad boy,” Charles said playfully as he held out his wrists. Joseph laughed, pulling out his cuffs and slapping them on him, the catches clicking into place. Charles blinked at them for a moment, stunned, before sidling up to Erik and tossing his restrained arms over his neck, smiling seductively as he rolled his hips at him, enjoying the feel of the metal pressed against his wrists. “Erik, I think we’re going to have a lot of fun with these, don’t you?”

Erik sighed dotingly, resting his hands on the small of Charles’ back to still him. “I really can’t take you anywhere. And Joseph’s costume will be incomplete without those cuffs.”

“Oh you two can keep them. This isn’t my real costume, anyway,” Joseph said as he stripped off his uniform to the beat of the club music, tossing the shirt and jacket aside like a professional gigolo and revealing the skin-tight latex black-and-white French maid outfit underneath. “It’s a costume within a costume,” he announced as Tom’s eyes went wide with shock, adding, “Oh come on, you’re always asking me to use my imagination.”

Tom took off the contraption on his face, gasping for air as he laughed. “You’ve never been afraid to dream a little bigger, darling.”

Still stunned, Charles wanted to whip out his phone and take a picture of Joseph in his French maid costume, but he was confused when his arms remain steadfastly locked around Erik’s neck, reminding him of the handcuffs. “Oh bother,” he mumbled, releasing Erik from his hold and looking around for help. Nothing could describe the relief he felt when he spotted Superman towering over the crowd, arm in arm with Raven. “Raven! Ask Superman to release me,” he pleaded, shoving his handcuffed wrists at the surprised couple.

“Jesus, Charles, you’re as drunk as a skunk,” Raven said with a laugh, while Superman peered down at the handcuffs, examining them. Charles blinked owlishly at him, wondering why Superman looked so familiar.

“Oh don’t worry, these are trick handcuffs, you don’t even need a key,” Superman said, before lifting a little latch and behold, the cuffs slid off and Charles was free.

“Thank you so much, you’re amazing, my friend.” Charles beamed at Superman, stroking the bright yellow and red ‘S’ logo on his chest. It wasn’t as nice as Erik’s chest, but Charles was far too grateful to his benefactor. “How can I ever repay you?”

Superman now seemed a little wary as he stepped back, away from Charles’ pawing hands. “Uh, it’s
okay, I didn’t really do anything--”

“Charles.” The tone of Raven’s voice made him spin around, and he was confused to see the identical black looks of thunder on her face as well as Erik’s. “Just how wasted are you? Stop pawing Hank, for God’s sake.”

Charles was stunned by the revelation. “Wait, that was Hank? My goodness.” Now his head was throbbing with the effort to comprehend all this, or maybe it was the bloody alcohol, he couldn’t be sure. “Hank, you look amazing.”

“Uh, thanks,” Hank said a little uncomfortably as Raven rolled her eyes and walked off, and he trailed after her like a lost, confused puppy dog. Charles spun around to look for his real saviour - Erik - and pouted when he saw Erik still didn’t look happy. He locked his arms around Erik’s waist, nuzzling his cheek.

“Did I do something wrong?” Charles pressed a kiss to the corner of Erik’s mouth, watching it struggling not to twitch up into a smile.

“If you’re going to get like this every time you get drunk, maybe you should lay off the sauce a bit,” Erik said with a low sigh of resignation.

“No one but you, Erik,” Charles assured him. Although his head was swimming, he meant every single word. “You’re the lof-love of my life. Everyone else is just....eh.”

Erik was finally smiling again. “Come on, let’s get you some water.”

* * * * *

Later, Erik would not be able to remember how that little corner of the club ended up in another drinking game. He’d been deep in conversation with Tom Hardy when it started. By the time he caught on to what all the cheering was about, it seemed as if half the club was either watching or participating in the game. Charles and Hemsworth seemed to be the nucleus, the main event, while the others went along and stopped whenever they wanted to; the rules, from what Erik could make out, were to do with the song lyrics being blasted over the club, and also arbitrary and subject to change at a moment’s notice, as were the drinks. Everybody seemed to be having fun, though. Erik even spotted Benedict Cumberbatch dressed as Sherlock Holmes cheering as he watched the proceedings from the side, and he made a mental note to tell Charles that his old friend had been able to make it after all, despite the last-minute invitation. Still, Erik hoped Charles was sober enough to recognise Benedict in the first place.

The drinking game was still in full swing, and at least there was no nudity or inappropriate snogging, so Erik just cheered along with everyone else as Charles downed a brightly-colored shot seconds ahead of Hemsworth and Hiddleston.

He did sidle closer, as a precaution; Erik was no biologist, nor completely sober himself, but he had enough common sense to be able to compare body mass and prepare for Charles’ eventual defeat.

The next minute, it occurred to him that the only person who would suffer tonight from a completely inebriated Charles was him. Erik had plans, damn it, and needed Charles to be conscious.

He grabbed the shot Charles was currently holding in his hand and finished it, and then leaned forward, tapped Charles lightly on the nose - which elicited a distinctly cat-like and not at all adorable blink - and announced, loudly, “I’m tagging you out.”

This was met with the expected chorus of protests, and Erik managed to discern Hiddleston in the
corner shouting, “What, is he pregnant?”, but there was also a wave of disorganized shouting and shuffling; several others were being tagged out as well, voluntarily or otherwise. Charles was reluctant but easy to placate with a deep kiss and Erik strategically lifting his skirt up as he squeezed past the crowd to where Charles was perched on the bar stool, like his dress was modestly floor-length and not already around his thighs. Somewhere nearby, he heard Robert denying both drunkenness and the need for someone to tag him out. “Sorry, pal, but Iron Man doesn’t have a sidekick.“

The whole thing, not surprisingly, soon broke down into a confused but happily inebriated muddle, and Erik was far more interested in drinking Charles’ mouth than the shots put in front of him. He wasn’t sure if the heady, world-blurring feeling was due to the alcohol finally hitting him or an effect of Charles’ kisses. Possibly a combination of both.

He did wonder if he’d intervened too late when, after a few moments of pleasant necking, Charles’ head began to loll over Erik’s shoulder. “You need water,” he said, tracing Charles’ lower lip with a finger.

“Tom ha’ m’water,” slurred Charles. He waved a hand, presumably to point towards ‘Tom’, and smacked Erik in the face instead. “Tom, Tom - t’one with, with, y’know, lips. Not curly. TOM.”

“Here,” Tom Hardy popped in with a laugh, and handed a bottle of water to Erik.

“What ha’ you all got the same name?” Charles complained. He obligingly opened his mouth so Erik could pour a bit of water in. Erik missed slightly, which suggested that he was quite drunk himself; clear drops of water splashed out, trailing down those nicely puffy lips in a way that caught all of Erik’s attention. “S bloody incon- inconven- ‘s bloody hard.”

Erik sighed, though he was smiling. He should really stop finding drunk Charles adorable and endearing. Charles suddenly sat up and coughed. Erik put the water bottle down, rubbed his back, and said, “Swallow first before you try to speak.”

“S not what y’said this morn’,” Charles leered. Benedict, who’d just settled down on the other side of Charles, laughed openly. Erik felt his face warm.

“Ben! You made it!” Charles exclaimed in delight, leaning over to give his friend a brief hug before releasing him. “Ben, I like you, you have an in’ers’ing name. Rolls off the tongue. Well, not right now, not my tongue because, y’know, drunk, can’t feel it.” Charles frowned, eyes crossing - dear God, he was trying to frown at his tongue while it was in his mouth. “But you’re not a Chris or a Tom. We ha’ a surplus of both. So I like you. And Erik. ‘S is why you and Erik are my favourites!”

Charles waved his arms about, a gesture meant to encompass Erik and Benedict that then morphed to an attempt to clap a hand on their shoulders. He missed on the latter, not surprisingly, and toppled off the bar stool.

Erik met Benedict’s eyes as they both reflexively grabbed onto Charles before he could hit the floor. The other man was obviously on the verge of laughing outright.

“If it helps,” said Ben, his deep voice melding nicely with the alcohol in Erik’s system to create a pleasant, warming effect, “he was much worse at uni. Especially when we celebrated landing a role. You should ask him about that time we woke up in a golf course, in the middle of the green.”

“Maligned!” exclaimed Charles, staggering to his feet. “I’m being maligned!”

“Water,” Erik said determinedly, and snagged the bottle from the bar. He helped Charles onto a bar
stool and got more water into him and was just about finished with the bottle when somebody bumped into him from behind.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” whoever it was said cheerfully. Strong, warm hands helped Erik regain his balance before their owner slid his way in to face them.

Erik smiled in recognition. “Adam, I’m glad you made it. Charles, we met at an Anti-Defamation League event a couple of years ago.”

“Adam Lambert, such a p-pleasure to meet you,” Charles smiled warmly as he shook his hand, the singer dressed as a Victorian vampire in a top hat, face powdered white.

Adam smiled charmingly in return. “Fantastic party, guys. Heidi and Seal have nothing on you. And Erik, I love your dress.”

“Thank you. How are you? And how is the new album coming along?” Erik asked as he steadied himself against the bar beside Charles, the counter cool against his exposed back, flipping the red hair off his face with a toss of his head.

“It’s been amazing and so much fun. I’m about to fly off to Northern Ireland to perform at the European Music Awards with Queen, actually,” Adam replied, showing off his fangs with a toothy grin.

“We’ll be sure to catch it on cable,” Charles declared, resting a hand on Adam to stop his topple while Erik grabbed onto his waist even though he could barely feel his legs himself, before abruptly breaking into giggles, “I’ve always wondered what it’s like, to be kissed by Adam Lambert.”

Erik pulled Charles back, shifting him safely against the bar top. “I’m sorry, Charles has no boundaries once he’s in this state.”

It was Adam’s turn to burst out laughing, leaning against Erik as he did so, and it was now clear to Erik that he would be hard-pressed to figure out which of them was the least drunk. “Charles is really cute, I’d be happy to oblige,” Adam slurred as he tapped Charles’ chin up, earning a rather aghast look from Erik. “Oh don’t worry about it, people always walk up to me and ask me to kiss them, I tongue-dive from stage all the time.”

Charles sobered up immediately and bolted upright, shaking his head as if to clear it, “Mmmh, no, wait. That won’t be necessary, although I’m sure it will be magical. I don’t--”

Adam cut him off by leaning in towards Charles before Erik’s alcohol-addled mind could even process what was going on, only to veer off course at the last moment to plant a quick peck on his cheek. He pulled away, laughing as he planted a matching one on Erik’s cheek as well, draping an arm around both their shoulders when he was done.

“You should have seen your faces!” Adam didn’t stop giggling as he tucked them both close to his side, warm and snug against his chest, and Erik couldn’t help but laugh along, caught up in the giddy combination of that spike of adrenaline and what must by then have been an entire bar’s worth of alcohol in his system.

Adam was still grinning when he drew away from them, Charles taking the opportunity to wrap his arms around Erik’s neck and kiss him thoroughly when Adam grabbed a drink from the bar, and Erik was vaguely aware of Adam calling out to them before making his way back into the crowd, voice drowned out by the music and the drum of CharlesCharlesCharles in his head, “You two crazy kids have fun.”
After so many rounds of socialising and drinking, Erik was glad to stumble into a nearby booth just
to take a breather. All night long, people had been pawing at him, touching him and twirling strands
of his wig around their fingers. He was tired of being a point of curiosity, although not drunk enough
yet to go along with it. He squinted at his phone to check the time; there was just enough time to sit
down and catch his breath before his ‘surprise’ for Charles would turn up on stage.

Casting a glance at the exit, Emma’s blindingly white costume caught his eye, and he smirked when
he noticed she was locking arms with Jon Hamm as they headed towards the door. Shaw wouldn’t
be happy about that, but then again, Emma had never really given Shaw the time of day even before
Hamm had even come into the picture.

His thoughts were interrupted when someone tumbled into the booth beside him, and Erik’s body
recognised Charles before his mind did, registering his scent and his laugh and filing it under the
mental folder ‘Important’. “There you are!” Charles said with a laugh, the joy in his voice clear and
unrestrained, his arms clumsy around Erik’s neck. “Been looking for you, daaaarling.”

“You’ll be the death of me,” Erik slurred, and even then he couldn’t resist leaning in to claim that
sweet, soft mouth in an earnest, sloppy kiss. “Enjoyed yourself tonight?” he asked after pulling
away, stroking back Charles’ mussed hair.

“The best,” Charles said with the widest grin. “Erik, you’re the besht- the best boyfriend ever.”

Erik didn’t even know why he found this funny, but he did. “Takes one to, uh, know one. Is that the
phrase?”

“Think so.” Charles was now blinking hopefully at him. “Do-does it mean sex?”

“Not everything means sex,” Erik reminded him, although he was trying his best to remember if it
did. Before he could answer, the lights in the club were being dimmed, along with the sudden loss of
music. As people started chattering in confusion, Erik craned his neck to look around. From where
he was sitting, he could see that the stage was suddenly flooded with lights. Finally, he thought,
pressing a kiss to Charles’ temple, but his aim was hazy so it landed on Charles’ hair instead. “I’ve
got a surprise for you.”

“Awwww, Erik.” Charles was beaming at him, cheeks flushed and eyes dancing. “For me? You
didn’t haf- um, have to.”

“Trust me, you’ll want to see this.” Erik draped his arm around Charles, arranging him slightly so
that he faced the stage. Now there was a little frown of confusion between his eyebrows as a very
familiar tune started booming from the speakers, eliciting cheers and rabid applause from the crowd.

“Erik, why--” Charles trailed off as he stared at the stage in utter shock, his jaw dropping. On the
stage, a diminutive figure wearing oversized sunglasses with a puffy mountain of teased blonde hair
was stalking her way to the front, crooning into the mic, “Ooohhh, oh oh oh ohh....”

“ERIK!” Charles was practically mauling him, his hands clumsily grabbing Erik while his eyes
remained fixed on the stage, wild and surprised. His mouth was opening and closing like a goldfish
as he struggled to find the words. "Erik, it’s Gaga! You....oh my word, you got Godga!"

“Charles!” Before Erik could even think, Charles was already up and stumbling to the stage, arms
pinwheeling around and around like a windmill, almost hitting a passing Chris Evans in the face. Erik
stumbled to his feet and gave chase immediately after his wayward boyfriend, who was now
flailing right in front of the stage much to the amusement of everyone else. Lady Gaga was smiling down at him as he sang along raucously with her to the first few lines of ‘Bad Romance’, and Erik refused to admit how endearing it was that even when drunk, Charles knew every single line by heart, even the pauses in between the words.

“Erik! Sing with me!” Charles commanded loudly before wrapping Erik’s arms around himself like a mink stole, loud and out of tune. Laughing, Erik couldn’t help but give in, singing along, “Love, love, love, I want your love...”

They were enthusiastically joined by the audience during the chorus, everyone pumping their fists in the air to the beat. Charles was entirely in bliss, adoring gaze fixed on Lady Gaga as he stood cocooned in Erik’s arms. Erik rested his chin on Charles’ shoulder, just enjoying the feel of Charles in his arms like this, leaning heavily against him more than usual because of the alcohol.

When the song’s bridge came on and Lady Gaga started singing, “Walk, walk fashion baby”, Erik was nonplussed to find that people were surging forward and pushing him and Charles towards the stage, and Gaga was crooking her finger at them, smiling lasciviously. “What do you guys think if these two joined me on stage?” she asked the audience, who absolutely howled in approval, pushing Erik and Charles to the front even more.

Charles didn’t even need to be asked twice, yanking Erik forward as the two of them climbed the few steps required, and the applause and cheering now was deafening, almost drowning out the backing track. Gaga herself was applauding with her microphone, blowing kisses at them and urging them forward. “Come here!”

Now the three of them were standing together, and Erik was smiling as his favourite part - the bit with the French lyrics - was coming up, and Gaga pointed the microphone at him, arching an elegant eyebrow. “Sing it, sister,” she demanded, and Erik shrugged. Who was he to refuse? He sang into the mic, hoping his pronunciation was accurate enough:

“J’ai ton amour et je veux ton revenge
J’ai ton amour, I don’t wanna be friends...”

The screams and catcalls he received were a good enough indication that he had nailed it, despite his rather tipsy state. Not to be outdone, it was now Charles’ turn to hog the mic, drunkenly singing, “I don’t wanna be friendssss...” and the three of them shouted together: “Want your bad romance!”

Now stumbling off stage, Erik was still laughing while Charles was buried in his arms, shaking with mirth. Erik couldn’t believe they had just shared the stage with Gaga, and for once, he was dressed more outrageously than she was. They stood by the side and watched the rest of her performance in awe, Charles slumped against Erik. She was such a pro, and Erik was so glad that she had agreed to this special performance.

The last chords of the music faded away, though the raucous applause that surged up in its wake meant that the noise levels didn’t decrease in any discernible amount for several minutes after. Lady Gaga took a long bow, blowing kisses to her adoring audience, then - to Erik’s surprise - beckoned him and Charles back over to the side of the stage.

They went, of course - it was Lady Gaga - and she somehow managed to half-crouch, half-lean over to drape her arms over their shoulders, one each. She looked up, and the crowd fell quiet.

“To Erik and Charles,” she announced in her throaty, slightly hoarse voice, “I give my heartfelt blessings. Now go suck face, and make your Mama proud.”
“HAIL GODGA!” someone shouted from the upper floor. The whole club erupted again, cheers and hoots and colourful hollering. Lady Gaga pressed a sticky kiss to Erik’s forehead, then Charles, and stood up, causing a small explosion of glitter over both their heads.

“I think we just got hitched,” said Charles, in an atrocious Southern accent. Erik had no choice but to swoop in and cover Charles’ mouth with his, kissing him deep and dirty, in case he had a mind to try out any more badly-suited accents; besides, Erik was only doing as Lady Gaga commanded.

* * * * *

The party wound down gradually. The level of attention Erik paid to his surroundings tended to be inversely proportional to the level of attention Charles was dedicating to him. Now that Charles seemed to have forgotten about everything that wasn’t Erik, and seemed to be taking his new matrimonial duties very seriously, the two of them could have been teleported somewhere with bombs flying towards them and Erik wouldn’t have noticed.

He had no idea how long they were making out for. They’d started out right next to the stage, but the crowd, now mostly intoxicated and happy to dance their way back to sobriety, good-naturedly shuffled and bumped them towards the darker corners, which Erik was totally fine with.

Eventually, a warm and somewhat heavy body came to rest against Erik’s back. It still took far too long for Erik to realise, I should probably do something about this, and even longer to extricate his mouth from Charles’ and peer over his shoulder.

It was Evans. They were in a corner of the main club floor, where there was a wall partitioning that area and the outer area where the bar was. Evans appeared to have fallen asleep tucked into the corner, but then slipped sideways and was now resting his head on Erik’s back.

Charles peered over Erik’s side and giggled. “Got Cap?” he asked with a wide grin.

“You’re ridiculous,” Erik said fondly. He looked around, and spotted Hiddleston coming through the door from the outer area. “Tom!”

While Hiddleston was helping Erik with Evans - for someone who looked leaner than Erik, the man was surprisingly strong - Charles looked around the club with a very satisfied expression. “I believe we can call this party a success. A raging success, even.” He wagged an eyebrow at Erik.

Erik laughed, sending Tom a somewhat helpless see what I have to put up with look, to which Tom responded with a knowing smile.

There weren’t many people on the floor, he noticed, and Evans was far from the only one relying on the ambulatory services of their friends.

There was a brief snicker of static over the sound system, then Samuel L. Jackson’s voice came through, loud and clear.

“All right, everybody. Go the fuck to sleep.”

* * * * *

The door of the limousine had barely closed when Charles practically launched himself at Erik, appearing to have mostly recovered from his previously inebriated state. It was the hardest thing in the world, when he was still fairly drunk-dizzy and had a lap full of eager, aroused Charles, to free his mouth and tell the very professional driver to head for Charles’ house, and then close the partition. Charles punished him for the brief break into responsibility by sucking hard on his
collarbone until Erik went back to kissing him.

“You don’t know how much this has been teasing me all night,” Charles said, breathless, right into Erik’s mouth. His fingers trailed lightly up and down the length of Erik’s thighs, playing with the slinky hem of the skirt.

Erik had mostly forgotten about the dress while they were inside. Now he couldn’t help but be aware of it again: the feel of the material sliding over his skin, the rub of the leather seats against his bare back, how the whole thing clung to him in strange but exciting ways.

Charles seemed particularly fixated on his legs. He gave Erik an impish grin and bent down. Erik watched as Charles kissed one of his knees, and then a pink tongue slipped out and licked down the side towards the sensitive crease of the back of the knee. Erik’s legs parted of their own accord. The air in the limo felt too hot.

Charles continued to lick, and plant open-mouthed kisses; that damnable tongue slipping under the fishnet threads, leaving them wet, and sometimes Charles would graze his teeth over the stockings, as he slowly nosed up between Erik’s legs. One hand slid up Erik’s inner thigh, and Erik gasped, his body conflicted between thrusting up from the hips and, strangely, closing his legs.

“It’s the skirt, he decided. There was something erotic about the way it wrapped around his hips, partially constricting the movement of his legs, and yet allowed for easy access between them.

“So hot for me, Erik,” moaned Charles, who was crawling up Erik’s body again. His hand continued its climb up under the skirt, deliberately slow; when he reached Erik’s erection and gripped him tight, Erik found it hard to breathe for a moment. “Do you know how,” Charles panted, licking sloppily at Erik’s lips, “how badly I wanted to hitch this up and- and have you, in front of everyone?”

Erik tried to capture Charles’ tongue, but ended up mouthing along his jaw instead. “Yes. Right there on the stage,” he groaned. “Can you imagine the pictures?” Images flooded Erik’s mind: Charles laying him down on the glitter-strewn stage, his stocking-covered legs locked tight around Charles’ waist. Erik shuddered from wanting it; he didn’t know whether to regret or be relieved by their lives not allowing so public a claiming.

“Even death by Raven would have been worth it,” muttered Charles.

Erik’s body decided that it should probably be more active in the proceedings, and he surged up, hands tugging impatiently at Charles’ belt and trousers. He was, possibly, not as coordinated as he’d like to believe, because an attempt to pull Charles’ shirt up somehow ended with Erik’s hand down the back of Charles’ trousers. This was not, of course, an unwanted turn of events, and Erik eagerly seized the prize of the moment with, as it were, both hands.

A pleased noise rumbled out of Charles’ throat. Erik shifted on the seat so that Charles was mostly draped on top of him. Another thorough kiss, luxuriating in the familiar heat of Charles’ mouth even as his hands squeezed Charles’ gorgeous rear. The fingers of one hand dipped down, searching, and then Erik was letting out a shocked gasp, because the skin around Charles’ hole was unmistakably slick.

The gasp quickly turned into a desperate growl. Erik nipped at Charles’ puffy lower lip. “That is very presumptuous of you.”

Charles looked thoroughly unapologetic, and wiggled his ass in a very pointed and distracting way. “I’d like to think of it as ‘efficient’.” The car hit a small bump. Charles balanced himself with a hand on Erik’s shoulder, then stroked said hand down Erik’s chest. His eyes were blown dark. “Or are
you just sorry that you missed watching me prepare myself?”

Erik swallowed heavily. He moved one hand to grip Charles by the hip, steadying him, while he continued to explore the extent of Charles’ preparations with the other. With so much of Charles pressed against him, he could feel Charles’ breathing go shivery when Erik’s finger slid inside, smooth and easy, all the way to the knuckle. Yes, Charles whispered, yes, more, please.

The second drew an audible moan from Charles. “Fuck, Erik, I love your hands.” He pressed another kiss on Erik’s lips, and pushed down with his hips, trying to deepen the reach of Erik’s fingers despite the awkward angle and the trousers still caught around his thighs. “Thought about them when I was fingering myself. Wished it was you slicking me up.”

“Oh God, Charles,” groaned Erik. He used his free hand to pull at the inconvenient trousers. “Need to take this off.”


The car suddenly jolted, and jumped, like it had hit a crater rather than a pothole. Charles lost his balance, fell sideways, and tangled up as they were, Erik followed him. There was a confusion of limbs, stuck clothing; luckily the limo had ample floor space, though Erik’s head still bumped against the door. He ended up lying on the bottom again, but at least Charles had gotten his trousers and boxer briefs most of the way off now. Erik yanked hard and threw them somewhere that was away, and settled Charles’ lovely, pale, and slightly hairy legs down on either side of him.

“This is much better,” murmured Charles approvingly. The car continued to bounce and jolt alarmingly. “I should be concerned that we’re being driven through the worst maintained streets in Los Angeles or, possibly, the backwoods of nowhere, but oh, what do we have here?” Erik gasped when he felt Charles stroking his erection through the fabric of the dress.

“Charles,” whined Erik.

“Hush, love.” Charles captured his lips in a very thorough, very distracting kiss, before scooting down a little. “Let me get you out of this.”

Erik felt Charles hitching up the skirt of the dress, tellingly slow. His eyes were hungry and appreciative, raking over what he could see of Erik’s body under the light of passing streetlamps and closed storefronts, occasionally stroking the inside of Erik’s thighs. Erik felt distinctly like a gift being unwrapped; arousal and anticipation coiled hot under his skin. He shivered when his erection, which at this point felt barely contained by his tiny boxer briefs, was exposed to the cool air and Charles’ intent gaze. A strangled sound escaped Charles’ throat; and then Charles was mouthing at the sizable bulge, tracing the shape of Erik’s cock with his tongue and closing his lips, as if in a wide kiss, over the head, licking at the already damp fabric. The sudden contact made Erik’s hips buck up violently before he could control himself. “Charles, Charles, please,” begged Erik.

Apparently Charles was not all that patient, either. He pulled hard at Erik’s underwear, hooked his fingers into the fishnet stockings; Erik felt the garter belt around his waist go taut. Charles let out a frustrated noise, and yanked, careless. Erik heard something tear, but the almost painful constriction of his underwear disappeared, and ohsweetmerciful finally, Charles’ talented, glorious mouth was on his cock.
“Nmmrgh, not yet,” said Charles, pulling off after only a few painful moments; his voice already sounded ragged, desperate. “Want, want you, in me.”

Erik felt too far gone for words, but he helped Charles roll the condom onto his cock, and had to bite down on his hand when Charles made the first, tight slide down, taking Erik’s cock into his body. Erik could tell he was going slow, giving himself time to adjust to the stretch.

Then the car hit another big bump, and Charles, losing his balance, sank down the rest of the way, impaling himself fully on Erik’s cock. Being suddenly gripped by the too-tight heat nearly finished Erik right then. The high, shocked sound that came from Charles made his dick twitch, which perhaps made him a bad, bad man; except he couldn’t care less because fuck fuck fuck, Charles was beautifully flushed and shining on top of him, mouth open and head tipped back, arching into the penetration.

Once Erik was able to draw a full breath, he asked, “Charles, are you all right?”


“If you’re hurt—”

“No, honest.” Charles did feel relaxed again, and was smiling at him. “It’s, it’s good, I love having you inside me.”

Erik shuddered, forced himself to take a deep breath. They hadn’t started moving yet, but the bumpy car ride was already bouncing Charles a little; each up-down shift and rub sent sparks of pleasure through Erik’s body, but they were far from enough.

Charles bent over and claimed his mouth; Erik responded eagerly. He was glad to be thus occupied when Charles lifted himself up and slid smoothly back down, because Erik would have shouted at the top of his lungs, the driver’s plausible deniability be damned. His hands groped all over Charles’ legs and hips, unsure where to settle. Charles wobbled due to a series of hard bumps of the car, so Erik kept a hand on his hip to balance him, while the other curled around Charles’ cock. God, there was already a ridiculous amount of precome on the head; Erik eagerly covered his fingers with it, and spread it all over the steel-hard shaft.

Another motion up, Charles letting Erik’s cock slide out of him until only the head was left, then he sank back down, sharp. Erik moaned, lost in a haze of alcohol and lust and pleasure, and maybe also something hot and tight that sat in his chest and twisted whenever he locked gazes with Charles. It had the shape of a secret, except Charles knew it too without having to ask, telling it back to Erik in the soft lines of his mouth and the way his hands stroked Erik’s face and chest, reverent.

Erik could only tighten his hold, hard enough that come morning there might be a bruise in the shape of his hand on Charles’ hip; he squeezed and stroked, until Charles’ breath broke into uneven pants. All throughout, Charles rode him, hips rolling and thighs shaking. The sudden bumps of the car added an unpredictable element to his movements, but instead of being put off, Charles only chuckled.

It was a bit of a mess, uncoordinated, and so, so good. When Charles’ rhythm stuttered, Erik found leverage with his feet and began thrusting up, meeting Charles’ downward movement and driving his cock harder into Charles. A stream of swear words left Charles’ mouth, garbled and mixed with “Erik” and “yes” and “fuck me”. There was a warning clench around Erik’s cock, and then Charles was coming, body arching, hot come hitting Erik’s stomach.

Charles whimpered a little when Erik kept pounding into him. It took only another handful of thrusts
before orgasm roared through Erik’s body. He clumsily yanked Charles down for a kiss and fed high, keening noises straight into Charles’ mouth.

He wasn’t sure how long they lay there, just breathing. A distant part of his mind pointed out that, no matter the quality of the vehicles, the floor of a limo was probably not sanitary enough to be lying down on. Still, it took him several long minutes before he could even look down and reluctantly survey the damage.

The dress was very likely a lost cause. One of the shoulder straps was snapped - he vaguely remembered Charles tugging on it, at some point - and the bottom of the dress had been rucked up to the middle of his stomach, revealing the garter belt, which meant that some of Charles’ come had gotten on it. Erik tried to convince his libido that this was not arousing in the least, and mostly failed. The glimpse of the garter belt led him to carefully shift his legs, and what he felt suggested strongly that the fishnet stockings had been torn.

In short, “I think we embraced the spirit of our costumes very thoroughly.”

Charles muffled a laugh into his neck. “Yes, fully dedicated to our roles, that’s us.”

Maybe it was the sex and the alcohol and the sex and Charles and, also, so much sex, but the rest of the night passed in a soft blur for Erik. There were gentle hands guiding him back to the seat, and the bone- jerking limo ride ending at one point, and he stumbled after Charles’ voice in the dark, those hands guiding him again. There was a door, and another door, and eventually, soft sheets that wrapped him in warmth. He clung on long enough to feel Charles’ fingers undressing him and brushing back his hair, and then he let sleep pull him under.

* * * * *

The line at the Santa Monica Starbucks was insanely long, snaking out the door. Emma wasn’t surprised to see other hungover Halloween revellers like herself in line, bleary and desperately in need of caffeine the morning after. Beside her, Jon was texting on his Blackberry, and already she felt bored and abandoned. Sure, he was great in bed, but other than that he wasn’t much of a delight to be with. It wasn’t a good sign that she was already trying to think of the best way to get rid of him once they had gotten their coffee.

Once it was their turn to order, Emma had to wait yet again while the cashier fawned over Jon and asked for his autograph, fighting not to roll her eyes as they flirted and laughed while he signed a napkin for the cashier. Then another excruciating fifteen minute wait until Emma finally had a hot cup of life-giving coffee in her hands, and she inhaled the lovely aroma, pleased.

“Let’s get some sugar,” Jon said as he tugged her towards the condiment station, where a group of teenagers were laughing raucously as they watched something on their phones. She ignored them as she tore two packets of Splenda and stirred them into her coffee, wondering what excuse she could make to leave soon.

However, Jon was now pawing at her. “Em, you’ll want to take a look at this,” he said, his eyes wide with shock as he watched the video over the shoulders of the teenagers, blindly gesturing for her to come over and take a look.

Picking up her coffee, she walked over to where Jon was standing. The teens seemed to be watching some Lady Gaga performance on YouTube, and Emma squinted at the screen when she saw that Gaga was sandwiched between two familiar people. One was Charles, yelling drunkenly into the microphone, and there was a strange-looking woman on Lady Gaga’s left, singing along as well.
Wait, that was no woman. That was--

“ERIK!” Emma’s shriek stunned the Starbucks into silence, and it was only when she heard Jon’s howl of pain that she realised she had spilled her coffee all over Jon’s lap and crotch, causing the teenagers to laugh even more. She hurriedly snatched a few napkins and wiped at his lap carelessly, muttering ‘sorry’ even though Jon was still bent over in agony. As the manager came over to help them, Emma ignored Jon and pulled her Blackberry out of her bag, pressing the speed-dial button for Erik’s number.

Erik Lehnsherr was going to be single-handedly responsible for sending her to an early grave.

* * * * *

Lady Gaga singing with Charles Xavier and Erik Lehnsherr - Halloween ‘1

Uploaded by CoinCollector on Nov 1, 2011
Lady Gaga performs "Bad Romance" at Charles Xavier and Erik Lehnsherr’s Halloween bash.
Notes:

Guest List:
'The Avengers' cast: Robert Downey Jr. (Iron Man), Chris Evans (Captain America), Chris Hemsworth (Thor), Tom Hiddleston (Loki), Samuel L. Jackson (Nick Fury).
'The Dark Knight Rises' cast: Christian Bale (Batman), Joseph Gordon-Levitt (John Blake, a beat cop in Gotham), Tom Hardy (Bane), Benedict Cumberbatch (Sherlock Holmes)
Jon Hamm
Adam Lambert
Lady Gaga

1. The title of this chapter is a quote from 'The Nightmare Before Christmas'.
2. 'Rage' is a gay club in West Hollywood known for occasionally staging drag shows.
3. Erik made wolf bite shots for Charles and the Avengers.
4. The codename for 'The Avengers' during production was 'Group Hug'.
5. Sean wore John Lennon sunglasses in 'First Class'.
6. 'There's gonna be more celebrities here than rehab.' is a line from 'New Year's Eve'.
7. January Jones currently plays the ex-wife of Jon Hamm's character on 'Mad Men'.
8. Tom Hiddleston said, "Dear God, I have Mjolnir in my pants." in this interview.
9. Thor drank boilermakers with Erik Selvig in 'Thor'.

Disclaimer: Fake Youtube page. This is not real. Youtube is owned by Youtube, Gaga owned by herself, Charles and Erik owned by Marvel.
10. Rose Byrne played Briseis, the cousin of Trojan princes Hector and Paris in 'Troy'.
11. The song that Sean 'sings' to Moira is 'Something' by The Beatles.
12. Joseph Gordon-Levitt said, "Maybe the most fun I've had in my life, physically... with my clothes on." in this interview.
13. Joseph Gordon-Levitt in his French maid costume at a concert he staged during Halloween this year.
15. Adam Lambert's costume.
16. The Anti-Defamation League is an organisation against anti-Semitism.
17. Clocks also wrote 'Bad Romance' under a different pen name, about €rik as a popstar.
18. Samuel L. Jackson reading the bedtime story, 'Go the Fuck to Sleep'.
19. Viral videos are what happen when you pick Hamm over Bacon.
We’ll Always Have Paris

Chapter Summary

They begin filming on location in the City of Light, Charles creates a monster, and a new member joins their entourage.

Chapter Notes

It’s time to bid Los Angeles goodbye and begin Charles and Erik’s CIA Shaw-sponsored globetrotting! The tweets in this chapter should be read from the bottom up and, since it’s been a while, just a reminder that all sections in italics are scenes from the movie.

This story is being translated to Chinese by the wonderful Yaegakisawa. The translations can be found on her Tumblr and links to the individual chapters are in the notes at the beginning of this work. A huge ‘thank you’ to the amazingly talented kannibal for these beautiful drawings of Sean:

Sean telling Shaw his ideas for the changes to the script.
Sean Lennon with his guitar.
Sean Lennon in psychedelic digs.
Moira and Sean talking about fish.

And thank you so much to mikanskey for this lovely fanart for the scene on the Seine towards the end of this chapter! Here's the AO3 link! <3

Soundtrack: Friendly Fires - ‘Paris’

Erik had learned many valuable things over Halloween, the most important one being that his alcohol tolerance was definitely getting worse with age. It was tempting to blame it all on Charles, of course, but Erik knew that it was also his own fault for not being able to say ‘no’ to any of Charles’ zany schemes, be they regarding Halloween parties, drinking contests or limo sex. However, what benefited Charles also benefited him, and Erik conceded that a killer hangover was a small price to pay for making the love of his life happy.

He sat up in bed, wincing a little. Beside him Charles barely stirred, still sleeping off the previous night’s excesses. Erik ran his fingers through the dark waves of Charles’ hair, brushing a few errant strands back from his forehead. God, he loved this man. Erik was about to bend down and press a kiss to Charles’ pale cheek when his phone started vibrating on the dresser. Irritated, Erik cursed himself for forgetting to turn it off before they collapsed in bed last night. Glancing at the caller-ID and realising it was not worth risking Emma’s wrath, he decided to pick up the call. “What?” he hissed a little curtly.

“You really are the stupidest putz this side of LA!” she shrieked at him. “I know you’re never going to listen to me and keep doing what you want, but do you always have to announce it to the whole
“What are you talking about?” Erik said with a yawn, still idly stroking Charles’ hair.

“The video, idiot.” The exasperation was plain in her voice, but unfortunately for her, Erik still didn’t know what she was talking about. “Haven’t you seen the chaos on YouTube? You and Charles and Lady Gaga?”

Erik was suddenly a lot more awake. “Someone put that on YouTube already?”

“What do you think?” The scorn in Emma’s voice almost corroded his earpiece. “I’m in a Starbucks now, and I almost castrated Jon Hamm when we saw some teenagers watching the video on their phones.”

“Wait wait wait, how did you ‘almost’ castrate Jon?” Erik was now more curious than anything else, and at least it would explain the howling and laughter he could hear in the background.

“Um.” Emma sounded uncharacteristically remorseful. “I may or may not have accidentally spilled hot coffee all over his crotch.”

The snort of laughter escaped before Erik could clap a hand over his mouth, but Charles was already stirring, a faint frown creasing his brow. “Now look what you’ve done,” Erik chided Emma, running a soothing hand over Charles’ forehead. “You almost woke Charles.”

“Um, what?” Emma’s tone was full of icy disbelief. “I think there are more important things to worry about right now, Erik.”

“I disagree,” Erik said, just as icy. “We should wait until Charles is up, then I’ll discuss this with him and call you back.”

Any other agent (with the possible exception of Raven) would have just given up at this point, but it was only because Emma had worked for him for so long that she actually spoke up, her tone much more calm and serious now. “Erik, I think you need to think long and hard about your priorities.”

Erik leaned back against the headboard with a sigh, feeling Charles nuzzle into his touch. “I did, Emma. And I know you’re just looking out for me. But right now, freaking out about some YouTube video isn’t going to change the fact that it’s already on YouTube. So if you don’t mind, I’d like Charles to get his rest before we start freaking out, proper.”

“Oh, for fuck’s sake--” Emma’s very unladylike cursing was cutoff as she hung up on him, but Erik really couldn’t care less. Tossing his phone aside, he slid back under the sheets and cocooned Charles in his arms with a contented sigh, but it was too late as Charles’ breathing picked up, and his eyes fluttered open.

“Hey.” He smiled as he blinked blearily at Erik. “What time is it?”

Erik ran his thumb along the jut of Charles’ collarbone, huddling closer to him. “We have enough time to pack and run to LAX, I think. But you can get a few more minutes’ sleep if you want.”

Charles scrunched up his nose. “Ugh, I hate LAX. I prefer to fly out of SFO.”

“Me too.” Travelling for work had its downsides as well, and Erik wasn’t surprised that Charles had pretty much the same preferences. He pressed a kiss to Charles’ ear, the dark curls tickling his nose. “Too bad we can’t live - and work - in San Francisco all the time.”
“Oh, Erik.” Charles now smiled at him, looking a little more awake. “I don’t really care where we live, as long as you’re there with me.”

“All your movies have turned you into such a sap,” Erik pretended to grumble, but it was hard to keep up the act when Charles was slowly sliding his hands down Erik’s spine, his mouth twisted in a naughty smile. “I can’t believe I’m saying this but no, Charles, we really have to leave for the airport soon.”

“Bloody hell.” Charles sighed, before reluctantly releasing Erik and swinging his legs out of bed. He winced as he stood up, balancing against the bedpost. “Ow, my head, why did you let me drink so much last night? You were under strict orders.”

Erik’s eyes grew wide. “Me? I tried to tag you out a couple of times, but you are a very wiley one, Mr. Xavier.”

Charles rubbed at his temples, cracking an eye open at him. “Did I throw myself at anyone last night?”

“Apart from me?” Erik arched a cool eyebrow at him. “You had your hands all over Hank’s chest at one point. And then you asked Adam Lambert to kiss you, and backed out when he actually offered to.”

Charles was staring at him with growing dismay. “You’re messing with me.”

“No, I’m afraid not. Thank goodness Adam was a really good sport and ended up kissing our cheeks.” Erik saw Charles’ mouth open to ask something, and he quickly added, “No Charles, he kissed the ones on our faces, don’t worry.”

“Oh.” Charles looked relieved, about to head for the bathroom when he turned around, grinning as he caught Erik in the midst of giving him an appreciative leer. “Is it me, or did I dream that we went onstage with, um, Lady Gaga?”

Erik heaved a long-suffering sigh. “It’s already on YouTube.”

Charles’ eyes almost popped out of their sockets. “We’re watching it on the plane,” he demanded, before checking the time and ducking into the bathroom.

Erik smiled to himself, before forcing himself out of bed to collect his ruined dress. Yes, it was indeed quite a night.

* * * *

Most of the crew and cast were already at the Tom Bradley terminal, either checking in or texting on their phones, and Charles saw quite a few people saying goodbye to their families and loved ones. For a moment he was glad that he wasn’t going to have to be separated from Erik, but the relief didn’t last long. After all, at some point after they finished shooting ‘First Class’, they would have to go on to separate projects for a while. It was hard to fight the glum feeling settling over him, which wasn’t helping his killer hangover.

“Got your passport?” Erik asked him as one of the PAs started making the rounds to collect everyone’s, and Charles handed his over readily. He looked up when he saw Raven and Hank standing together by the check-in counter, snickering over a video playing on Raven’s phone. He didn’t need to be telepathic to know what they were watching, and he buried his face in Erik’s shoulder with a laugh.
“What’s so funny?” Erik asked, before his eyebrows jumped when he saw Raven and Hank cracking up over the video on their phone. “Dammit, news travels fast.”

“Let’s go watch the Gaga video now.” Charles grabbed his hand and tugged Erik over to the counter. They both viewed the video over Raven’s shoulder (Hank was too tall for even Erik to spy over him from behind.) Charles could make out Erik and himself on the small screen, flanking Lady Gaga who was riling up her adoring audience with fist pumps, and he found himself laughing at the video. God, how drunk was he?

At that moment, Hank and Raven turned and acknowledged them with a giggle before turning back to continue watching the video. “Erik, how did you manage to look campier than Gaga?” Hank said in awe, and Raven dissolved into peals of laughter with Charles, while Erik just stared wryly at Hank like Clint Eastwood staring down a quivering informant. Unfortunately, since this look was directed at the back of Hank’s head, the intended recipient did not even notice Erik’s murderous gaze, making Charles and Raven laugh all the more.

“Be nice, Hank, I was the one who did Erik’s make-up.” Charles leaned his cheek on Erik’s shoulder, taking in his cologne. How was it that he always smelled so good? “Besides, Erik had never looked more beautiful.”

“Oh, *barf*,” Raven said in disgust, while Hank laughed. Erik, however, had turned to Charles and was looking at him as though he were the most wondrous thing he had ever seen, those steel blue-green eyes softening as they raked over Charles’ face. He gave Erik a rather secretive smile, leaning up on his toes to kiss him, and he was pleased to find Erik already meeting him halfway.

“Seriously, can you two keep it in your pants for a minute, at least until we check in? Or better yet, the hotel room in Paris?” Surprisingly, Raven didn’t look or sound miffed. Instead her tone was one of wry amusement, and her lips were pursed as though she were fighting a smile as she watched Charles pull away from Erik. Hank was nervously averting his eyes, pushing up his glasses and blushing a little, and Charles was willing to bet that his blush had nothing to do with their kiss, and everything to do with Raven’s close proximity to him.

“Don’t be jealous, Raven,” Charles said airily as he rubbed Erik’s back. “It doesn’t become you.”

“Oh shut up,” Raven huffed, but there was a telltale flicker of her eyes towards Hank, who was still blushing. Charles sincerely hoped these two would soon get a clue, and he couldn’t help wondering if others had thought the same thing about him and Erik before they had finally gotten together.

“You look extraordinarily thoughtful, what’s on your mind?” he heard Erik murmur against his ear, and he gave Erik’s hand a quick squeeze, which was code for ‘I’ll tell you later’. Thankfully Erik seemed to have understood, squeezing back before turning to walk over and collect their boarding passes from the PA who was passing them out, along with their passports.

Just as he was about to join Erik, he felt a hand on his shoulder, and he turned to face a rather apologetic Raven. “Hey, um, you know I was only kidding back there, right?” she asked a little tentatively, surprising him. They were in the habit of teasing each other, and there was seldom a need to apologise or clarify things they had said.

“Of course, Raven, don’t be silly.” Charles wrapped an arm around her shoulder, aware that Erik had turned to look, and thank god Erik was a smart man and knew not to intrude for now. “My dear, if there is anything that is troubling you, you know you can talk to me, right?”

There was a wry twist to Raven’s usually cheerful smile. “I know. It’s just that--” here, Raven’s eyes skittered towards Erik before looking away again, “--you’re busy now, and I get that. I mean, if I
were in a new relationship too, I’d want to spend my time with my new boyfriend as well.”

“Hey,” Charles said a little sternly. “That’s not true. I may be with Erik now, but I’ll always have
time for my friends, especially you.”

Raven must have believed him, for her eyes lit up. “Well, I’m going to hold you to that,” she warned
him, even as he chuckled. “You’d better remember that the next time Erik has you in the sack and I
need to vent about something.”

“I heard my name and something about us in the sack,” Erik’s droll voice said from behind them, and
they all laughed as they started making their way to the boarding gates.

* * * * *

The pilot’s voice was low and soothing on the intercom, announcing that they would be landing in
Paris in about thirty minutes. Erik blinked slowly, not quite awake yet, caught in the state between
consciousness and lucid dreaming. He turned immediately to his right by default, and Charles was
still there, cocooned in the window seat under the pile of airline blankets they were sharing, deeply
absorbed in his book. Under the blanket Erik sought out Charles’ hand, twining their fingers together
and making Charles look up with a sunny smile. “Oh Erik, you’re up. You were out for quite a
while.”

“Someone wore me out last night,” Erik replied with a smirk. “So it was their fault.”

“It takes two hands to clap, Erik.” Charles said dryly as he flipped a page, making Erik grin a little
sheepishly.

“I’d much rather your hands do something else with me.” Erik laughed as Charles rolled his eyes.
Erik slouched down so that he could lean more heavily against Charles, their hands still linked under
the blankets. A stewardess discreetly glided by, nodding with a smile and thankfully leaving them
alone. Erik sighed with contentment, squeezing Charles’ hand. “You know, I’ve never really done this before.”

“Done what?” He could feel Charles putting down his book and start stroking his hair, and Erik couldn’t help wondering how many members of the paparazzi would give their left eyeball to take a shot of them like this.

“Visited Paris with someone I love,” Erik said thoughtfully. “Well, except for the time I came here with Klaus.”

“Who is Klaus?” Charles asked, his voice very steady, but Erik could feel Charles’ grip on his hand tightening.

“My teddy bear when I was five,” Erik said solemnly, bursting into laughter as Charles started thwapping him with his book. “What can I say? I really loved Klaus, you know.”

“For god’s sake, I was imagining some German himbo,” Charles grumbled, cheeks a little flushed. “You are such a troll.”

“Oh no, I prefer British himbos now,” Erik said, and this time his hand was quick enough to block the next attack with Charles’ book, laughing as he did so. Charles rolled his eyes, but Erik didn’t miss the slight curve of his lips in a secretive little smile. “All right, Charles, I’m sorry I....called you British.”

“Idiot.” Charles shot him a glare of mock exasperation, but it quickly melted when Erik lifted his hand and planted a kiss on the back of it, nuzzling his cheek against it.

“You know I love you, right?” Erik brushed his thumb across Charles’ knuckles, still amazed at how easy it was for him to say this to Charles, whose eyes were now transfixed on him, so blue and so clear. “You’re everything to me.”

Charles leaned in, kissing the corner of his mouth. “Now look who is being a giant sap.”

“Stop calling yourself a giant sap, Charles.”

Laughing, Charles tilted his head so that their mouths matched up on the second kiss, soft and slow, growing in intensity as Erik wrapped an arm around Charles’ waist and slid him nearer. The armrest was already up, so he thankfully had unrestricted access to Charles. Erik pulled him closer, surprised at the depth of feeling in this kiss, especially since the stewardess could come by at any second. The thrill of getting caught just turned him on even more, and Charles was doing that really sexy thing with his tongue that was distracting Erik beyond reason, and those little pleased noises he was making in the back of his throat didn’t help either.

“Wait,” Erik whispered against that beautiful red mouth before reaching down to unbuckle Charles’ seatbelt - of course he still had it on - and Charles let out a little whoosh of breath as Erik started unbuckling his belt as well.

“Erik, you--” Charles’ words were cut off with a gasp as Erik slid his hand into Charles’ underwear, palming the warm curve of his erection. “Erik, oh god, we’ll get caught--”
“Shhh.” Erik could hear the soft muted click-clack of the flight attendant’s heels approaching, and he quickly went limp and pretended to be fast asleep on Charles’ shoulder. Thankfully Charles took his cue and scrabbled for his book again, clearing his throat, but his heavy breathing and flushed cheeks were a dead giveaway for anyone paying close attention.

The flight attendant breezed past them again, her attention focused on the call button two rows down that was lit up. That would be Shaw and Bryan then, as the entire first class cabin was filled only with the principal cast and the upper echelons of production. Relieved as she zipped past, Erik cracked open an eye again as Charles put down his book. “Erik, you can get your hand out of my pants now.”

“But why?” Erik said with a frown. “We weren’t caught, and no one can see under the blanket.”

Charles patted his cheek, amused. “Erik, think about it. Think about the stewardess blabbing to her friends, and tomorrow in the newspapers, you’ll see the headlines, ‘LEHNSHERR LE PERVERT’ or something like that.”

Erik hated to admit that Charles did have a point, and he reluctantly withdrew his hand, zipping Charles up again. “When we get to the hotel room, then.” He thought of something which made him smile. “Maybe it’s for the best, you’re so noisy anyway.”

“Me? I’m not the noisy one!” Charles was indignant. “It certainly wasn’t me who was screaming, ‘Charles, Charles!’ in the trailer last week and scaring half the crew that walked past.”

Erik chortled against his shoulder. “Now now, let’s not get into who was screaming what.”

“Pervert.” But Charles was smiling, wrapping his arms tightly around Erik, and they remained huddled under the blanket together until it was time to land.

* * * * *

There was a gorgeous man in a long leather coat waiting at the CDG terminal right outside ‘Arrivals’. His longish light brown hair was swept back, straight teeth gleaming in a rakish grin as he held up a sign with Erik’s name on it, looking as though he had just stepped out of the pages of ‘GQ’. The man was currently ogling two flight attendants who were wheeling their suitcases past him, calling out ‘Bonjour!’ to them and dropping them a wink as they giggled. Charles narrowed his
eyes at the man, who was now returning his attention to the stream of passengers getting off the plane. Erik hadn’t noticed him yet, still texting Emma and grumbling about some ‘surprise’ she had promised him.

“Erik, love, I think that man is looking for you,” Charles said quietly into his ear, and Erik looked up immediately, alert. The security officers who travelled with them were nearby, and Charles was determined to make sure they stayed within shouting distance so he could call for help if the man turned out to be a psycho.

As the man stepped up to the both of them, he didn’t exactly look psychotic, which was a relief. “Monsieur Lehnsherr?” His French accent was thankfully not that thick, which spoke of some time spent abroad. At least Charles could understand him. “I’m Remy LeBeau, Emma Frost sent me.”

“She did?” Erik narrowed his eyes suspiciously at the man, placing a protective hand on Charles’ chest while using the other to dial Emma’s number. Charles was touched that Erik’s first instinct was to protect him, and his hand crept into his pocket for his own mobile, ready to call for help if things turned ugly.

Thankfully, that turned out not to be necessary as Charles heard Emma’s voice on the phone, and Erik’s eyebrows were knitting together in confusion. “I don’t need an assistant,” he told Emma, and now Charles could hear Emma’s voice rising in objection, Erik wincing at her shrill voice blasting from the phone. “Come on, Emma. I wasn’t the one who uploaded the video on YouTube, it’s not my fault!”

Charles laid a soothing hand on Erik’s shoulder, ignoring the curious looks from Remy. “Let me talk to her,” he said gently, and he was surprised when Erik gave him the phone immediately, meek as a lamb. Placing the phone against his ear, Charles said, “Emma, it’s Charles here. Who is this man at the airport?”

“Charles, thank goodness.” Emma sounded relieved. “I hired Remy as Erik’s new PA, but as you can tell, he isn’t wild about the idea. Maybe you can talk some sense into Erik. In fact, I think you’re the only person he actually listens to.”

“Um, all right.” Charles kept a wary eye on Erik who was pacing about in irritation, watched by an increasingly amused Remy. “So, why the new assistant?”

“Just to keep an eye on Erik,” Emma said with a sigh. “I have a feeling the media circus is just going to get worse, and I want to make sure someone is there with Erik to get a handle on things while I sort out the mess you two left behind in L.A.”

“Erik doesn’t seem too happy about this,” Charles said. “And if Erik doesn’t like the chap, there’s nothing even I can do, because I’m not going to force him to do anything he doesn’t like.”

“Well, how about this?” Emma sounded a little desperate. “Just keep Remy on for a trial period of a few weeks, see if they get along together. If not, Erik can send him packing before Christmas, and then we’ll look for a new assistant together.”

“That sounds reasonable. Let me ask him,” Charles said, before putting his hand over the mouthpiece and telling Erik the terms of Emma’s new proposal. Erik gave the grinning Remy one last long withering look before nodding sharply at Charles.

“Okay Emma, Erik will give him a trial run.” Charles shot Erik a smile, which seemed to put him at ease.
“Oh good!” Emma’s tone went from pleased to sly. “I suppose you’ll be rewarding him later for this.”

“Emma!” Charles stared at the phone, stunned as Emma hung up with a cackle. He handed the phone back to Erik, who seemed resigned to his fate as he slid it back into his pocket. Charles got the vague impression that Erik had agreed to all this simply because he was the one who had asked him, and he made up his mind to ‘reward’ Erik, just like Emma had suggested. He rubbed Erik’s back in slow circles, feeling the tension ease from it slightly.

“So I take it that I’m hired, oui?” Remy’s winning smile was just this side of smug.

“Only temporarily,” Erik warned him. “One wrong move and you’re going back to being an underwear model or whatever it is you were doing before you came here.”

Remy only laughed as he followed them to the cars, and Charles suspected it was going to be a very interesting few weeks, to say the least.

* * * * *

“Have you ever been to Paris before, James?” asked Erik.

Charles made a show of looking around, as if he was surprised to find himself in one of the most recognizable cities in the world. “That depends.”

Erik looked torn between exasperation and curiosity. “What, are you training me to read minds now, too?” After a moment, Erik caved. “Was it for business or pleasure?”

He got a coy smile, which Charles pulled off with a practiced ease that undoubtedly made him popular with the ladies. “Tell me, Michael,” Charles stepped closer to Erik, “would you call this,” one hand casually ran down the parting of the detective’s crisp work shirt, where Erik had left the top two buttons unbuttoned, “business, or pleasure?”

Erik found his body leaning in of its own volition, as if there was something about Charles that drew him in like a magnet, despite all the rational arguments for how this was a really bad fucking idea.

Then he spotted someone in the uniform of the Prefecture striding purposefully towards them, and the moment was broken.

“Messieurs,” the officer said, undeterred by Erik’s scowl, “we are ready for you.”

“Play nice,” Charles chided him quietly.

“Interpol called us in,” said Erik. “I don’t have to play nice.”

Charles and Erik followed the officer down the airstrip to where the plane was waiting. The murder hadn’t been discovered until after the plane had landed, so the passengers had simply been disembarked quickly, and the rest of the plane’s routes cancelled. They climbed up the stairs and into the fore door, where a different officer led them to the first class section.

The most recent victim, Ariadne, was still in her comfortable first class seat, posture relaxed and head resting against the wall of the plane. Her red blouse was eye-catching but also looked comfortable.

“She’s so young. She looks like she’s just sleeping, waiting for someone to wake her up,” Charles said quietly.
Erik rested a heavy hand on Charles' shoulder, and went to speak with the cabin crew who'd been kept back for that very purpose. No one had noticed anything strange, or how the cyanide could have gotten into the victim's drink.

“Michael,” Charles called.

Erik turned and went back to where Charles was crouched in the aisle. He reached gloved hands into the compartment under the seat, careful to disturb Ariadne’s body as little as possible, and pulled out a small bag. A look inside revealed the usual items - wallet, keys - plus a sketchpad, with the logo of École D’Architecture in front.

They opened the sketchpad. It was filled with scribbles and doodles, but every few pages, there was a fairly detailed sketch of well-known Parisian buildings. They seemed fairly innocuous, just a student’s studies of the city she was living in, which happened to have one of the most spectacular examples of architecture in the world. But his detective’s instinct told him that there was something important, hidden there in those sketches.

He gestured for Charles to flip back to the first sketch. La Tour Eiffel.

“James,” he flashed his teeth at Charles. “How do you feel about doing a bit of sight-seeing?”

* * * * *

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It wasn’t often that they could sleep in during a shoot, but an unexpected downpour had delayed shooting for half a day, so Remy had called Erik to let him know that the Eiffel Tower scene would be postponed until further notice. Erik was more than fine with this, as it meant he and Charles could laze about in bed, legs tangled together in the sheets as he listened to the soft tapping of Charles’ fingers on his iPhone screen. A quick peek showed that Charles was smiling to himself, tweeting replies to his fans.

“Are you up to no good again?” Erik whispered against the shell of his ear, watching Charles’ thumbs rapidly flying all over his keypad. “Because you have a particularly evil smile on your face.”

“According to you, I’m always up to no good,” Charles said over his shoulder, before resuming his tweeting. “The fans are so sweet sometimes. And hilarious.”
Erik tucked his chin over Charles’ shoulder, pressing a kiss to the pale, creamy skin. “What are they saying about us?”

Charles laughed out loud. “Someone just suggested that we play strip chess.”

Erik chuckled, before nuzzling his cheek against Charles. “That is actually an excellent idea. Tell her I will send her a box of brownies.”

“You do have your own Twitter account, love, you can tell her personally.” Charles sounded amused, scooting back into Erik’s embrace so that the curve of his backside was nestled in the cradle of Erik’s hips.

“Fine.” Erik reached over for his phone, planting yet another kiss on his shoulder (asking him to stay away from Charles’ skin was like asking a thirsty man to stay away from water) before settling in against him in companionable silence. They typed on their phones for a while, occasionally chuckling at the other’s tweets, and Erik slid his arm around Charles’ waist, dragging him closer.

“Are you jealous of Twitter, Erik?” The laughter in Charles’ voice was obvious as he continued to type on his iPhone.

“No, I’m not,” Erik grumbled, trying to think of a way to get Charles’ full attention. He experimentally slid a hand over Charles’ stomach, hearing his breath hitch. Bingo.

“Erik, you sly devil.” Charles almost dropped his phone when Erik started sucking on his earlobe. “Aah, oh god--”

“Let’s see if Twitter can do this,” Erik said with a triumphant smirk before sliding his hand further south between Charles’ legs, cupping his growing erection. His own hips rolled against Charles’ as Charles gasped, his head lolling back against the pillow.

“Erik, you’re insatiable.” The way Charles was shamelessly arching back against him contradicted his weak protest, though.

“Look who’s talking,” Erik whispered against the curve of his ear, smiling as Charles let out an involuntary whimper. “Don’t blame me, your skin tastes too good, you smell too nice...really Charles, this is all your fault.”

“Oh please, Erik, you are so full of--” Charles’ words stuttered to a stop when Erik slid a teasing finger down the length of his cock, which he had learned was a surefire way to win any impending argument with Charles (who called it ‘playing dirty’ as though he wasn’t guilty of the exact same thing). “Erik--”

“You were saying?” Erik knew he sounded too entirely smug, but it was hard not to, what with Charles coming apart in his arms like this, panting hotly, cheeks flushed as he arched up blindly, seeking Erik’s touch as his phone tumbled off the pillow, forgotten.

“Oh, Erik.” Charles was biting his lip, and Erik lifted his head to get a better look, transfixed. Charles always made the most glorious noises and expressions during sex, and it was Erik’s mission in life to catalogue them all and file them away for future research. Right now Charles was making those sweet hitching sounds like he always did when he was desperate for Erik, throat exposed and begging for a kiss.

Erik’s mouth slid down his neck, sucking on the smooth jut of Charles’ collarbone, grinding his already interested cock (when was it not interested around Charles?) against the back of Charles’ thigh, the head dragging along the smooth valley of his closed thighs. Erik was insane with want for
Charles, punctuating his messy kisses with ‘love you’ and ‘so beautiful’ and giving Charles the agonizingly long, slow strokes he loved, and every time Erik rubbed a thumb over the dripping head of his cock, Charles let out an unintelligible ‘ngghh’ sound between those beautiful parted lips, breathless and already looking like he’d just been fucked. “Oh Erik, fuck, Erik--”

“My,” Erik growled against the back of his head, taking in the sweet, sharp scent of Charles’ shampoo that never failed to arouse him. He actually had a problem on set whenever Charles walked past, smelling so good like this all freshly showered, leaving Erik with problems concealing his erection. However, he didn’t have to now, rubbing himself against Charles with increasingly desperate moans, his eyes fixed on the man writhing in his arms. How could he love someone this much, want just one person this much? He didn’t know and didn’t care, as long as Charles was with him, always.

“Erik, I--” Charles arched up with a cry and warm stripes of come coated Erik’s hand, making his grip slick. He continued to press kisses to the line of Charles’ shoulder, still pumping his cock and holding Charles through the last shivers of his orgasm. This was his favourite part, looking at Charles like this, eyes a startled electric blue just after coming, lips puffy and parted, colour high in his cheeks, dark hair mussed and tousled.

“Perfection,” Erik whispered before he thrust against Charles and slammed his eyes shut, coming all over Charles’ thighs and the sheets, letting out a low guttural groan that may have been an attempt at Charles’ name. He could feel something nipping at his lips and realised Charles was trying to kiss him, and he willingly opened his mouth, exchanging exhausted, sloppy kisses as Charles partially rolled on top of Erik, taking the sheets with him. Erik felt sated, sweaty and deliriously happy, clutching Charles to him and trying to tell him how much he loved him in a series of off-aim kisses, and from the growing smile on Charles’ face, he probably got the message loud and clear.

“Don’t you dare put this on Twitter or I’ll kill you,” Charles warned him, confiscating Erik’s phone in case he got any ideas, and Erik just laughed, rolling Charles under him and kissing him some more.

* * * * *

The view from the third level of the Eiffel Tower was as magnificent and breathtaking as one could hope; even Erik, for all his single-minded dedication to the job, had to pause for a moment and take it in. It seemed fitting, somehow, that he was here with Charles.

“Beautiful,” murmured the other man.

Erik stared at him, not bothering to hide how his gaze was riveted to Charles’ lips. “Yes.”

Charles caught his look, or maybe the tone of his voice, and a faint blush appeared on his face.

Erik cleared his throat. “So.” He gestured around them. “We should probably take a look around.”

“Yes,” Charles agreed. “You take the first level, I’ll take the second, and we’ll meet up back here?”

Erik nodded. They took the elevator down, Charles stepping off on the second level. Erik went straight into the restaurant on the first level, reasoning that the employees there would have a better idea of anything interesting in the surrounding area than the tourists, since they were there regularly.

He wasn’t surprised when he didn’t get anything concrete, though. It wasn’t as if he even knew what, exactly, he was looking for. The wait staff all spouted interesting Parisian or Eiffel Tower
trivia at him until he flashed his badge, after which he then had to assure them that they weren’t in any trouble that he knew of. He’d never been more grateful before for his fluency in French.

Erik dutifully went over the rest of the first level, too, speaking briefly with the few employees of the Tower that he came across. He looked out over Paris, trying to imagine what could have been important to Ariadne about this particular place. He suspected that it wasn’t the building itself - it was too well-known, too obvious. A student studying architecture in Paris; casual observers would see those sketches and dismiss them. But Erik suspected that Ariadne had been clever enough to anticipate this. An architect... aesthetics versus structural integrity, appreciating the difference between the visible and the hidden... there had been doodles of mazes in some of the pages... she would have hidden the information in plain sight.

Charles was frowning when he showed up back on the third level several minutes after Erik.

“No luck?” guessed Erik.

“Not as such,” Charles admitted. “But the chef of Le Jules Verne mentioned that there’d been riots down on the Champ de Mars last year.”

Erik nodded, making a note to see if Ariadne had been involved, though he didn’t hold out much hope for there to have been any kind of record. And they still hadn’t had the chance to go through the little notes around the sketches. “We probably won’t get anything else here,” he said. “Shall we move on to the next place?”

Charles looked grim. “ Seems like we have no other choice.”

* * * * *
Charles watched as the crew packed their gear up for the day, camera grips and production assistants hurrying about to complete their tasks before the sun went down. The shoot had gone smoothly, and the tourists had been very accommodating considering they had closed off a large section of Champ de Mars around the base of the Eiffel Tower for filming. He supposed that was the reason Bryan had chosen the off-peak season to film there, the amount of resources that would have been required for crowd control during the summer months would have made the venture rather unfeasible. However, that also meant that they had much fewer hours of daylight to work with for the outdoor shoots, and there was the added unpredictability of the Parisian weather in November, the threat of passing showers always looming.

Raven strolled over with her hands tucked into her leather trench coat, her knee-high boots finally a necessity rather than a fashion statement now that they were no longer in Los Angeles. "I'm going to make a move first," she announced, the pink rays of sunlight filtering through her loose curls as she tipped her chin.

"I'll see you tomorrow," Charles replied as he wrapped an arm around her waist and pressed a kiss to her temple. Raven turned to leave, and he smiled to himself when he noticed her weaving her way through the crowd towards Hank, who was piling the last of the equipment into the camera van. Hank was endearingly shy and awkward, but at the same time completely brilliant in what he did, and Charles had often caught the chap watching Raven from the sidelines when her back was turned. It was nice to see her finally paying attention to him, and they really did look quite lovely together. Well, provided of course Raven did not decide to eat him alive first.
Charles felt Erik's presence approaching without even having to take a glance. There was something in the way everything in him seemed to shift towards the man whenever he was around, like a piece of him perpetually pointed due Erik and that piece would always find him, was always meant to find him. If Charles were a compass, Erik would be magnetic north.

"What are you looking at?" Erik questioned as he tucked Charles under his arm, and Charles snaked an arm around Erik's back and beneath his coat to share some warmth.

"Oh, nothing. Would you like to go for a stroll?" Charles asked even as he pulled Erik along, already knowing the answer.

Erik fell into step beside him, leaning their heads together. "Lead the way."

Charles took them north through Champ de Mars towards the River Seine, only a few scattered tourists occupying the park with them. The beauty of being somewhere that thrived on tourism was that, now that the travellers were gone, it almost felt as if the entire city belonged to just the two of them. The best part of it all was that the general attitude of indifference Parisians had towards foreigners meant that he and Erik had the luxury of walking the streets just absorbed in each other, with the occasional polite smile towards people who recognised them. Photo requests were rare, and not once had they been mobbed by admirers or paparazzi. He felt like he was slowly finding himself again, meandering through empty streets in the familiar, chilly European weather that he had grown up in, worlds apart from the blinding glare of the sun and spotlights of Los Angeles. After spending such an extended amount of time caught up in the excesses of Hollywood, he had almost forgotten what it was like to simply just feel... normal.

"She really is majestic, isn't she?" Charles said, pausing to turn around and take one last look at the Eiffel Tower before they headed on their way, the setting sun turning the bronze tones of the landmark a deep rich carmine. Like all things beautiful, the structure was intimidating and overwhelming at close proximity, yet breathtaking when beheld from afar.

"Everyone found it odious at first," Erik remarked as they continued on their path, Charles turning his attention back to him. "It's made of over eighteen thousand pieces of puddled iron and has over two and a half million rivets, and when it was constructed, it surpassed the Washington Monument as the tallest man-made structure in the world."

Charles slipped a hand into the back pocket of Erik's pants and drew him closer, flashing him a coy smile. "I get the feeling you didn't just read that off a travel guide."

Erik chuckled, and Charles was pressed close enough to feel the laugh vibrate through Erik’s chest and against his side. "You're right, I studied engineering in university."

Charles beamed at that, delighted that Erik shared his love for science and technology. He never got to show this side of himself much, people from the entertainment industry tended to either get intimidated or have their eyes glaze over whenever the subject came up. "I majored in genetics, graduated at the top of my class in Oxford, actually."

Erik pulled away a little to face him, and Charles felt something unravel inside as Erik smiled softly at him for the longest time, before abruptly breaking into his shark grin as he turned away. "This explains the grandfather cardigans."

"Really, Erik? I tell you my scholastic accomplishments and you quote my stylist?" he huffed, playfully batting at Erik's arms as they wrapped around him.

"I’m sorry, Liebling. You have brains and brawn and talent and I’m very proud of you. I love you..."
very much, and I even love your frumpy cardigans. And I’m sorry I called you a himbo the other
day, please forgive me. Is that better?” Erik kept Charles’ face still with one hand, barely containing
his laugh as he trailed a series of kisses from his temple down to the side of his chin, all the while
holding him firmly around his waist with his other arm.

Charles giggled against him, cheeks flushed as he pressed a soft kiss to Erik’s lips. “Yes, much
better.”

Erik kept his arms around him as he pulled him along, slowly getting them back on track. “I only
tease you because you look adorable when you pout.”

“I know,” Charles replied fondly, rubbing the back of Erik’s neck with his hand.

“So why the change in career choice?” Erik asked, curious.

Charles slid his palms down Erik’s arms, letting them rest on top of his hands. “I did a college play in
my sophomore year. That’s where I met Ben, by the way. The acting bug bit me and I guess the rest
is history. Let’s just say my parents were... displeased.” Charles answered, eyes trailing to the
shadows of the barren trees that lined the park as they stretched away from them.

“You don’t talk about them,” Erik remarked, holding him tighter.

“I wonder why,” Charles said, pursing his lips as he shrugged. “Do you ever think of how different
our lives would have been if we’d just kept at it, continued on in academia?”

Erik nudged the side of Charles’ head with his, whispering into his ear, “Then I wouldn’t have met
you.”

Charles untangled himself from Erik at that, shifting to circle his arms around his neck. They were
inseparable these days, wherever he went, Erik would follow. They shared the same space, the same
breath. Life without Erik was unfathomable. “I’m sure we would have run into each other
eventually, perhaps at a conference?” Charles suggested, tiptoeing a little as he pressed himself
against Erik. “I’d walk up to you with my most charming smile and say, ‘That was an excellent
presentation. I must confess that I’ve been following your research for years, and it truly is
remarkable. I know I’m being forward, but I was wondering if you would be interested in
collaborating? What’s your opinion on the use of superparamagnetic nanoparticles for targeted gene
delivery?’”

Charles inched closer, the corner of his mouth quirking up in a smile as he slid a hand through Erik’s
hair. “Think of all the amazing things we could accomplish together, you and I. We could discuss it
over a spot of tea, if you like? I saw this lovely place just around the corner.”

Erik tilted his head to the side, voice low with a slight edge of danger, “And I’d say, ‘I don’t do
collaborations, and all the people I’ve worked with turned out to be imbeciles...’” He paused, eyes
falling closed along with Charles’ as he leaned in, “But for you I’ll make an exception.”

Charles’ breathing went shallow as he took in the scent of Erik’s skin now so near his. “Oh, where
are my manners? I’m Professor Xavier, but you, my friend, can call me Charles.”

He whispered the words against Erik’s parted lips before claiming them, fervently conveying his
desire for their lives to always be tangled with each other’s through the kiss, and Erik drew him close
enough in his arms that no space could ever exist in between.

* * * * *
“Let’s get on that boat!” Charles declared as he grabbed Erik’s hand, pulling him along as he ran for the *Bateaux Parisiens* sightseeing cruise ship that was docked on the Seine.

“No, it’s for tourists. It’s embarrassing!” Erik protested as he hurried after him, boots pounding against the pavement in time with Charles’.

Charles laughed as he carried on sprinting, his hair flying in his face when he looked back at Erik over his shoulder. “Aren’t we tourists?”

Erik grinned as he shook his head in resignation, knowing very well that his half-hearted complaints were just for show. They made it to the dock just in time and were greeted by a mildly startled boatman as they climbed on board, who seemed to be blinking at them in disbelief as he watched them catch their breaths. Erik exchanged a few words in French with him and handed him some Euros, placing a hand on the small of Charles’ back as they made their way into the cabin.

“What did the boatman say?” Charles asked as they maneuvered their way through, the inside of the cabin rather empty save for several vacationers occupying a few of the seats. They emerged at the stern of the boat, the air outside cold enough that the wind had a bite to it as they cruised eastwards along the river, and Erik could see the visible shiver that shot through Charles.

“Oh nothing, he asked if you were really Charles Xavier.” Erik grinned as they leaned against the railing, pulling Charles to him and half-tucking him inside his coat. “Apparently his daughter loves your movies, and would marry you if she could.”

Charles huddled against him, and Erik could feel an arm sliding snugly around his waist. “And what did you say?”

“That you’re already spoken for.” Erik pressed a kiss to his temple when Charles chuckled. “Good thing nothing fazes the French much.”

“You can say that again.” Charles was smiling in contentment now, his eyes fixed on the horizon. Erik gazed at Charles as he held him close, taking in how the flush from their earlier footrace crept across his cheeks, the contrast with his eyes making them appear even brighter than they normally seemed. Charles shifted in his arms, smiling softly as he tilted his head up to meet his gaze, and Erik knew then that he would give anything to remember Charles just like that, standing there against the wind with the city fanning out before them, the world tinged in red and gold. If he looked hard enough, perhaps he could simply capture that moment with his mind, unmarred by lenses, just his vision of how Charles would always be in his eyes.

“What is it?” Charles asked, resting his palms on Erik’s chest.

“Just enjoying the view,” Erik replied quietly, fingers curled over the soft curve of Charles’ ear as he started stroking a path down his neck, which he secretly suspected was one of Charles’ erogenous zones, judging from how extremely responsive Charles always was when Erik kissed or touched him there.

Charles tiptoed up and placed a kiss on Erik’s lips, his skin soft and warm, a comforting contrast to the chilly air. “You’re fooling no one, you know. I could feel you staring the entire time.” Charles murmured in his ear before looking back out across the water. “Too bad about the weather, we can barely see the sun setting.”

“But it’s still there.” Erik pointed out the faint yellow glow of the sun peeking through the scattered cover of clouds, and Charles followed his gaze. They watched the setting sun in silence, and Erik slid his arms around Charles so that he could tuck his hands into his pockets. He snuck a peek at
Charles’ hand splayed on his chest, frowning when he saw Charles was only wearing fingerless gloves. “You’re always wearing those gloves. Aren’t you cold?”

“You can warm me up,” Charles said a little sleepily, his head nestling against Erik’s shoulder.

“You do realise I’m not your human hot water bottle,” Erik said, amused as he pressed his nose against Charles’ hair, only half an eye on the scenery.

“Oh, I’m afraid you very much are. Didn’t you read the contract?” Charles sounded as though he was trying not to laugh.

Erik’s eyebrows jumped. “What contract?”

“The Charles Xavier Relationship Contract.” Charles had now raised his head to look at Erik, his expression solemn even though his eyes were dancing with amusement. “You signed it after the very first time we slept together.”

“Huh, that’s interesting.” Erik’s mouth twisted as he fought back a smile. “I must have been too blissed out to remember.”

“Most of them are.” Charles was openly smirking now, and he must have seen the look on Erik’s face because he burst into laughter. “I’m kidding, my goodness, it’s disgustingly easy to rile you up.”

“Sorry,” Erik let out a sigh which ruffled Charles’ hair. “Just don’t like imagining you with other people.”

Erik could feel it when Charles’ grip on him tightened. “Then how am I going to make more movies in the future? There will be love scenes, you know, even if it’s not a romantic comedy.”

“I don’t know.” Erik could feel the corners of his mouth pulling down in a frown. “I was kind of hoping to cross that bridge when we get to it.”

They didn’t say anything for a while, deep in thought as they watched the red sun sinking into the horizon, its slow absence darkening the skies of Paris. Erik could see the first few stars out and about now, faraway jewels dotted in the dark blue sky.

“Erik.” Charles took in a deep breath, before letting his hand stroke up and down Erik’s back. “We’ll really have to think about the future, for real, because as much as I would love to, we’re not going to be able to do every movie together.”

“I know,” Erik said glumly. He had happily gagged his inner realist as best as he could ever since he had gotten together with Charles, but he couldn’t deny there were a lot of points they needed to discuss, particularly regarding their careers and the future. It was no wonder Emma and Raven were concerned. “We should sit down one day and discuss it seriously. I mean, I have another project after ‘First Class’ that I’m already committed to, but other than that, my plate is empty.”

“Me too.” Charles ran his hands up and down Erik’s spine under the fabric of his coat. “Don’t worry, we’ll find a way to work things out. Other actor couples have been doing this for decades, we’re not the first ones.” He glanced up at Erik, offering him a slow smile. “I have every confidence we can do this.”

“I know, we will.” And really, Erik did mean it, because this was the first time something had ever become more important than his career. “No matter how many heart attacks we give Emma and Raven in the process.”
Charles’ laugh was light and happy. “That’s my Erik. You were all Tickle Me Emo for a while there, you worried me.” Charles leaned up on to give him a proper kiss, and Erik could feel himself getting lost in it, in the sturdy feel of Charles pressed against him from head to toe.

They could hear the chime of church bells, and Erik broke away from the kiss, his eyes drawn to the beautiful spectre of Notre Dame dominating the backdrop. “Look,” he whispered, turning Charles to face the view, and they huddled together even closer inside Erik’s coat, taking in the magnificent sight of the ancient cathedral with its flying buttresses and towering spire. “This is one of the reasons I will always love Europe.”

“I know what you mean,” Charles said, tucking his hands into Erik’s pockets. “There is something old and grand about Europe that you just can’t find in the States, you know? Italy has it in spades, and so does Germany.”

“Speaking of Germany...” Erik waited as the cruise hostess popped in to check on them, nodding with a smile before she trundled off, satisfied. “Remember what I said about wanting you to meet my parents?”

“Oh.” Now Charles was turning back to face him properly, grinning from ear to ear. “Yes, and you also mentioned being afraid of your mother and I ganging up against you and sharing embarrassing stories.”

Erik pretended to let out a heavy sigh. “I suppose there’s no escaping my fate.” He bent down slightly to kiss Charles again, looking serious this time. “Come home to Munich with me. We’ll go during the Christmas break?”

Charles’ brilliant smile turned soft at the edges. “Nothing would honour me more.”

Erik couldn’t resist another kiss, chaste and gentle this time. “What about your family?” he asked, running his fingers through Charles’ fringe which had flopped down. He could see the very instant Charles froze in his arms, a distant look in his eyes.

“Do you really want to see my family for Christmas?” Charles said quietly, avoiding Erik’s searching gaze.

“Of course we should, I should meet them, at least.” Erik didn’t like the pinpricks of anxiety running up and down his skin. “Is something wrong?”

Charles probably knew better than to lie to Erik, for he just heaved a tired sigh. “My mother, she’s not exactly Mum of the Year.”

Erik wondered just how different Charles’ mother was from his own, who was nothing other than kind and loving even if she was a little fussy and liked to get involved in Erik’s love life. “We should still go see her, as an obligation,” Erik said. They were now sailing past the Louvre, and as usual, there were throngs of people huddled outside in the cold. Erik spared them only a cursory glance before returning his full attention to Charles. “I’ll be with you every step of the way, I promise.”

This made Charles smile once more, at least, and Erik held onto him tight for the rest of the cruise, fiercely promising himself that he would do anything in his power to make sure he never saw that sad expression cross Charles’ face again.

**Notes:**
1. The title of this chapter is a quote from ‘Casablanca’. 
2. Remy’s Taylor Kitsch’s old job.
3. In ‘Inception’, Ariadne was a graduate student at the Ecole D'Architecture in Paris.
4. @eriklehnsherr__ (two underscores) is now trolling on Twitter.
5. "Let’s get on that boat!" and "No, it’s for tourists. It’s embarrassing!" are quotes from 'Before Sunset'.
6. Route for the Bateaux Parisiens sightseeing cruise.
Paris, Je T'aime

Chapter Summary

Charles and Erik explore more of Paris, while Remy wins Erik over via devious means. Also, Charles and Erik make a porno (sort of).

Chapter Notes

Somehow this turned out to be the length of a Big Bang... even though it wasn’t supposed to be one. Whoops. We don’t know how the chapters keep getting longer and longer. There is going to be a lot happening in the next few chapters, so buckle up and join us for a long, smutty ride!

xsilverdreamsx really outdid herself with the beautiful poster and manip and magazine spread, we cannot thank her enough. She is as much a part of the project as the rest of us!

Soundtrack: Ewan McGregor & Nicole Kidman - ‘Come What May’

Erik and Charles stared up at the magnificent swoop of the Arc de Triomphe, taking in the details on its surface, from the inscriptions of names and victories to the sculpted reliefs celebrating French patriotism. “This was the next thing in Ariadne’s sketchbook,” said Erik.

Charles frowned as he rubbed the back of his neck. “I still can’t figure out a connection between all the sketches, apart from them being famous French landmarks.”

The two of them walked over to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, situated beneath the arc. A moment of silence passed, during which the both of them gazed sombrely at the eternal flame.

“They sometimes,” said Charles, “I’d like there to be a memorial, too, for the victims whose murderers go free.”

Erik let out a breath. “Let’s walk around, talk to people as usual.” He paused, reaching out to squeeze Charles’ shoulder. “If we catch whoever’s doing this, that’ll be a few less names for that memorial of yours.”

* * * * *

Alex always considered himself a guy who totally minded his own business, which was why he was currently a little edgy about creeping up on Charles’ trailer like how he was now. Given a choice, he would have made Sean do it, but Sean had been smart enough to disappear earlier when Bryan had suggested more changes to the script, so it had fallen to Alex to drop off the new script at the trailers of the principal cast. Charles’ was nearer, so Alex headed there first.
His footsteps slowed down as Alex neared the trailer, listening intently. He knew quite well what Erik and Charles got up to during shooting breaks - hell, everyone in the shoot knew, judging from the sounds that came out of Charles’ trailer - and although Charles and Erik were supposed to be out for a quick shopping break along Champs-Élysées, Alex didn’t think there was any harm in being careful in case they decided to pop back for a quickie.

No sign of their voices or - shudder - any other sounds. So far, so good. Alex was about to bend down and slip the new pages under Charles’ door when he heard someone stumble, then a loud, “Goddammit!” that definitely did not sound like either Charles or Erik.

Alex froze, eyes widening. How long would it take for him to run to the security HQ?

There was another loud stumble followed by a crash, then a drawer opening and closing. Alex didn’t care if it was Charles and Erik who were trying out some new inventive form of wardrobe sex, he was going to call security over before the intruder had a chance to get away. There already had been a previous incident at his last movie set where a fan had snuck into George Clooney’s trailer, so he wasn’t sure if this was a repeat incident. He pulled out his phone, then dialled the number he had been given as he stepped away, keeping an eye on the door.

Security promised him they were on the way, so Alex clipped his phone shut and squared his shoulders, prepared to tackle the supposed burglar to the ground and stop him from escaping if necessary. Thankfully, he could already hear pounding footsteps approaching, and as the security guards arrived, Alex pointed at Charles’ closed trailer door. “He’s still in there.”

The three guards nodded at one another, and the tallest one stood by the door while the leader, Emmanuel, flung open the door. “Don’t move!” he yelled at someone, and Alex quickly darted forward to see who the perp was, craning his neck to look above Emmanuel’s shoulder. The security guys were pointing their tasers at this tall African-American man who was wearing a fitted grey top that was practically clinging to his (sculpted) body, hands up and eyes wide, looking just as scared as Alex had felt earlier. A drawer was open before him, and now Emmanuel was edging forward.

“Keep your hands up,” Emmanuel told the guy sharply, who seemed more than happy to obey, and when Emmanuel peeked into the drawer, the last thing Alex expected him to do was burst out laughing. “Hey Laurent, you must see this,” Emmanuel said, waving the tallest security guard forward, and now everyone was just crowded around the open drawer, laughing their asses off.

“I am so fucked,” the African-American guy was saying miserably. “Charles is not going to like this.”

“Wait, who exactly are you?” Alex demanded. “And why is everyone laughing?”

“My name is Darwin,” the guy said with a sigh. “And I am Charles’ assistant.”

“No way, Charles doesn’t have an assistant,” Alex said, frowning at Darwin. “And what’s in the drawer?”

“I just came back from vacation,” Darwin explained. “And uh, I’d really much prefer that you don’t look in the--”

It was too late as Alex peeked into the open drawer, and his eyes bulged out at the small mountain of Louis Vuitton condoms there. “What the flaming fuck?”

Darwin scraped a hand over his face. “Okay, look, Charles asked me to get those, and I would really rather that he didn’t know--”
“Know about what?” came Charles’ cheerful voice from the door, but his smile dropped when he realised that security was in his trailer. “What happened here?” he asked in shock as Erik peered from behind him, curious. They were both carrying shopping bags, and Charles handed his to Erik immediately, stepping into the trailer. “Darwin, what’s the matter?”

“This is your PA, Charles?” Emmanuel asked, finally moving to holster his taser.

“Yes, I’m vouching for him.” Charles saw that everyone was peering into the open drawer, and that must have been his designated condom drawer, for his face was now turning a nice shade of scarlet. “Oh my god.”

Alex would have laughed, if it weren’t for the fact that Erik was now muscling his way into the trailer, frowning deeply. “Charles, what is the matter-” He stopped talking when he saw the open drawer, and his reaction was interestingly the opposite of Charles’ - he was now as white as a sheet of paper, mouth open.

Darwin was shaking his head with a wince. “I am so sorry, Charles,” he kept saying. “I was trying to keep it quiet, like you asked, but suddenly security burst in--”

“Wait, how did security know?” Charles asked, and all three guards pointed at Alex, who was trying to hide from Erik’s murderous glare.

“Alex called us, he thought he heard a break-in,” Emmanuel said as they began making their way to the door, careful to give Erik a wide berth. “Anyway, since this is all a happy misunderstanding, we’ll just go and let you folks enjoy your expensive condoms.”

“Um, thank you,” Charles muttered, blushing more furiously than ever as the security guards trooped out, leaving Alex trapped in a trailer with two embarrassed guys and a homicidal Erik who looked ready to break someone’s legs.

“Why is everyone looking in our condom drawer?” Erik demanded, walking over and closing it immediately. A part of Alex’s brain - the part that was 12 years old and not at all interested in self-preservation - thought, ooooh ’our’ condom drawer, but his desire to laugh quickly fled when Erik advanced on him, nostrils flared. “Alex, what’s wrong with you?”

“I thought, um.” Alex was starting to panic, backing towards the door. “I mean, what if it was a burglar?”

“He’s right, Erik,” Charles said tiredly. “It’s all right, Alex, thank you for looking out for us.”

“Oh, no problem. By the way, these are the pages for the new scene.” Alex took this as a free pass to flee the trailer and possibly the country, judging from the unhappy look on Erik’s face, but when Alex threw one last glance Darwin’s way, he felt bad about how dejected Darwin seemed, shoulders slumped as he stared at his feet.

*I’ll make it up to him*, Alex promised himself as he ran off in search of Sean, certain that his writing partner would laugh his ass off at this unexpected turn of events.

* * * * *

After the whole debacle with Darwin and the condom drawer, Erik was beginning to grudgingly admit that maybe Remy wasn’t as spectacularly dumb as Erik had feared him to be. Remy had particularly scored points when he had taken the trouble to hunt down some obscure French bakery which sold a local pastry that Charles wanted (and Erik had never even heard of) and Charles had been happily surprised when Remy had turned up on set with a box of the sweet treats. Of course,
whatever made Charles happy made Erik happy by default, and Erik found himself trusting Remy more with his schedule and list of personal tasks.

“He’s smart,” Raven had said one day when they were observing Remy laughing on the set with Charles. Erik had glanced at her, and she had been smiling to herself.

“What do you mean?”

“I meant that the fastest way to a Lehnsherr’s heart is through his Charles.” Raven’s smile had turned into a full-on smirk by now. “Remy probably figured out early on that there was no point buttering you up, and went straight for the jugular.”

“You’re mad,” Erik had said, even as he had secretly wondered if she was right as he watched Charles patting Remy affectionately on the back. Still, even if she was right, it just proved that Remy was resourceful and willing to find alternative ways to get to where he wanted. And Erik had always been a fan of that.

Erik was so lost in thought that he jumped when he felt a hand on his shoulder. “Mon ami,” Remy said gently, grinning from ear to ear. “It’s just me.”

“Jesus, you’re a PA, not a ninja,” Erik said irritably. He had forgotten that he had given Remy a key to his trailer. “Anyway, do you have what I asked for?”

Unfazed, Remy pretended to take a bow as he handed Erik a piece of paper. Erik was reluctant to admit that if he were a fifteen year old girl, he may have possibly found Remy charming. “A list of the best restaurants on Montmartre,” Remy said with a flourish. “And I have arranged for a car to take you to the 18th arrondissement as well.”

“Oh.” Erik hadn’t thought to ask for a car, as he had been quite sure that Montmartre wasn’t that far. “Thank you.” He began frowning at the list of restaurants, but Remy cleared his throat politely.

“I suggest that you head to ‘La Mascotte’, they serve the freshest oysters,” he said, pointing a well-manicured fingernail at the third restaurant on the list. “Also, it is cozy and unpretentious.”

“Oysters, huh?” Erik was intrigued. Still, it wasn’t as though he and Charles didn’t already behave as though they were on an all-oyster diet. “Maybe I will check it out.”

Remy nodded, pleased that Erik was considering his suggestion. “So do you want me to get the car to come earlier, so you can pop back to the hotel to change?”

“Change?” Erik looked down at the shirt and jeans he was currently wearing. “What’s wrong with this?”

The stricken look on Remy’s face suggested that Erik was intending to go to Montmartre dressed in a potato sack. “You want to look smart for your date, non?”

“Well yes, but--”

“Then this will not do,” Remy said firmly. “I will have a selection of suits waiting in your trailer by the end of the day, you will choose from one of those.”

Erik was staring at Remy with his mouth hanging open. “I beg your unbelievable pardon?”

Remy leaned in, an eyebrow cocked, and to his surprise, Erik found himself a little afraid. “Erik, this is how relationships die, you know. You think, ah I don’t need to make so much of an effort as
before, because we’re already together. *Mais non!* You still must keep making the effort, so Charles knows he is special.”

Erik just blinked at Remy. And blinked again. “Uh, okay.”

“Good!” Remy clasped his hands in delight. “I will go to pick out the suits now. You will look sharper than that English pansy James Bond, I promise you.”

Erik just remained seated in his chair as Remy left the trailer whistling, wondering what the hell just happened.

* * * * *

“There’s something about this next sketch that seems... different,” Charles said, as they rounded a corner and the Notre Dame came into view ahead of them.

“What do you mean?” asked Erik.

“Well, the others were all from the front and straight-on. This one was clearly drawn from an angle.” Charles looked thoughtful for a moment, then tapped Erik on the arm. “I have a hunch. Can I-?” He gestured at the sketchpad.

Erik glanced at the famous cathedral ahead of them. Well, the approach they’d been taking thus far hadn’t yielded any useful clues. “By all means.”

Charles walked to where he could get a good view of the building, then held the sketchpad up so he could compare between them. He led the way down the street, circling the church, looking around them and referring to the sketch at various intervals. Looking over his shoulder, Erik eventually caught on to what he was doing.

“Close, but you can’t see those far windows from here, and they’re perfectly visible on her sketch,” said Erik. “Perhaps the next street over, and a little further away?”

They ended up in the middle of a quiet little street. Charles held up the sketch and let out a triumphant “Ha! This is the place.”

The two of them looked around. Just a few feet to one side was a cosy cafe, with chairs and tables spilling out into the street; the aroma of the coffee was invigorating in the cold weather. There, on a similarly clear day several months ago, Ariadne must have sat and sketched. The question was - why?

“Come on.” Erik nudged a squinting Charles, gesturing for both of them to enter the cafe. It was dim inside, but there was enough sunlight filtering in through the glass windows for them to see where they were going. A tall barista with a Mick Jagger pout and haircut was wiping down the tables, ignoring them until they flashed their badges at him.

“We need your assistance in an investigation,” Erik told the barista. “Were you working here about 3 months ago?”

“Oui, I am here almost everyday,” the barista said with a faint frown. “Is anything wrong?”

Charles reached into his folder and pulled out the photo of Ariadne. “Do you remember this customer?”

The barista frowned at the photo for a while, before breaking into a smile. “Ah, la petite
“mademoiselle,” he said fondly, before looking at them in alarm. “Why, what happened to her?”

“Homicide,” Erik said with a sigh as he took out his notepad and pen. “Why do you remember her in particular?”

“She used to come a lot, sitting outside and drawing. I remember her because she was quite good.” The barista now looked utterly downcast. “What a shame.”

“We need you to think carefully if you’ve seen anything unusual,” Charles said, and the barista frowned. “Did she meet up with anyone?”

“Non.” But the barista’s frown was slowly deepening. “But I remember she stopped coming after this blonde creep hassled her on the day of the protests.”

Now Erik could hear Charles flipping open his notebook as well. "When was this?"

"About three months ago." The barista was now watching the two of them scribble furiously in their notebooks.

"Do you know what the protests were for?" Erik asked.

"Oh, it was some queer rights thing, very boring," the barista said.

“What about the blond man, what was he doing to Ariadne?” Charles asked.

"He was sitting at the table opposite her, watching her over the top of his newspaper for a long time before he went over to her. She got upset and I had to chase him away. She was so creeped out that she left almost immediately. I didn't see her again." The barista was looking at them with wide eyes. "You think he killed her, non?"

"We don't know yet," Erik said. "Can you describe anything else about him?"


They asked him a few more questions, but it didn't seem to help as he couldn't remember many details from the day of the protests. Erik wasn't surprised, as very few witnesses had eidetic memories. He and Charles were lucky enough that the barista had remembered Ariadne and her menacing blond stalker.

“So what now?” Erik asked as they stepped out of the cafe, tucking their notebooks inside their jackets. Charles looked particularly thoughtful, though.

“Come on, we have some research to do,” he said, nodding towards the way they had come from.

Hours of coffee and phone calls later, Charles and Erik sat staring at the mess of papers fanned out under Ariadne’s folder. The bags under Charles’ eyes were especially pronounced, but despite how tired he looked, Erik still felt a surge of attraction.

“After the barista mentioned that Ariadne was at the cafe on the day of the protests, I did a check on what happened at all the locations on the dates she’d indicated on her other sketches.” Charles announced as he handed the files he had been holding over to Erik. “It turns out that demonstrations had been staged at each of those locations on the dates the drawings were marked with. I then took a closer look at the details of Ariadne’s life. School subjects, club affiliations, etc. She was politically active. Specifically, she was a member of Comite Pederastique de la Sorbonne.”
“I’m not familiar with that.” Erik stated as he straightened his posture, frowning as he thumbed through the documents.

“It’s a fledgling political movement, advocating for the civil rights of,” Charles paused, glancing away, “homosexuals.”

* * * * *

Erik was ready to kill someone. Thanks to Hank cocking up one of the shots earlier, Erik had been made to stay back and re-do several takes of an important close-up that Bryan wanted to nail. Charles, who had already done his scene, had seemed a little tired, so Erik had told him to go back to the hotel first and get ready for their date. It was agreed that Erik would change in his trailer, then pick Charles up at the hotel so they could immediately proceed to Montmartre.

By the time Bryan had wrapped things up, it was already almost dark. Erik hurried to his trailer, letting himself in and hoping Charles wasn’t starving by now. He had never been more relieved to see Remy waiting inside, holding up two suits and a fresh set of towels, everything ready and good to go. “You still have time, don’t worry,” he told a flustered Erik, who nodded and ducked into the shower immediately.

It felt good to get the grime of the day off, and Erik haphazardly washed his hair with the new shampoo which produced an alarming amount of bubbles. Rinsing it out and turning off the water, he towelled himself dry, wiping the water out of his eyes.

Remy was waiting outside the shower, and he started laughing when he saw Erik in his bathrobe. “You look like a wet dog, mon ami!”

“Thanks a lot,” Erik grumbled, trying to slick his hair back but it was still too wet. Remy got up, rolling his eyes as he disappeared, then came back with a hair dryer and a towel.

“Change into your suit, I’ll fix your wet fur.” Remy’s dimples were showing, which made it all the more obvious that he was trying not to laugh even more at Erik looking like a drowned rat. Erik waited patiently while Remy blow-dried his hair, quick and efficient, then he gestured for Erik to pick one of the suits. Erik eventually selected the charcoal gray Dior three-piece, putting on the trousers after buttoning up his shirt. Remy helped him knot the tie, and Erik slid on the vest, feeling quite chic.

They were done in less than ten minutes, Erik fastening his cuffs while Remy slicked some product onto his hands and quickly ran his fingers efficiently through Erik’s hair. “I can do my own hair, you know,” Erik said, shrugging on his jacket.

Remy made a derisive snort. “You mean that usual flat style of yours where you always look like you’ve just taken off a helmet? No, we’re trying something different today.”

“Charles doesn’t care what I look like.”

“Indeed he doesn’t,” Remy said dryly. “Still, no harm done in making an effort for him, non?”

Erik sighed. Why couldn’t Emma have gotten him a PA who wasn’t a smartass? “Fine, do what you like.”

Still, by the time Erik was checking his reflection in the mirror, even he had to admit that Remy had done an outstanding job. Erik looked exceptionally smart in the Dior suit which seemed tailored just for him, and Remy had done his hair in a way that begged for Charles’ fingers to run through it, slightly slicked back and parted at the side, making him look smart and dashing.
Remy let out a low whistle. “If I were gay, this is the moment I’d consider risking my job and hitting on my employer.”

Erik couldn’t help laughing. “If that is supposed to be a compliment, I guess I’ll take it.”

“Oui, it is.” Remy was now smiling. “Okay, now show me your best smile, the one that will make Charles rip off his trousers and fall into bed with you.”

“Oh, okay.” It felt weird to do this without Charles here, who had the effect of making Erik smile naturally just by being around. Feeling a little self-conscious, Erik flashed Remy his brightest grin, but it faded as Remy stepped back quickly in alarm.

“Mon dieu, what was that?” Remy seemed to be recovering from a fright. “You’re going to take Charles out on a date, not eat a clownfish named Nemo.”

“Why does everyone say I smile like a shark?” Erik asked, exasperated.

“Um, because you do?” Remy said matter-of-factly. “Don’t worry, I’m here to help. Now, tell me what comes to mind when you think of Charles.”

Erik blinked, thinking of the sweet press of Charles’ lips against his, how soft his hair had felt earlier when Erik had raked his fingers through the dark silk of Charles’ locks, and his eyes, so blue and kind. Erik found his mouth curving up into a smile of its own accord, and now Remy was nodding his head in approval. “There it is, that’s the smile I wanted to see, not that scary one earlier with millions of teeth.”

“You’re a terrible PA,” Erik said without much heat to it, and Remy probably knew that because he was laughing.

“You’ll thank me later tonight,” Remy said mysteriously, patting Erik’s side pocket which felt thicker, and he could guess what Remy had slipped inside. Before he could check, there was the loud honk of a car outside, and Remy was hurrying him towards the door. “Come on, you don’t want to be keep Charles waiting. And remember, be as romantic as you want. You’re in Paris, after all.”

“Yes, of course.” Erik checked his reflection one last time before scurrying out to the waiting car outside, hoping Charles would like what he saw.

* * * * *

Charles didn’t know what Erik would be wearing to Montmartre, but it seemed like a place too casual for one of his tweed suits, so he ended up selecting a light blue shirt that Raven had once said brought out his eyes, as well as grey slacks and a matching waistcoat. He stood in front of the mirror, buttoning up his shirt and blushing a little at the numerous red marks around his neck that were clearly visible, thanks to the open collar.

Well, Erik was definitely a biter.

Charles was rolling up his shirt sleeves when the doorbell to the suite rang, and he checked himself in the mirror one last time, raking his hair back. No matter what he did, it was always floppy and had a bit of wave to it. Biting his lip, he shrugged before heading to the door, wondering if it was Erik or maybe a nosy Raven.

When Charles opened the door, he found a grinning Remy standing there. “Your date awaits,” he said with a flourish, before stepping back and tugging someone forward, and Charles literally felt his
jaw dropping open.

Erik was standing before him, and he looked as though he had been *poured* into the gorgeous charcoal gray suit he was wearing. Erik had always been handsome in Charles’ eyes, but now he looked spectacularly *gorgeous*, all neat and trim and dashing in the suit, which was accentuated with a maroon tie. Charles licked his lips, his mouth suddenly dry. He was dizzy with lust, want, desire and *love*, all warring within him like spoiled children.

It seemed Erik was just as dumbstruck, his eyes raking over Charles and lingering on his arms where he had rolled up his sleeves. Then his gaze slowly travelled upwards, taking in the waistcoat, then lingering at the open collar where he could undoubtedly see the love bites he had left on Charles that very morning. Now his eyes were half-lidded, dazed with want. “Remy, get out.”

Remy made a show of sighing. “Okay, but no sex,” he warned them. “Because I’ve already moved your reservation three times.” Erik seemed to pay his assistant no mind at all, eyes still fixed on Charles as the door closed behind Remy.

“You look...” Charles tried to think of an appropriate word that would describe his all-consuming need to rip Erik’s clothes right off him now and climb him like a tree. “Um.”

Erik chuckled, stepping a little closer so that their chests brushed. “You too.” He was leaning in slowly, his lips ghosting against Charles’ parted mouth in a feathery-light kiss, more of a tease, really. Such a contrast to all their usual passionate kisses, and it left Charles edging forward on his toes, aching for more.

“You’re so beautiful,” Charles whispered against Erik’s lips as he locked his arms around Erik’s neck, and Erik purred as Charles began raking his fingers through the soft baby hair on the back of Erik’s neck. “I can’t even articulate how much I want you right now.”

“Kiss me,” Erik pleaded, nosing against Charles’ cheek, and their mouths finally met. Now, the room was filled with the slick, wet sounds of their kisses, Charles running his hands up and down the straight lines of Erik’s suit. It was crazy, how he couldn’t get enough of Erik even after spending almost all day and night with him, and there was something tightening in his chest when Erik’s kiss turned tender towards the end, his long fingers caressing Charles’ cheek.

“I’ll want you. Always.” Erik gently brushed back a floppy lock of Charles’ hair. “Until my last breath.”

Charles rested his forehead against Erik’s shoulder, holding onto him tightly. “Then we still have a long way to go.”

There was an urgent knocking on the door. “Messieurs, I know I’m probably going to be fired for interrupting, but we really need to go.”

Erik grimaced. ‘Dammit, Remy--”

“He’s right.” Charles’ mouth quirked up in a playful twist as he palmed Erik’s cheek. “I like him, Erik, you’re not allowed to fire him.”

Erik pretended to let out a long-suffering sigh. “Can I at least yell at him?”

“Be nice, I like him.” Charles gave Erik one long, lingering kiss which was meant to be their last, but when he pulled away, Erik chased after him and this kiss was dirtier, steamier and left Charles speechless when Erik started sucking on his bottom lip. It was only when the knocking started again that Charles finally had the presence of mind to push Erik away. “Come on, let’s enjoy dinner.”
“All right.” The way Erik smiled down at him, fond and affectionate, made Charles’ skin tingle all the way to the car.

* * * * *

“Oooh, Erik,” Charles said, grabbing Erik’s arm excitedly, “it’s the Montmartre funicular!”

A little apprehensive - and possibly, also, a little turned on by Charles saying words, really, what was wrong with him - Erik peered out of the car that Remy had so helpfully procured for them. The funicular turned out to be a kind of tram, that traveled up the steep slope towards the **Sacre-Coeur** basilica.

Seeing it also meant that they’d reached the 18th arrondissement. Erik took one look at Charles’ beaming face and directed the driver to drop them off past Place Saint-Pierre, where the Gare Basse, the base station for the funicular, was located.

“So,” Charles said, in a coy way that fooled nobody. “We can climb three hundred steps up the Rue Foyatier to the summit, or…”

Erik rolled his eyes. “Get in the tram, Charles.”

Since it was approaching dinnertime, there were quite a lot of people wanting to use the funicular. The crowd was polite, though. Charles and Erik found seats in the upward cabin, which looked clean and well-maintained. There was a brief wait as more people came in - not quite filling up the cabin, but it looked to have quite a large capacity - then it began its ascent, with barely a jolt.

Charles hummed appreciatively at the view through the high glass panels, and his face broke into a delighted smile once the cabin was clear of the tree-line, revealing a gorgeous view of Paris. He even whipped out his phone and snapped a couple of pictures.

The ride was quick, just under a minute and a half, and then they were stepping out onto the Gare Haute at the top. A gust of wind, sweetly cold, ran up the slope of the hill and stirred up grass and trees and clothing. Charles scrunched up his face when the longer parts of his brown hair flopped down over his eyes and Erik chuckled, quietly; though not quietly enough, from Charles’ somewhat obscured glare. Erik apologized by ducking down and pressing their lips together in a hard, close-mouthed kiss, ignoring the wayward hair caught between them.

It was gorgeous walk. The view offered by the hill was unparalleled by any other location in Paris. Erik caught sight of apartment buildings facing the incline, and wondered what it must be like, to have this vision outside one’s window every single day. Around them, other couples were snuggling close, some sharing a bottle of wine to battle the dropping temperature.

He had a vague idea of where ‘La Mascotte’ was, but glancing down at Charles’ delighted face, Erik decided that they could take their time. He waited for Charles to snap a few more pictures, and even posed obligingly when Charles wanted him in the shot, attesting that, “there’s no such thing as too much of a good view.”

Then the female half of one of the other couples offered to take their picture for them, so both of them could be in it. Erik saw Charles hesitate for a second, but the woman did not look like a crazed fan, and was beaming at them in a how-adorable-are-you-two way rather than someone who recognized them, so he handed over his phone and stood with Erik.

A couple of shots, and then again from another angle, and Charles thanked the woman profusely, while Erik exchanged a dignified smile-nod with her counterpart. They set off for the restaurant,
finally, Charles winding his arm around Erik’s and letting Erik guide him while he browsed through all the photos he’d taken so far.

Erik saw the poster when they’d nearly reached it, and flushed. He attempted to discreetly lead Charles past it without Charles noticing - so, of course, that was precisely when Charles lifted his head and saw it.

“Oh my, Erik!” he squealed excitedly. He grinned between Erik and the poster. “Fancy seeing you here.”

Naturally, Charles just had to share his find with the whole world.
“You’re lucky you’re pretty,” grumbled Erik.
“A bit rich, coming from a model whose ad I’m currently looking at,” retorted Charles cheerfully. Then he hopped up to his tip-toes and pressed a slightly chilly kiss to the tip of Erik’s nose, leaving him blinking. “I think you look very handsome. In a serious and brooding way.”

“Um. Thank you.” Erik bit his lower lip, glancing uncertainly at the poster.

“Raven always teased that one day I’ll let fame get to my head and date only tall, gorgeous supermodels who are out of my league.” He leered unashamedly at Erik.

Erik chuckled and drew Charles close. “Flatterer. Come on, let’s get to the restaurant before we lose the reservation entirely.”

* * * *

It had been a whirlwind return for Darwin, struggling to get his bearings on set and get himself up to speed on Charles’ schedule. Charles was now out with Erik on a date, and Darwin was relieved to have the evening to himself just to sort things out. He had never expected this many changes during the few months he was away backpacking in South America, and the biggest change of all, of course, was evident in Charles’ schedule, the name ‘ERIK’ lovingly scrawled everywhere in Charles’ neat, printed handwriting. Christmas with Erik, New Year’s, Valentine’s…..Charles was definitely a goner.

“Charles, you horndog.” Darwin chuckled to himself as he stared down at the planner. It was nice to see Charles happy and madly in love after his long years of self-imposed celibacy, which would explain why the first thing Charles had asked Darwin to do when he came back to work was to get him a mountain of Louis Vuitton condoms and surprise his new boyfriend.

Of course, it would have gone smoothly too, if it hadn’t been for that interfering little--

“Hey.” There was a knock on the door of the trailer, and Darwin was stunned when he saw it was the same interfering little shit, Alex, leaning against the doorjamb and looking sheepish. “It’s Darwin, right?”

“Yeah, did you want to ruin something else for me?” Darwin said dryly as he flipped the planner shut. “You’ve already called security on me and embarrassed my boss and his boyfriend. If you come back next week, you can burn down my house?”

Alex rolled his eyes. “Dude, come on, it’s not that bad--”

“Alex, the security guards have started singing ‘Louie Louie’ whenever Charles is around,” Darwin said, exasperated. “It’s a good thing Erik hasn’t heard them yet or we’d have a lot of security guards with broken legs.”

The frown line between Alex’s eyebrows deepened. “Why are they singing that- Oh, wait, the Louis Vuitton thing. Ha, that’s funny.”

“Thanks,” Darwin said sarcastically. “So, next week? You bring the gasoline, I’ll bring the matches?”

“No, I’m sorry. C’mon, let me make it up to you,” Alex said pleadingly. “A beer or something?”

Darwin sighed. People had always said he was just as soft-hearted as his boss. “All right, but you’re buying.”

Alex grinned as though he had just struck gold. “Deal.”
They ended up in a dusty, quaint pub in the 5th, not far from where they were shooting, and Darwin had to admit the ale they had on tap was quite good. It was hard to have a proper conversation though, as they kept getting interrupted by the loud ‘pings’ from an ancient pinball machine in the back of the pub. Finally Alex gave up, rising to his feet and collecting his beer, motioning for Darwin to follow. They watched two Lyon fans play on the machine for a while before collecting their winning tickets, hooting in triumph. Darwin watched Alex slide over to the machine, cracking his knuckles before starting a game, and Darwin leaned over the machine, intrigued.

“Hey I meant to ask, is your name really Darwin?” Alex shot him a curious, sort of squinty glance, and Darwin sighed, reciting the explanation from memory.

“Well, actually my name is Armando, but Charles calls me Darwin.” Darwin watched as Alex easily toppled the high score that the Lyon fans had set earlier. “He says he calls me that because I’m the first assistant to be able to handle all the shit he throws at me, he says I ‘adapt to survive’. So I guess it stuck.”

“Your boss sounds scary,” Alex said, scrunching up his nose.

Darwin leaned in confidentially. “Not as scary as his boyfriend, to be honest. Erik is a total nutjob.”

“Damn straight he is.” Alex was grinning, his eyes still fixed on the machine. “I’ve been on the receiving end of his insanity a few times.”

“Holy shit.” Darwin was now chuckling outright. “Tell me, is it true that their first kiss was completely unscripted? Charles was trying to tell me ‘the script called for it’ but I knew he was so full of shit.”

Now Alex was laughing loudly. “What a load of crap! No, there was initially no kiss in the script. Actually, Charles and Erik hated each other at first and didn’t get along. So me and Sean nearly had a heart attack when we went down one day, and Charles stuck his tongue down Erik’s throat to say hi.”

“Wow.” Darwin’s gaze flickered down to Alex’s clever, quick hands before returning to the game at hand. “So who’s Sean? Your boyfriend?”

“What? No, ugh.” Alex seemed mildly repulsed, which caused a twist of glee in Darwin’s gut, for some reason. “He’s the other scriptwriter for ‘First Class’; my writing partner. If you see some dork drooling over Moira MacTaggert, that’s probably him. But he’s more my brother than boyfriend, if anything else.”

“I see.” Darwin realised Alex was now silent, and when he stole a glance, Alex seemed rather pensive. “Hey, what’s wrong?”

“My brothers and I used to play pinball during our spare time,” Alex said a little wistfully, and Darwin looked up at him, surprised at this unexpected revelation. “I haven’t seen them much since I moved out to L.A., I miss them.”

Darwin smiled. “I miss my sister too, but Charles constantly sends her beautiful dresses so she’s half in love with him and doesn’t mind he’s stolen away her older brother.”

Alex’s smile softened. “What’s her name?”

“Juanita. She’s 15 this year.” Darwin took out his wallet and showed Alex the picture of his sister and Mum. There was a loud ‘PING’ and they both realised Alex had just lost, due to the momentary distraction. “Oh, sorry man.”
Alex rubbed a hand over his face. “No, you know what, I’m the one who should be saying sorry. You had a shit time because of me.”

Darwin waved ineffectually at him. “Water under the bridge. Just let me kick your ass in pinball, then we’re even.”

Alex laughed, the straight white line of his teeth gleaming in the dark of the pub, and Darwin was surprised to find himself acknowledging that Alex, despite being an irritating little shit, was quite hot. “No way, I’m taking your ass to school,” Alex said as he clung to the machine with a smirk.

Darwin pretended to shove him off the machine. “Jesus man, you are *killing* me.”

* * * * *

Dinner had been more than excellent, and it seemed that Charles had fallen in love with the quaint, unpretentious restaurant. Erik grudgingly awarded another point in Remy’s favour as they left ‘La Mascotte’ hand in hand, Charles chattering excitedly about seeing the city lights, and Erik wanting nothing more than to see Charles happy.

However, when they got to the top of the hill and stood outside the magnificent Basilique du Sacré-Cœur, even Erik himself was awestruck by the pretty spectacle of the Paris nightscape, a carpet of warm glowing city lights laid out before their feet. Charles leaned against the banister and Erik wrapped his arms around him from behind, shielding him from the frosty nip of the evening wind. There were a few tourists who stared at them open-mouthed, but most of the other people there were couples who were busy making out, and Erik pressed a kiss to the top of Charles’ head.

“Shall we start heading downhill?” Charles said after some time, holding out his hand for Erik to take, and of course Erik didn’t need to be asked twice.

Erik held Charles’ palm in his as they left Sacré-Cœur, tucking their bare hands into the pocket of his coat to keep them warm. It was getting late and a light mist had descended around them, the temperature having dipped during dinner, and it felt like they had been transported back to the past, the stark shadows cast by the old world street lamps creating a chiaroscuro effect reminiscent of a film noir from the Forties.

“Let’s not call for the car. I think the Moulin Rouge is that way, would you like to take a look?” Charles asked, pointing downhill towards Rue Azais.

“Of course,” Erik replied, and Charles grinned as he slipped their hands out of his pocket and guided Erik’s arm behind him, swinging his own over his head so that Erik’s limb now looped around his waist. Erik pulled him in closer and dropped a kiss to the back of Charles’ ear, the skin there warmer than usual against his lips as a result of the bottle of Beaujolais Nouveau they had shared earlier over dinner.

They strolled down the cobblestone streets, emptier now that most of the patrons and caricature artists had left, and Erik was vaguely aware of staff from the al fresco restaurants beginning the task of clearing the heat lamps and tables from the sidewalk as they passed by. All that seemed to fade into the mist with Charles pressed up against him, Erik’s focus centred solely on the steady sounds of Charles breathing in the night, and it was in quiet moments like these that Erik heard his thoughts best, thoughts that these days consisted of nothing but Charles, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that, if he listened closely enough, the voice inside his head was now unmistakably and irrefutably Charles. They continued on into the night, Erik still holding Charles’ hand in his, an irrational subconscious fear of him being spirited away in the fog.
“You’re doing it again.” Charles sounded amused as he huddled closer to Erik, who wasn’t quite sure what he was referring to.

“Doing what?”

“I call it ‘going off into Erik-land’, if you will,” Charles said, laughing as he winked at Erik. “You just get this distant look in your eyes sometimes, like you’re really lost in thought.”

“Oh.” Now Erik was laughing as well, squeezing closer against Charles so another couple could pass by them. “Does it make you feel better that Erik-land has a population of one, and it’s only you?”

“Strangely enough, yes.” Charles was chuckling as he rested his head on Erik’s shoulder. “So, tell me what I am doing there in Erik-land.”

Erik thought for a while, remembering Remy’s instructions to be as romantic as he wanted to be. In the end, he decided honesty was the best tack. “Erik-land was empty for a long time,” he finally said, aware that Charles had lifted his head and was staring at him. “I didn’t trust just anyone to let them in. But you came along and...I don’t know, it was so natural for me to let my guard down. By the time I wanted to let you in, I realised that you had been there all along.”

Charles stopped him in his tracks with a hand on his chest, staring intently at him. “You know I won’t be held responsible for ripping off your suit and jumping on you in public even if we both get arrested, right?”

Erik was laughing as he bent down to kiss Charles fondly, his hand running over the buttons of that sexy waistcoat. “Don’t worry, Emma and Raven will get us the best lawyers.”

“Thank god for the capable women in our lives.” Charles pressed one last kiss to his lips before they continued on their stroll. “You know, I want Raven to be as happy as I am.”

Erik snorted with amusement. “Is she still unaware that Hank is mooning over her? The other day, he was staring at her so much that he almost tripped over some wires and smashed a camera.”

Charles laughed, running a hand over Erik’s back. “You saw that as well? Though, knowing Hank, it very likely could have been a separate occasion. I’m sure Raven is aware, it’s just that Hank seems so petrified of going after her.”

“He really is Captain Oblivious,” Erik commented dryly.

Charles batted teasingly at Erik’s chest, still chuckling. “Oh you’re one to talk. There were days when I thought I could walk up to you and drop my pants to reveal ‘Property of Erik Lehnsherr’ tattooed across my arse, and you still wouldn’t have gotten the hint.”

“Where is this tattoo you speak of? Clearly I’ve not given your posterior a thorough enough examination.” Erik gave Charles’ ass a firm squeeze, grinning triumphantly when it earned him a startled yelp in return. He circled in front of him and bent his knees, grabbing Charles by the back of his thighs and lifting him up before pressing him against a nearby lamp post, Charles’ limbs instinctively wrapping tightly around him. Erik dropped his tone to that deep rumble he always used when he had Charles pressed into the mattress and squirming beneath him, sliding his hands to trace circles around the jut of Charles’ hipbones with his thumbs, “I think it’s bright enough over here, shall we take a look?”

“Erik…” Charles shuddered, his breath misting in the chill night air right before Erik kissed him soundly, and Erik did not miss the way he arched his back to rub himself against him. “Oh god, if
you don’t stop right now, we are going to spend the night in jail.”

“That won’t do, you’re too pretty to go to jail.” Erik smirked as he let Charles down reluctantly, hooking his fingers into his belt loops to pull their hips flush and teasing his lips apart, savouring the fruity taste of the Beaujolais Nouveau that still lingered on his tongue. A shiver ran down Erik’s spine when Charles dragged his teeth lightly on his bottom lip as he pulled away, the promise that they weren’t done yet lingering in the air.

Charles took hold of his hand, leading them down the steepening decline. “Anyway, before you deviously distracted me, I was thinking we should help Raven and Hank out, jumpstart things a little. Goodness knows they need it.”

Erik sighed fondly. “We’re meddling in their love lives now? Sometimes it worries me how much you’re like my mother. Okay, but not here, I’m enjoying spending time with you walking around Paris too much, perhaps at our next stop.”

Charles smiled delightedly as he kissed the back of his hand. “Splendid. I knew you’d come around.”

“Have I ever said ‘no’ to you?” Erik asked, feeling a little miffed at himself.

Charles spun around to face him, laughing as he walked backwards, pulling Erik along. “No, I don’t think you have. You spoil me, my darling. What did I ever do to deserve you?”

Erik grinned as he tugged on his hand, and Charles played along, falling into his waiting arms. He embraced Charles tightly, inhaling deep and losing himself a little in his scent, and feeling like it was really he that had been lucky. “Well, you’re not so bad yourself.”

He kept Charles bundled up in his arms as they made their way down Rue Lepic, stopping before one of the two remaining iconic windmills left on the hill, its blades stationary in the night. Standing beneath the old windmill next to Charles, Erik wished he had the power to get the once functional turbine back in motion, watch the blades spinning round their axis over and over again through some unseen force, and be moved by whatever it was that had inspired painters and poets all those centuries ago.

“I wonder what it must be like, having to stand still for eons and watch the world pass you by.” Erik draped an arm over Charles’ shoulders as he looked upon the unmoving structure, all cold stone and unyielding steel.

“At least it’s not alone; it’ll always have the other one right by its side.” Charles answered, indicating the accompanying windmill in the distance as his arms wrapped firmly around Erik’s waist, and Erik smiled into Charles’ hair as they carried on.

They curved left down Rue Lepic, past the fire engine red awning of the Café des 2 Moulins made famous by ‘Amélie’, doubling as a pub now that night had fallen, and Erik would have been tempted to suggest they make their way in if not for the crowd.

Charles chuckled beside him, squeezing his side under the coat. “Look at that, they placed her gnome on the bar. If we had one of those, I’d name him Gnomeo.”

“Charles, if you carried a gnome everywhere we went, I hope you understand if I destroyed it out of jealousy,” Erik replied wryly and Charles burst out laughing, still grinning when he planted a quick kiss to the corner of Erik’s mouth. Charles looped an arm around Erik’s, leaning against him as a cold gust of wind swept down the street from behind, pushing them along.
Erik could finally see the brightly lit windmill of the Moulin Rouge, its name written in red neon lights, beckoning them at the end of the road, and he was looking forward to heading indoors (or really just anywhere with central heating), perhaps even get a drink, and settle into a plush chair with Charles in his lap. He was just about to quicken his pace when Charles stepped in front of him with one hand pressed firmly to his chest, stopping him in his tracks, an eyebrow quirked up, his tell for when he was about to set one of his dastardly plans into motion.

Charles smiled wickedly as he trailed the back of his fingers up from where they were resting on Erik’s chest, his fingertips leaving small tremors in their wake as they slid slowly up his neck and along the side of his face, and Erik shivered when the warm pads of Charles’ fingers circled the shell of his ear before going back down to hook around the knot of his tie. The fabric loosened its hold around his neck as Charles pulled on it, but the way the thumb of Charles’ other hand was running along the crease of Erik’s thigh over his trousers was making it decidedly harder to breathe. Charles’ eyes flicked up from where they had been previously trained on his neck, gazing up at him through his long, dark lashes.

“Monsieur Lehnsherr,” Charles began, the tip of his tongue darting out to lick his lips tortuously slowly, and Erik could not pry his eyes away from the wet trail saliva lingering on his skin to save his life.

Charles slid Erik’s tie all the way off and ran a finger down the pulse of his throat before beginning to undo the top button of his collar, and Erik’s breath hitched when Charles pressed his warm body against his to suck and tongue at the tip of his earlobe, mouth scorching and wet on his chilled skin. Charles dragged the earlobe through his teeth as he pulled away to whisper hotly in his ear, fingers making their way south to pop another button, “Voulez-vous coucher avec moi, ce soir?”

Mein Gott, we really are going to jail. Erik let out a groan as he buried his hands in Charles’ hair, tugging at it to angle his head back for a dominating kiss, plundering his mouth with his tongue while Charles held on tightly to the collar of his shirt, moaning softly. Charles shifted then, pushing away and holding out his index finger, touching it to Erik’s lips.

Charles dragged Erik’s bottom lip as he trailed his finger down his chin, and Erik swallowed deeply as it went over the curve of his Adam’s apple before finally coming to rest on his chest. “How much are you willing to pay?” Charles asked, voice low and hoarse, tugging on the lapels of Erik’s suit, and Erik had to fight hard not to slam him against the nearest building and take him up against the wall.

He cleared his throat instead, hands stroking down Charles’ back to cradle the curve of his hips, his tone dark and dangerous. “I wouldn’t know. I’ve never been with a rentboy.”

“I’m sorry? Do I look like a rentboy to you?” Charles asked in mock indignation. He tossed his hair back, taking his time to tilt his head sideways to expose the smooth pale skin of his neck, marked by lovebites, before looking up at Erik seductively out of the corner of his eye. Charles twisted the ends of Erik’s tie around his hands, tossing the silk fabric over Erik’s head and pulling hard in one swift movement, using the tie as leverage to bring his face closer to Erik’s, voice sultry as it escaped his lips, “I’m a courtesan.”

Fuck. Erik always took pride in his remarkable self control, but Charles was leaving him at his wit’s end, and he could already feel himself half-hard against Charles’ thigh. Erik shut his eyes and bit back a whine as Charles rubbed that said limb teasingly on his groin, choking as he replied, “And I’m penniless, I can’t afford you.”

Charles let the end of the tie fall from his left hand, and Erik could feel the fabric dragging at his collar as Charles stepped back, pulling the necktie along. He picked the tie back up again, letting it
thread through his fingers as he looped it around the back of his neck before yanking at it with his left hand, so that his right hand rose up to his unbuttoned collar. He popped the next button as he bit down on his lip, pulling the shirt aside to expose his collarbone, and Erik wanted so much to mouth the skin there until it was red and swollen. Charles nodded slowly, “Very well. One night in the name of love.”

Erik lunged at him, nipping at his bottom lip as his hands grabbed at his face, devouring his sweet, perfect mouth when Charles threw his arms over his head to haul himself up with the necktie as his legs scrambled around Erik’s hips for purchase. Erik growled, gripping tightly at Charles’ ass to support his weight, almost falling over when Charles ground down on his cock and sent a spasm of pleasure down Erik’s thighs. Charles gasped out, his warm breath against his face driving Erik mad, and quietly murmured against his lips, “You’re going to be bad for business. I can tell.”

He took Charles’ lip into his mouth, sucking on it and savouring the delicious sounds his ministrations were coaxing out of Charles’ throat. He was about to make his way to Charles’ jaw when Charles started in his arms, and Erik was on the verge of asking what the matter was when he felt it as well, cold sprinkles of rain landing on the side of his face. Charles buried his face in Erik’s neck, laughing as he slid his way down now that Erik had dejectedly loosened his hold on his hips. Charles pressed two soothing kisses to the side of Erik’s neck as he slipped an arm around his waist, brushing back his own dampening hair with his other hand. “So much for that.”

Erik stared dumbly up at the sky for a moment, blinking as the icy rain hit his face, the cold pinpricks dragging his lust-clouded mind back to the here and now. Erik shook his head, laughing incredulously as he remarked, “I can’t believe we didn’t bring along an umbrella. We are such idiots.”

Erik hurriedly stripped off his jacket, holding it over their heads as Charles tucked himself next to him, and the two of them started sprinting down the empty street, skipping over the tiny rivulets that were forming in the cracks on the road. As the bone-chilling shower continued to mist his skin, it abruptly occurred to Erik that he would readily run to the ends of the Earth and back, so long as Charles was beside him. They were just metres away from the shelter of the Moulin Rouge when Charles slowed down, Erik dropping his speed to match his pace.

“Erik, stop,” Charles said, pulling on Erik’s shirt to hold him back. Erik halted, looking down at him quizzically. Charles slipped out from under him and into the falling rain, holding out his hands. “Let’s stay here.”

Erik’s gaped at him as he lowered his arms, hooking his fingers into the collar of his jacket and slingling it over his shoulder. “Charles, have you gone mad? We’re almost there.”

Charles smiled brightly, beckoning him with his fingers, “We’re already drenched, there’s no point going in.”

He surrendered, tossing his suit jacket to the ground and stepping forward to take Charles’ hands in his. Erik would not deny that Charles had a control over him that no one ever had before, and it would terrify him if not for that fact that he trusted Charles implicitly, a part of him knowing that he would even bring the world to its knees, or build a city with grains of sand, if only Charles asked. Erik pressed his forehead to Charles’, trying his best to use his body to shield him from the drizzle.

Charles guided Erik’s hands to the small of his back before wrapping his arms around his neck, stroking his hair as he said, “It never rains in L.A., this reminds me of good old England.”

“We should get inside, it’s freezing.” Erik kissed Charles’ forehead as he held him closer in a bid to keep him warm, tasting the rain on his skin.
Charles tiptoed up, lips brushing against the shell of Erik’s ear as he whispered, “No it’s not,” pausing to tap two fingers gently to Erik’s temple on the opposite side of his face, “it’s really all in the mind.”

Charles kissed him lovingly then, just the tips of their tongues meeting as they licked against each other gently, lips sliding smoothly along skin moistened by the rain. “Tonight was perfect,” Charles said quietly as his hands moved reverently down his neck, finding their way down his chest to wrap firmly around his torso. “I love you, Erik.”

“I love you, too,” Erik replied, meaning it completely, unconditionally. He was a fool to not have known from the start that, the moment Charles had come into the picture, the world as he knew it had been over. They stood there soaked to the bone, reflections shifting on the water’s surface as the rain landed softly on the street, and as he let himself be held tightly in Charles’ arms, he knew for sure that somewhere along the way, Charles Xavier had saved his life.

* * * * *

It had been Charles’ idea to stop by the modest little hotel just off Rue Lepic and get out of the rain, and maybe he was still unapologetically giddy and high on the romance of the entire date so far, but the thought of them ‘running’ away and making out in some cheap hotel room was incredibly exciting. As with anything else, it didn’t take long to persuade Erik, who was of course baffled at the thought of booking a new room while a perfectly nice - and luxurious - one waited for them back at the Four Seasons, but of course all it took was a smile and a ‘please?’ from Charles to make Erik nod, and in they went.

The clerk at the reception of Hotel Du Moulin did not even bat an eyelid at them, simply exchanging a few terse words in French with Erik before registering them under Erik’s go-to pseudonym (which was ‘Max Eisenhardt’). After they paid in cash, she emerged from the behind the counter with a sour look, trudging up the stairs as they trailed behind her. Charles was already shivering a little from the damp and cold, and he couldn’t wait to get out of his clothes and warm up. Erik must have seen him shivering, for he was drawing Charles closer and pressing a kiss to his temple, not at all giving a damn that the staff could have seen it.

“Just hang on,” Erik whispered to him and this time a shiver of a different kind ran through Charles at Erik’s warm breath against his ear. Since they didn’t have any luggage, the clerk simply handed the key to them, then walked off briskly without even bothering to show them the room.

“What marvellous, award-winning service,” Charles said with an eye-roll as Erik chuckled, pushing open the door. After being used to the elegant surroundings of their suite, the cheap, garish decor of the very modest room was a bit of a shock. Still, the sole queen-sized bed looked comfortable, and Charles bent over to push down on it experimentally, the springs groaning under his touch.

“Hang on a sec,” Erik said, striding into the room, and once again Charles couldn’t help admiring the way the damp, tailored suit clung to the lines of his body in all the right places, and Charles was a little embarrassed at the way his mouth was watering at the thought of running his hands all over those firm, toned muscles.

Erik flipped a switch behind the radiator, and it wasn’t long before warmth was flooding the room, making Charles sigh in relief. “Oh, that feels wonderful,” he murmured as he closed the door, then locked it. It really did feel like a mini-adventure, as though they were a couple who had been forbidden to be together and had to run away from prying eyes. Charles couldn’t stop smiling at the little fantasy they had acted out earlier by the Moulin Rouge, a little thrill running through him at the thought of continuing the ‘courtesan scenario’ with Erik.
“Are you all right?” Erik asked in concern, walking over to check on him. “You must be cold, you need a hot shower. You should take most of the blankets.”

“I’m fine,” he said to Erik, before turning to frown at the bed. “But we’re both poor, now that I’ve run away with you. I’m so sorry there is only one bed. It looks like we will have to share.”

Erik was now staring at him as though Charles had lost his mind. “Wait, what?”

Charles continued to keep a safe distance between them as he circled the bed, putting on his most regretful expression. “It is big enough for us to share without touching,” he said, running a finger down the bedpost and trying desperately not to laugh at Erik’s stunned, confused expression. “So I suggest we take turns drying our clothes. I promise I won’t look.”

Charles could tell the exact moment when the light went on in Erik’s head and he had cottoned on to what Charles was up to. Erik was shaking his head with a rather incredulous smile, but when he met his eyes, he looked just as serious as Charles. “Why no touching? I thought you were a...courtesan.”

Erik had stepped closer now, their bodies only inches apart, and Charles was drunk on the smell of him, of Erik’s enticing body heat.

“I don’t let clients touch me outside of work,” Charles said a little haughtily, his breath catching as Erik’s eyes travelled down his wet clothes. “So no touching unless I give my explicit permission.”

“Fine. I give you my word, no touching unless you ask me to.” Erik gave him a slow smirk, which pretty much promised that Charles would end up begging him before the end of the night. “Did you want to take a shower first? I’ll dry my clothes here.”

“If you don’t mind,” Charles said, and quite frankly he was amazed that Erik was agreeing to play along with his charade. Charles undid the buttons to his waistcoat, then unrolled his sleeves, more than aware of Erik’s hot gaze on him. When he looked up, Erik pretended to look away, and not for the first time Charles admired his underrated acting skills.

He stepped into the shower first, which was too small for the two of them to have shared anyway, letting the hot water warm his chilled skin. He would have much preferred for Erik to do that, of course, but if his silly plan worked, Erik would be doing more than just warming him up.

Wrapping himself in a large towel and nothing else, Charles emerged from the bathroom in a cloud of steam, and he could see Erik sitting up immediately, his hungry gaze devouring Charles from head to toe.

“Your turn,” Charles said politely as he remained in the doorway, not moving even when Erik approached him, nostrils flared as his eyes unapologetically raked over Charles, making him feel more naked than he already was.

Squeezing in through the doorway, Erik deliberately brushed every single part of his body against Charles as he made his way in, lips quirking up in a smirk as Charles bit his lip, the towel tightening around him. Erik didn’t bother closing the door all the way, and Charles started laying out his damp clothes over the radiator, listening to the shower running and Erik’s low humming. He couldn’t help grinning again, pleased at how Erik was playing along with his little fantasy, and he was already naked and waiting with the blankets drawn over himself when Erik emerged from the bathroom, towelling himself dry.

Erik seemed to be stuck in the doorway, breath hitching at the sight of Charles already naked under the sheets. “Oh.” He almost dropped his towel, but managed to hang onto it as he made his way to the other side of the bed. He continued towelling himself dry, deliberately bending over so Charles
got a free show, and by the time Erik crawled into bed, Charles’ breath was coming in short and shallow. He could feel the warmth radiating off Erik’s body, so close yet so far, and he could see Erik tucking his hands behind his head on the pillow, staring at the ceiling.

His hands were already itching to wander all over Erik’s warm, smooth skin, so Charles cleared his throat and moved on to the next stage in his silly little fantasy. “I’m still cold, are you?” Charles asked him, and Erik nodded.

“There’s a way to keep warm,” Erik said, his voice a little husky as his gaze remained fixed on Charles’ neck, where they both knew there was already a giant angry lovebite the exact size and shape of Erik’s mouth. “Since we have no spare clothes, we could stay warm with...shared body heat.”

Charles pretended to bite his lip coyly at this suggestion, which must have made Erik all hot and bothered as Charles could hear him rustling against the sheets. “If you don’t mind, then I suppose we have no choice.”

They edged closer, and Charles held back a moan as Erik slid his arms around his waist, so warm and familiar, pulling him closer so that their legs were tangled together, so close that they were almost sharing a breath.

Erik’s eyes were bright and luminous in the soft yellow light from the bedroom lamp they had not bothered to switch off, and Charles’ mouth went dry at the amount of emotion in them that even Erik couldn’t disguise.

“Well, we should go to bed....Erik.” Charles slowly leaned in, angling his head as though to kiss Erik, but just as Erik’s eyes fluttered shut, Charles whispered, “Goodnight,” and pulled away, unable to help the smallest of smiles at Erik’s growl of protest.

“Where do you think you’re going?” Erik’s voice was low and rough as Charles found himself rolled over onto his back, and Erik’s body was on top of his, his delicious weight pinning Charles to the bed, their hips and pelvises aligned perfectly. Charles was helpless to stop himself from arching up against Erik’s body, their mouths barely an inch apart. “You shouldn’t tease people like that.”

Charles licked his lips agonizingly slowly, and Erik’s gaze instantly dropped to Charles’ mouth, his pupils dark and blown. “I’m sorry,” Charles whispered against those open lips, and he could tell Erik was trembling with the struggle not to take his mouth there and then. “Erik, your lips...I just couldn’t resist.”

Erik’s head dropped down just a tiny bit more, so that their lips now brushed, their breaths hot and sweet. “I still can’t afford you.”

Charles slid his hands up Erik’s arms, admiring the smooth defined firm muscle before cradling Erik’s head in his hands. “And I agreed to one night in the name of love,” he murmured, before leaning up to press a kiss to Erik’s left eyelid. Erik let out a long, shivery breath that warmed Charles up like nothing else could, and Charles moved on to the right eyelid.

“You’re so gorgeous,” Charles continued as he bestowed a kiss onto the slope of Erik’s nose, his thumbs brushing up and down Erik’s sideburns, and he could feel Erik growing hard against his right thigh. “How can you expect me to turn you down?” he said with a soft sigh, letting the heel of his foot rub up and down Erik’s calf, and Erik made the sexiest, muffled noise that sounded like a bitten-back moan.

“Kiss me.” Erik’s command sounded ragged and broken, he was breathing so heavily that Charles
could hear nothing else, not even the patter of the rain against the window. “Don’t make me take that red, pretty mouth of yours without asking.”

Charles flashed Erik his naughtiest, flirtiest grin. “You should see what else this mouth can do.” His mouth left a trail of kisses to Erik’s ear, before whispering, “And you have.”

That seem to break something in Erik, who bent down and mouthed a line of kisses up Charles’ jawline before claiming his mouth in a sinful, dirty kiss that completely melted Charles’ brain. It was possessive, it was hot and the dominant way Erik’s tongue swept into his mouth, tasting every last inch of it, that unleashed something in Charles that was begging to be held down and fucked, very hard, by Erik.

Charles tried to tell him this, but Erik wouldn’t stop kissing him, and for a while Charles forgot what he wanted to say to Erik when he felt Erik’s hips move against his, their legs gloriously tangled. When he tried to place a hand on Erik’s chest, Erik growled and took that hand away, pinning it to the pillow above Charles’ head, and that was so insanely hot and dominant that Charles moaned into Erik’s mouth with eager approval. Erik was usually so gentle and considerate with him, and to see this primal, dominant side of Erik was like Christmas and his birthday rolled into one.

When Erik pulled away, Charles tried to chase after his mouth, but it was now Erik’s turn to deliberately deny him a kiss. “Tell me you want this,” Erik said, his grip tightening on Charles’ wrist. “Tell me you want me on top of you, like this, with your legs wrapped around my waist.”

Charles bit down on his lip, taking in the sight of Erik’s mussed hair hanging down over his flushed face, framing those intense blue-green eyes. “Erik, you can’t expect me to share a warm bed with you all night and keep my hands off you.” Charles’ hips rolled up of their own volition, and Erik made a soft, strangled noise in his throat, shifting against Charles amidst the rustling of sheets. “No.” Erik mouthed the word against his throat, before bending down further to nip at his collarbone, his mouth sucking on the very spot that made Charles see stars. “Do you know what you’re doing to me? Waiting for me in bed, naked under the sheets? You’re doing it on purpose.”

“Me? Tease you on purpose?” Charles huffed a laugh against Erik’s hair, sliding a hand down the curve of Erik’s spine before coming to rest on the luscious swell of his backside. “Now why would I want to do that? It’ll only rile you up and make you fuck me harder than ever before.”

Erik’s entire body stilled as he let out a desperate groan against Charles’ shoulder, his forehead warm and sweaty. Charles was a little worried if he had pushed his little fantasy too far, about to nudge Erik when he felt Erik’s warm, wet mouth latching onto his right nipple, making him arch up. “Oh god, Erik!”

“I’ve always wanted to do this,” Erik whispered between licks of his nipple, and Charles slid his hands into Erik’s hair, tugging him over to the other nipple and gasping in pleasure as Erik’s tongue flicked over the tight pink bud, wetting it and savouring the taste of Charles’ skin, just like how Charles was currently losing himself to the wicked sensations of Erik’s clever mouth.

“We need to stop, this isn’t right.” Charles knew his words were contradicting his actions, because he was running the sole of his foot up and down Erik’s leg, teasing him to madness, tugging on his hair like he couldn’t wait for Erik to fuck him. And thank god Erik wasn’t listening to what he was saying, giving his nipple one last lick before reaching up to pin Charles down to the bed again.

“You want me, I feel it in the desperate way you kiss me,” Erik declared, and this was punctuated with a roll of his hips against a quickly hardening Charles. “So you will stay here and I will fuck you so hard that we almost fall off the bed.”
Charles partially sat up on his elbows, breathing heavily as he shot a defiant look at Erik. “Make me.”

The sudden kiss took him by surprise, Erik’s teeth dragging on his bottom lip and sucking it into his mouth, and Charles couldn’t help the shameless, muffled moan that followed at the way Erik was just taking his mouth, his overwhelming kisses punctuated by little nips and bites. By the time Erik pulled away, Charles was sure that his mouth was redder than ever, and judging from the way Erik couldn’t stop staring at his lips, he knew he was right.

Erik licked at his own lips, which were moist and reddened, and Charles felt a surge of lust when he realised he was the one who had made them that way. “I’ll make you do a lot of things,” Erik promised him, placing a hand squarely on Charles’ chest and pushing him flat down on the mattress again, and he could see the corner of Erik’s lips curling up into a dangerous smile when Charles pretended to struggle under his grip. “I’ll make you come apart with my hands, my tongue, my cock-”

“Erik.” Charles was already panting shamelessly, hands clawing at the sheets as a slew of images ran through his head, particularly of Erik holding him down and fucking him mercilessly, the bed creaking with every thrust. “Erik, god, want you in me--”

“Be a good boy and hold still,” Erik murmured, his intense gaze raking over Charles, lingering on the red marks he had left all over his body the night before (and that morning). “I’ll make you feel good, make you come so hard that you’ll be wanking to this memory forever.”

“God, yes.” Charles arched his hips up at Erik a little impatiently, and Erik’s breath hitched as his hands expertly maneuvered Charles and rolled him over onto his belly. Charles went along, easy and pliant, eager to see what Erik would do with him being so submissive. He could feel Erik fitting a pillow under his hips, so Charles braced himself on his arms, his arse arched in the air at Erik’s mercy.

“Fucking hell, you’re so beautiful,” Erik growled, his warm, calloused hands running all over Charles’ bottom and squeezing the firm flesh. “You make me so hot, Charles.”

“Then do something about it.” Charles wiggled his bum a little, and that must have done the trick because he could feel Erik’s mouth on his skin now, hot and wet, trailing down one cheek and driving him mad. However, Erik didn’t seem to be stopping, and Charles wondered what he was up to. “Erik, what are you--”

“Shhhh.” Erik now sounded amused, leaving a trail of open-mouthed kisses that was slowly leading inwards. Charles was starting to tremble with anticipation, letting out a soft groan when Erik’s strong hands gripped him and further spread his legs apart, leaving him open and vulnerable to Erik. The unspoken trust and bond between the two of them had never been more apparent than this moment, Erik’s mouth just inches away from Charles’ most vulnerable, intimate spot. “Going to open you up with my tongue, with my mouth...”

“Oh god.” Charles gasped into the pillow, hands bunching up the sheets as he shamelessly thrust back against Erik’s questing mouth, despite his burgeoning hesitation. After all, they’d never done this before. “I don’t think--oh, Erik...”

“Trust me,” Erik murmured, before Charles felt his tongue flicking out and licking at his hole, smooth and wet and eager, and Charles momentarily forgot all sense of language as he panted into the pillow, giving himself up completely to Erik.

“Charles.” Erik’s voice was low, rich with arousal. “Still so open and slick from this morning, I can
feel you.”

“Ngh.” Charles shoved back into Erik’s hands and mouth, desperate for more of Erik’s tongue. “Inside me, please.”

Erik’s laugh was low and rough. “You belong to me,” he murmured, before his mouth resumed its trail of kisses, licking slowly and deliberately across Charles’ entrance, driving him crazy with his wet, smooth tongue.

And then-- “Erik, Erik, Erik--” Charles almost lost his mind when he felt Erik’s tongue slipping past the ring of muscle, determined to get inside him and drive him wild. Charles was rutting shamelessly against the pillow, hard and dripping pre-come on the pillowcase’s scratchy fabric, shoving back against Erik’s mouth. “Oh god, oh fuck--”

Erik’s only reaction was to grip tighter and spread Charles further apart, licking into him eagerly, making him all loose and wet, and Charles started trembling when he realised Erik was getting Charles ready for him, prepping Charles to get fucked long and hard after Erik was done eating him out. Charles let out an intelligible, helpless sound at that, closing his eyes and imagining how he must look like, sprawled out on the bed like this and held open, completely at the mercy of Erik’s hot, wet mouth.

As if that wasn’t enough, Erik’s hand was sliding between his stomach and the pillow, searching out and wrapping around Charles’ stiff cock, fisting him at the same rhythm of his tongue stabbing into Charles, and Charles grabbed onto the sides of the cheap headboard, completely surrendering himself to Erik who seemed determined to make Charles boneless with pleasure. There was nothing hotter than the thought that Erik cared more about Charles’ gratification than his own, and Charles arched his spine up, thrusting back against Erik as he spiraled up into blinding pleasure. “-rik, Erik, fuck me now,” he begged, his voice almost raw and hoarse.

Erik finally pulled his mouth off, pressing kisses to his bottom before hopping off the bed, and Charles was grateful for the few moments of respite to pull himself back from the edge of orgasm while Erik was rifling through his suit for a condom, and he heard Erik say, “Oh thank you, Remy, you resourceful fellow, you’re so getting a raise...” before the mattress dipped and Erik crawled back onto the bed again, pressing a row of kisses down Charles’ spine. “Charles, if only you could see yourself, all stretched out and open for me, all mine...”

“Mmmm.” Charles rubbed himself against Erik wantonly, enjoying the strangled groan that the action produced. “I believe I was promised a very hard and very thorough fucking.”

“That’s right.” Erik sounded soft and dangerous again, the dominance creeping back into his voice. “You’re not allowed to touch yourself, you can only come by fucking yourself on my cock.”

The gasp was out before Charles could stop himself, but he refrained from stroking himself like he was told to, determined to act every bit the good boy. Erik’s good boy. He could hear the rip of foil, then the snap of rubber as Erik sheathed himself. Another rip, and the slick sounds of Erik slathering lube on himself, making Charles hum with anticipation.

The anticipation, however, failed to prepare him for how utterly glorious it felt to have Erik spreading him open, then sinking into him slowly, inch by sweet inch, his breath stuttering with effort. “Oh Charles, oh my god--” Erik sounded like a broken man, and Charles himself was amazed at how slick and loose he was that Erik slid in almost immediately, buried deep in him.

“Erik--” Charles was panting heavily, grip tightening on the creaky headboard, writhing under Erik’s deliciously heavy body. “So good, so big...”
“You like it,” Erik mouthed against his ear, his breath hot and sweet, before dipping to kiss the juncture of his neck and shoulder. “Charles, sweet, beautiful, trusting Charles...”

Charles’ eyes watered as he squeezed them shut, overwhelmed from Erik’s words and the feeling of Erik’s thick cock inside him, and he desperately wished he was in a possible position to kiss the man senseless. “Move,” he hissed through his gritted teeth, his throbbing cock pressed against the pillow and just a few pulls on it would be enough to make him come. “Please, Erik, move...”

He felt Erik’s teeth sinking into his shoulder as Erik started thrusting, slowly at first, but Charles was so loose that his rhythm picked up quickly, Erik fucking him so hard that the cheap bed was creaking, no doubt annoying their neighbours (if they had any). Charles couldn’t bring himself to care, consumed only with the sensations of Erik pounding into him, teeth scraping his shoulder, his knees raw and sore as they slid forward on the sheets with each thrust.

“God, Erik, love you, fuck--” Charles was getting fucked into incoherence, letting slip the only words left in his vocabulary, and he moaned very softly when Erik’s thrusts started slowing down, Erik drawing out the long slide of his cock until only the tip remained inside Charles, then slowly slamming it home again.

“I love you,” Erik mouthed against his ear, and even though he couldn’t see Erik’s expression, he could hear the heartrending sincerity in Erik’s voice. “I love you, loveyou, love-- oh, Charles, Charles--”

“Unh, Erik.” Charles bowed his head, feeling Erik’s teeth nip at the curved line of his neck, his hair flopping into his eyes, damp with sweat. He could hear Erik’s erratic breathing and gasps, the slap of Erik’s hips against his, and then - suddenly - furious pounding on the wall. Erik immediately stilled his thrusts, and they both listened as their neighbour swore at them very colourfully in French, ending with a hearty, ‘Merde!’

“Jesus.” Erik was chuckling breathlessly, pressing a kiss to the sweaty nape of Charles’s neck. “We’d better keep it down.”

“Gag me,” Charles demanded, and he turned his head sideways when he felt Erik’s tight, obvious hesitance. “Get your tie, and gag me.”

He could feel Erik’s cock inside him twitch, and then Erik was pulling out and rummaging through his drying clothes like a madman. Charles was amused, although his eyes were drawn to the sleek curve of Erik’s bent-over arse, and the shadow of his heavy cock between his legs. Once Erik found the tie, he climbed back onto the bed and gripped Charles by the hair, his hold gentle but firm. “Open your mouth.”

Charles did.

The tie was made of dupioni silk, and it still bore the scent of Erik’s cologne, which made Charles ridiculously hot all over. He bit down on the smooth fabric, arching back against Erik impatiently, eager to get his cock back inside him. “Be still, or else I won’t fuck you,” Erik said sweetly, which made Charles groan around his makeshift gag. “Good boy.”

Charles could feel his mouth watering as Erik pressed the tip of his cock teasingly inside him again, driving him mad before finally, finally sliding in to the hilt, and Charles couldn’t stop the muffled moans any more than he could stop himself from loving Erik, and Erik had a possessive hand splayed on the small of Charles’ back, holding him down while he fucked him, his thrusts picking up speed. Erik was close, Charles could tell, his breath getting shallow, his grip on Charles getting tighter. “Oh, fuck, Charles--” And then Erik drove into him one last time, their hips glued together,
his hand dragging a line through the sweat on Charles’ back, holding him tight and perfectly still. Charles was shaking, mouth dry around the tie, so close to the edge of orgasm but remembering Erik’s command not to get himself off, but he needn’t have worried because Erik’s hand was fumbling for him now, pushing away the pillow, those long elegant fingers wrapping around his cock and stroking him firmly, a thumb brushing against the pearl of pre-come on the head. “Come on my hand, come on, want to feel you--” Erik was nosing against the shell of his ear, and Charles let out one long, stifled moan around his impromptu gag before spurting all over Erik’s hand and the garish hotel sheets, his legs trembling with the effort.

There was a pause as Charles fought to regain his breath and basic mental processes, and he could hear Erik getting up and walking to the bathroom, presumably to throw away the condom. There was the sound of running water, then the mattress dipped as Erik climbed on top of him again, and Charles could feel the soft, cool rub of cloth cleaning him up, Erik’s strokes mild and gentle.

“God.” Erik’s voice was shaky with laughter. “I think my brain is still somewhere on the floor.”

Charles let out a muffled reply, and he tried not to laugh as Erik reached over, pulling the tie out hastily. “Ah, that’s better.”

“You’re constantly full of surprises,” Erik said fondly, stroking back Charles’ hair. “First the courtesan thing, then the tie...every day with you is like my birthday.”

Charles laughed lazily. “You bring out the worst in me.”

Now Erik was leaning over him, kissing Charles’ shoulder. “And you bring out the best.”

* * * * *

Their driver had been very obliging when Charles had called him earlier requesting that he picked them up from outside the Hotel Du Moulin instead of the Four Seasons where they were being put up, merely offering them a knowing smile when they had entered the car, and for that he had Charles’ undying gratitude. However, that had turned out to be the only free pass they received that day. There had been a last minute change of plans as the rain was still pouring, and Darwin had informed him that they would be doing a studio shoot instead. Judging by the startled looks they had received the moment they had stepped into the studio, he and Erik must indeed appear just as bedraggled as he had thought. Charles shifted closed to him, placing a comforting hand on Erik’s back as they continued on, searching for Bryan to have their morning briefing.

“Jesus Christ!” came a shriek that was most positively from Raven, along with the familiar sound of heels clicking against marble floor as she hustled over. Charles sighed long and hard. Might as well get this over with.

“Good morning, my dear,” Charles greeted as he placed a kiss in her hair, wondering just how terrible his own bedhead must look.

“Oh no, you’re not charming your way out of this one. What the fuck? You two look like you were rode hard and put out wet.” Raven squirmed away, making a show of dusting off her sullied clothes for added measure.

“That...would actually be not too far from the truth.” Erik answered, grinning brightly, and Charles was starting to feel the beginnings of a blush creeping across his own cheeks.

Raven wailed, covering her ears with her hands. “I’m going to need brain bleach for that! And that still doesn’t really explain why you two showed up looking like this.”
Charles shifted uncomfortably on his feet, suddenly finding the floor extremely fascinating. “We couldn’t get out of bed in time to go back for a change of clothes. In my defence, that was entirely Erik’s fault.”

“Was it, now?” Erik commented with a smirk as he looked over, and Charles could not help the guilty smile that broke out across his face, which promptly earned the both of them a much exaggerated eye roll from Raven.

Charles was about to reply when he heard a loud gasp from behind, and was soon in the presence of a rather distraught Frenchman. “Mon dieu! That was Christian Dior!” Remy exclaimed as he took in the sorry state of Erik’s attire, horribly wrinkled by the rain. Erik merely shrugged innocently, and Charles bit his lip in an attempt to not break down in hysterics at the look on Remy’s face as he fussed over the jacket, vest and tie that he had grabbed from where they had been slung over Erik’s arm.

Remy sighed as he slumped his shoulders, though he brightened up when he turned to face Charles. “Bonjour, cher,” Remy greeted as he bowed slightly, flashing a very dashing grin, “I hope last night was good?”

“Oh yes, the restaurant was excellent. Thank you for the recommendation.” Charles smiled sincerely as he patted Remy’s arm. They truly did owe him for the wonderful evening, and Charles made a mental note to find a way to repay him someday.

Remy beamed in return, waving it off. “It was my pleasure.”

“Sorry to break this up, but Bryan wants the both of you on set as soon as possible,” Raven interjected, locking her arm around Charles’ as she led the way.

Charles surveyed the floor as he kept pace, frowning a little when he noticed that there were a lot more people loitering around the set than usual, many of whom he did not recognise, staring at them as they strode by. “Is it me or are there more people here today?” Charles asked, wondering if he was just being more sensitive to gawkers since they were quite literally taking their walk of shame.

It seemed it was Raven’s turn to be highly amused. She giggled, squeezing his arm tightly to her side. “Didn’t you know? You’re doing the love scene today. They’re here to watch.”

“What?” Charles exclaimed, stopping dead in his tracks with Erik doing the same, looking back at him sheepishly. “We’re doing it now? No, we are not going to meet Bryan. We need to see Angel, immediately.”

“Why?” Raven asked, before the realisation finally dawned on her. “Oh, oh.”

They turned tail, heading for the makeup department instead. Angel was seated on one of the dressing tables when they arrived, smiling to herself as she checked her phone, the intricate tattoos on her back reflected in the vanity mirror. She looked up when they entered, taking a moment to blink at them in stunned silence before hopping off the table. “Christ on a cracker...”

“I know, right? Charles here says he needs you to work your magic on him.” Raven supplied as she shoved him over.

Angel raised a knowing eyebrow, holding back a laugh as she shook her head, “Get changed into a robe and let us see exactly how much damage Erik did.”

Erik shot Angel a smug, predatory grin at that, and Charles was rather ashamed to admit that he was torn between wanting to crawl into a hole to die and jumping Erik’s bones. Charles stripped quickly
in the dressing room, emerging in a plush cotton robe and sitting down in front of the vanity mirror next to Angel, who was looking at him expectantly. He sighed heavily, letting the robe fall off his shoulders and pool around his waist.

“Sweet mother of god!” Raven yelled as she took in the bitemarks all over his body, the fresh ones on his shoulder from last night still red and angry against his porcelain skin, with a scattering of fading ones lingering on his collarbones and the juts of his hipbones. Out of the corner of his eye, Charles could see Remy stifling his laughter into the back of his fist before giving Erik a congratulatory pat on the back, the latter nodding his head and smirking proudly in response.

Angel snorted before breaking into full on giggles, fluffing up Charles’ hair as she ran her hand through it. “I’m sure we can get Erik’s dental records from these,” she joked as Charles buried his face in his hands, wondering if he was going to be the first person ever to actually die from mortification.

Charles looked up as Erik stalked over, resting his hand on his shoulder as he stood close to his side. “That’s enough staring, now can you fix this or not?” Erik asked as Charles gave him a grateful look through the mirror. Erik rubbed his thumb in soothing circles over the raw skin on his shoulder which caused Charles to shudder inwardly, and he had to admit that it did feel good, being so completely claimed by Erik for the world to see.

“Of course I can, now stand back and let me do my job.” Angel instructed, chasing Erik away by fluttering her hands in the air.

Charles placed his palm over the back of Erik’s hand just as he remembered, stopping him from leaving. “Actually, Erik should stay,” Charles said as he exchanged a look with him, “he needs you to work on him as well.”

“Oh…right.” Erik stated calmly as he began unbuttoning his shirt, pulling it off and leaving it on Charles’ chair to display the shallow ligature marks around the back of his neck, the result of Charles’ little role-play with the tie.

“Fucking hell. Were you two having sex or trying to kill each other?” Raven exclaimed as Erik smirked, that smug bastard. “Please tell me your sexcapades aren’t the reason Erik’s always in turtlenecks.”

Charles was about to vehemently deny that when they were interrupted by a knock on the door and turned in time to see Sean pop his head in, “Guys, Bryan would--” Sean stopped mid-sentence as he took in their half-dressed states, entering the room to circle around them, his eyes trailing over their exposed skin as if cataloging the bruises. Sean whistled loudly when he was done and exchanged a fist bump with Erik, clearly impressed with his handiwork.

“I would be eternally grateful if the ground would please just open up and swallow me whole,” Charles lamented as the rest of the room laughed at his expense.

Angel placed her hands on her hips after a while, clearly the only professional in the room at that moment. “You cats know it’ll take double for both, right?” She let out a fond sigh before continuing, “Raven, help me with Erik. Sean, tell Bryan to go out for coffee, this will take a while.”

They did as instructed and Erik settled down in a chair beside Charles, gently tapping the side of his jaw with the back of his knuckles and receiving an exasperated smile in return. They were still engaged in a wordless conversation with each other, all fond looks and quiet smiles, when Remy swung by holding Charles’ discarded clothes in his arms, picking Erik’s shirt from the back of Charles’ chair in the process as he announced enthusiastically, “I will send these for cleaning and
have fresh clothes delivered to your trailers.”

“Thank you, Remy. You’re a lifesaver,” Charles said gratefully.

Remy bowed with a flourish, giving Erik a two-fingered salute as he turned to leave, and Charles heard Angel call across the room as he sauntered out the door, “Stop by Sephora while you’re at it. We’re going to need all the concealer we can get.”

* * * * *

Shooting a sex scene in any movie was, in Erik’s experience, an awkward and stressful production all around. It was as far from the real thing as anything involving nudity could get, and yet they had to make the viewers believe that it was real. Half the work usually lay in the rest of the movie: establishing a sense of chemistry between the characters involved, building in the sexual tension, getting the viewer interested in the relationship.

But, at some point, the clothes had to come off and the talent needed to do the hump fandango. Erik had, by now, established a plan of attack: get the other person comfortable, determine boundaries, do the scene in as few takes as possible, follow the path of least mortification. His prep chat with his various female on-screen partners over the years tended to go along the lines of, "Do you mind if I touch your breasts? Do you not want me to do that? Can I kiss your breasts? What lines do you have that you don’t want me to cross?"

He had a strong feeling that a sex scene with Charles was going to go a little bit differently.

A tiny remnant of professionalism had him asking, “Are there any lines you don’t want me to cross?” anyway.

Charles gave him a look. Erik felt his face heat and quickly added, “I meant on camera.” Several feet away, Raven let out a strangled noise and pointedly crossed to the other side of the set.

Erik liked to think that he was growing rather fluent in reading Charles. The expression on Charles’ face now suggested to Erik, in unabashedly suggestive terms, that he might be in trouble. “I think you have more lines than me, darling.” It took conscious effort to stand his ground when Charles stepped closer. “I’m willing to wager,” said Charles in a low voice, “that you will back off long before I do.”

The scene began in the shared hotel room, courtesy of Interpol, of Erik and Charles’ characters. Both men looked tired, worn out, and the rumble of rain was audible through the old walls. There was a new tension between them. It’d been there since they figured out the link between the murder victims.

“James,” Erik started. The other man looked up. There was a lost look to his wide blue eyes, and Erik hesitated, his character forgetting what he’d wanted to say.

And then, almost like magic, Charles was right in front of him, deliberately in his space. Erik felt his body - sadly conditioned to associate certain outcomes with Charles’ presence - starting to lean forward. He had to dig his nails into his palm to stop himself. Fortunately, his character was supposed to have been resisting James McAvoy all this time. Erik had to admire Michael Fassbender’s fortitude.

“I want you,” Charles hissed through gritted teeth. Plainly, boldly. Erik’s hands moved, without prompting from his brain, and gripped Charles by the arms. Charles’ face was beautifully expressive, and there was lust there, but something else, too. It looked like fear.
“James?” whispered Erik, a question this time.

“It’s... You always know that there are people who would-” he waved towards the desk in the corner, where all their case files and assorted evidence and Ariadne’s sketchbook lay, “- people like us. It’s not a nice world, for you and me.”

“Or anyone, I should think,” murmured Erik. McAvoy tended to be the steady one, the personable half of their partnership, so it felt fitting that Fassbender would be the anchor now, the calm in the storm.

Fingers grabbed at the back of his neck, scratching him - and damn it, he sincerely hoped Charles hadn’t taken that dare business seriously, because even those brief lines of pain had his cock twitching inside his trousers - and Charles’ mouth was on him. Familiar, by now, but also somewhat shocking, because there were cameras right there, a full crew along one wall of the bedroom set.

He’d known, he’d known, that lines were going to blur here, that the wall between what was wanted on-camera and what needed to be off-camera would be temporarily transparent. But actually doing it felt nothing like what he’d expected.

Also, fuck, there was a chance that he had a burgeoning exhibitionist streak.

Charles walked backwards, breaking off a few times to hiss, “want you, need you so bad right now,” while tugging him towards the bed. This being not a wholly unfamiliar maneuver, something about it felt... off, or strange. It wasn’t until the first rush of excitement and arousal was past that Erik realized why - Charles was angling them towards the cameras.

Erik found it easier to concentrate after that. There was still a wall, it seemed, between personal and work. It was in all the little differences; for example, James didn’t kiss as deeply as Charles did, probably because, as much as Erik enjoyed sharing spit with Charles, he’d been told that they looked like they were trying to eat one another’s face.

They hit the edge of the bed, and Erik followed Charles down, happily covering Charles’ body with his own.

“CUT!” shouted Bryan. “All right, a couple more takes of that before the costume change. It was good, but I think you two can tighten up your delivery even more. Really bring the emotion into it.”

By the sixth take, Erik and Charles looked as haggard as their characters were supposed to be. Erik loped off for the ‘costume change’ - which, in fact, involved taking off his costume, putting on the cock sock, and coming back out in nothing but a robe - and hoped that the next part would be easier.

It wasn’t.

Don’t get hard, don’t get hard, Erik mentally chanted as he settled into place between Charles’ legs. Charles, at least, seemed to be in similar straits, face stern with concentration and not quite meeting Erik’s eyes. Erik’s dick, however, seemed to recognize the sweet little nook of heated skin it was nestled against and wanted to wave hello.

He saw Angel approaching the bed with a spray bottle. “Try not to sweat all over my hard work, boys,” she told them, right before she sprayed them with a mixture of rosewater and glycerin; evidently, fake sweat was acceptable. Another member of the crew tugged the sheets over so it draped artfully over Erik’s ass, leaving one leg uncovered and a sliver of his hip peeking out.

Charles took a couple of deep breaths, and shared a reassuring smile with Erik. He was careful not to move anything that was touching Erik below the waist, which Erik was grateful for. Erik saw those
blue eyes glance out towards the camera and lights.

“Is it just me,” whispered Charles, “or is there an unusual number of people in here? For a closed set?”

“Just remember,” Bryan called out, preventing Erik from looking over his shoulder and glaring at the cheerful lechers that were the film crew. “Fassbender and McAvoy have just realized that they’re dealing with hate crimes, the kind that they could be subjected to one day. They’re unsure, don’t know if they’re doing the right thing, but the passion wins out!”

Erik resisted the urge to roll his eyes. Charles adjusted his legs, until Erik’s hips were between his thighs. Under the sheets, Erik felt his dick brushing against Charles’ balls, and swallowed a whimper. The cock sock might as well be a condom, for all the good it did in keeping the skin of their intimate parts from touching.

“ACTION!”

Erik rolled his hips, simulating a hard thrust. Charles gasped, jaw going slack as if Erik was entering him, hands gripping Erik’s arms in a way that seemed undecided on whether to keep him at a distance or pull him closer. Their lips met, clumsy, wet.

“James,” whispered Erik, reverent. Somewhere, his old acting coach must be feeling a grave chill, because this wasn’t acting, this wasn’t acting at all. “I didn’t... this is...”

“We shouldn’t do this. Oh God, I know we shouldn’t,” mumbled Charles, mouthing at Erik’s jaw. “S a really bad idea.” He pushed his tongue into Erik’s mouth.

“The very worst,” Erik agreed, pinning Charles’ arms up on the bed. “We’ll get into trouble, if we’re found out.”

“So much trouble,” Charles moaned. “God, do you know how hard it’s been to work beside you every fucking day, trying to act professional?”

“I’ve wanted to kiss you,” admitted Erik. “Your mouth, James-”

He was overridden by Charles chanting, “yes, yes, please Michael, I want this, I want you - I don’t care anymore” and pulling Erik down for a crazed, drunk-like tangling of tongues.

Erik kept moving, thrusting, trying not to rub his dick against Charles’ skin too much but failing spectacularly. His own hands were skittering up and down Charles’ body. He kept going for the areas where Charles was the most sensitive, or loved being touched in, and remembering halfway through the movement that he wasn’t supposed to be getting Charles worked up. He hoped that, to the camera, it just looked like a new lover being unsure and desperate.

He’d never been able to forget the cameras before, had never gotten a role that was deep enough for him to completely sink himself into the mind of the character. And then there were the lights and the crew and the inherent awkwardness of being in this position with a relative stranger. But Charles was so very much not a stranger, Erik probably knew his body better than his own at this point, and if the unavoidable friction wasn’t bad enough, the sounds that were coming out of Charles, plus the smell and heat of him, overcame Erik’s best efforts to the contrary, and had him aching and his cock filling under the sheets, until he was hard enough to pound through walls.

A low, shocked sound escaped Charles, and his body tensed under Erik, a gorgeous arch of tension. The pretend orgasm was far more controlled than the real thing. Charles kept his eyes open, maintaining eye contact with Erik. Erik groaned out his own fake climax, and sought Charles’ lips
for a last deep kiss before collapsing on top of him.

There was a heavy silence in the set for several seconds, like the aftershock of a lightning strike, and then Bryan called out “CUT”.

The faint hum of conversation sprang up once the cameras and lights and other technical parts of the shoot were being checked and adjusted and carted about. Erik distinctly heard a female voice saying, “damn, if that’s them faking it...” and another responding, “I think I need a change of panties.” He caught Charles’ gaze, and the both of them started laughing.

Charles was flushed for real, sweating for real, and now Erik wanted to cover him up. He’d known, going in, that he’d have to share Charles with, oh, the rest of the world; as far as Erik was concerned, they’re welcome to his public persona, and the fruits of his acting. The real bits, though - they were Erik’s, and only Erik’s.

Erik sucked in a breath when he felt Charles shifting. It was a bit of a relief to feel that Charles wasn’t entirely unaffected, either. “It’s probably a good thing we didn’t formally enter into the dare,” said Charles with a grin and a huff. He winced. “Ah. We might have to consider, well, a bit of lubrication, if we’re doing a lot more takes of this, as I imagine it will start to chafe.”

Bryan appeared on one side of the bed, presumably having finished checking the cameras. “Good work, guys, great effort. We’ll do at least a couple more takes...”

Erik groaned, his head dropping down to nuzzle Charles’ neck. Charles laughed, shaking him a little, and Charles’ hand came up to pat him on the back. “There, there,” said Charles, wearing the grin of a man who basically just had to lie back and think of England, instead of doing any actual work.

“I’ll have you know that all the moaning and groaning is quite taxing,” said Charles, making Erik realize he might have said a bit of that aloud. “I should look into becoming a phone sex operator, for when I start losing my figure.”

Erik was glaring at the suggestion, instinctively possessive, before he even thought about it. Though it would be hot, to record Charles’ real sex noises so he could listen to them whenever he wanted--

“Down, boy,” murmured Charles, his thigh nudging Erik’s increasingly hardening cock. Erik swore under his breath, convinced that this was it, he was going to die of blue balls, a martyr to his art, he was going to meet his maker clad in only a cock sock.

“... try to make it a bit harder, maybe angrier, really put some teeth into it...”

Erik took Bryan at his word and scraped his teeth over the pale line of Charles’ neck on the next take, and was sure that he could feel Angel attempting to skewer him with her glare from the other side of the lights. Charles retaliated by shoving his hand under the sheets covering Erik’s lower back, vengefully squeezing one buttock.

After the third take, Charles had to request some lube, which incited a round of catcalling from the crew. Erik glared and Charles reddened, but the stress of the shooting must have been taking its toll on everyone, too, because by the fifth take, people were shouting suggestions at them.

“Slap him around a bit!”

“Roll him over and ride him!”

Bryan didn’t bother stopping them, so Erik figured this take was probably down the drain anyway.
Charles seemed to reach the same conclusion. He grinned up at Erik and said, in a loud, faux-feminine voice, “oh, you’re so big, Michael, give it to me hard.”

“Charles,” hissed Erik, because Charles had started wiggling and undulating in ways that he hadn’t known Charles was capable of, and it was rubbing parts of Charles - well heated and lubed parts - against his dick and balls, over and over.

He felt a flash of admiration for Darwin, who must have dealt with Charles in a vindictive mood before, when Charles’ eyes gleamed with mischief and a pair of hands yanked Erik down. Erik’s tired arms nearly gave way, catching himself before he headbutted Charles, and that sinful sex-telephone-operator voice was panting right into his ear. “Are you thinking about it, Erik? Taking me right in front of all these people? On camera? Sliding inside me for real, making me moan and beg for real? No one would be able to tell. We’re actors, right?”

To Erik’s horror, he could feel Charles’ thigh moving against him, the lube and their own sweat making everything slippery, and - “no, Charles, don’t you dare,” hissed Erik when he could feel his cock sock beginning to slip off.

The touch of Charles’ thigh, smooth and soft, against the bared skin at the base of his cock, had Erik swallowing groans of relief, though his hands grabbed at the sheets in frustration. It didn’t help that Charles smelled like Charles now, no longer the foundation or powder or rosewater that had been applied on them, but sweat and musk, exactly like Charles-during-sex. He really couldn’t blame his body for being a bit confused.

He was about to get up, halt proceedings, fuck the voyeurs pretending to be professionals, but then the world spun, literally, and he was suddenly flat on his back, looking blankly up at Charles.

The crew was outright hollering now but they were easier to ignore, like this, when Charles was looming over him and blocking out the rest of the world, blue-eyed and beautiful and a little terrifying. “Got you exactly where I want you,” whispered Charles brightly.

Charles began to move, lifting himself up and then down, as if he were riding Erik’s cock. He’d somehow brought the sheets with him, so that Erik was covered from the waist to his knees, and most of the fabric was pooled around Charles lap. Erik could tell that Charles was hard now, too, which made him feel a little bit better.

But Charles also continued his campaign of removing Erik’s cock sock. Erik found Charles’ thighs under the sheet and dug his fingernails in, warningly. Charles just smirked and moaned, loud and hitched, exactly the way he would if they were doing this for real, and a part of Erik’s brain skittered away with thoughts of Charles enjoying Erik’s bruising hold on him and this blatant exhibitionism.

Pleasure flared and sizzled under his skin with every brush of his cock - now partially free of its sock, thanks to Charles’ efforts - over Charles’ ass. He didn’t know how much longer he could contain himself. And he wouldn’t put it past Charles to be able to somehow manipulate his glute muscles into pulling the sock all the way off; the man’s ass was magic, after all.

And then, just when he was burning with the prospect, feeling the first licks of the impending shame at coming in front of lights, camera, and crew, Charles stopped. He didn’t quite sit, just held himself over Erik’s groin, ass lightly touching Erik’s cock but at least no longer rubbing.

“Well,” said Charles, noticeably breathless, “this is quite a bit of work, isn’t it?”

“I hate you,” grumbled Erik, grabbing a set pillow and attempting to smother himself with it. “I hate you, and the moment we are both alone, I’m going to ream your ass so hard, you won’t be able to
walk for a week.”

“Cut! I think we have everything we need.” Bryan called out, but he was smiling. “You guys know the boom is picking up everything you’re saying, right?”

“Oh fuck me,” Erik said with a mortified sigh, but it was hard to stay embarrassed when an incredibly amused Charles was doubled over with laughter, hands resting on Erik’s chest to support himself, and Erik couldn’t help gradually smiling.

After all, he had just survived filming an actual sex scene with Charles Xavier.

* * * * *

“You two old farts need to hurry up!” Raven called from up ahead, hitting the button for the elevator as she waited for them. Charles laughed, holding Erik tighter as they quickened their pace. They were on the tail end of their stay in Paris, and Charles could not help but agree that it truly was a city for lovers. He felt closer to Erik than ever before, the two of them growing more entwined with each passing second, and every day brought with it a new opportunity to fall in love all over again. Charles tiptoed as he brushed his lips against the back of Erik’s ear while they waited for the elevator, Erik smiling softly as he kissed his hairline.

They entered the elevator when it arrived and Raven hit the floor for the offices of French GQ, the doors opening to the mild chaos of the magazine’s bullpen when they reached the floor. However, everything seemed to grind to a halt as he and Erik stepped out, the staff looking up from their monitors as they walked by. Charles offered them a polite wave, his other hand grasping Erik’s as Raven led them to the meeting room.

“Bonjour! We’re so glad the both of you agreed to come,” one of the GQ staff greeted as he and Erik sat down on the leather sofa, her French accent slightly thicker than Remy’s but still easily understandable.

“Bonjour!” Charles replied, continuing as one of the lines Erik had recently taught him popped into his head, “J’ai eu les jambes en l’air toute la journée.”

The entire staff burst out laughing at that and did not stop until most of them had gone red in the face. Charles stared at them wide-eyed, a feeling of dread creeping up his spine. “What? What did I say?” he asked hesitantly.

The interviewer he had been addressing recovered enough to reply, wheezing a little as she answered, “You said that you’ve had your legs up in the air all day.”

“Erik! You told me it meant ‘you look stunning today’.” Charles groaned as he buried his now scarlet face in his hands. “I am so, so sorry.”

“I didn’t think you were going to use it in an interview,” Erik answered, fighting back his laughter as he rubbed Charles’ thigh.

“Oh god, what other inappropriate lines have I been spouting all this time?” Charles asked, raising his hand when Erik tried to speak, “No, wait, please don’t answer that.”

Erik grinned brightly as he dropped a kiss in Charles’ hair and Charles sighed, leaning back and resting an arm behind Erik across the top of the sofa, “Shall we begin?”
Remy had worked in a lot of jobs before, but so far, being a personal assistant to such a big celebrity was a whole new bag of tricks. It was a good thing that he was always able to think on his feet, because Erik was constantly throwing new challenges at him. But Remy had figured out right from the start that the person he needed to work on was not Erik, but Charles, and it was a gamble that had paid off handsomely. Charles adored him, and as a result, Erik seemed less likely to stuff him into a suitcase and send him back to Toulouse.

Still, it was a huge surprise when Erik came into the green room one day, holding a stack of papers and a leather planner, looking for someone. “There you are,” he said, gruffly handing the startled Remy the papers. “I need you to fill these in for your work visa application.”

“Work visa?” Remy’s eyebrows jumped up. He had already been keeping an eye out for more gigs after this Paris assignment. “What work visa?”

Erik gave him a withering look. “You need a work visa to be employed in the U.S., you pretty-boy moron.”

“The U.S.?” Remy echoed, blinking down at the papers. Now Erik was handing over a leather-bound planner to him, and Remy found himself frowning down at Erik’s packed schedule for the next few weeks.
"I just need you to make sure my appointments don't clash," Erik reminded him, as Remy's frown deepened. "Also, always check with me if the appointments are not vetted first by Emma."

"Oui," Remy said a little doubtfully. "But I think it would be easier if you had a 'Yes' list and a 'No' list."

Despite himself, Erik seemed intrigued. "What's that?"

"Put a few people on your 'Yes' list so I know they always get access," Remy said. "And everyone else on your 'No' list so I don't waste your time."

"Fair enough." Erik didn't take long to think about it. "These people will always be on my 'Yes' list: Charles, my parents, Emma. That's it."

Remy arched an eyebrow at him. "I see Charles gets 100% access to everything." Now he was grinning wolfishly at Erik. "Nicely done, mon ami."

"Uh, all right." Erik's face was now a little flushed, but he was also smiling as though he had just won the biggest, best, most important lottery in the world. "In case of medical stuff, you can call him as well."

"He's your emergency contact?" Remy asked, fishing a pen out of the coat of his leather jacket.

"Yes, and I am his. If anything happens to me, he's the one you should go to," Erik said. "Even if you need to make life or death decisions."

Remy whistled. "Très serious. I like it." He flashed Erik a sunny grin before writing down the information in his planner.

“No, this is a lifelong thing so nothing changes,” Erik said very patiently, as though he were explaining this to a complete idiot. “If there are any questions, I'll be in my trailer.”

Erik was already halfway to the door when a light went on in Remy’s head, and he yelled out, “Wait, so I’m hired?"

“Don’t make me regret it!” Erik shouted back before he left, leaving a triumphant Remy to pump his fist in the air.

* * * * *
**Notes:**

1. The title of this chapter is from the French movie of the same name.
2. Charles’ [Louis Vuitton condoms](https://www.louisvuitton.com/) are kind of a fandom meme.
3. The security guards were probably singing ‘Louie Louie’ [like this](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dCk58fZzKoI).
5. GPOY for [Remy getting Erik ready for date night](https://www.pinterest.com/pin/780287803860129515/).
7. [Beaujolais Nouveau](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beaujolais_Nouveau) is a festive red wine that goes on sale in Paris on the third Thursday of November.  
8. Charles and Erik’s [walking route](https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Charles/Xavier) after dinner, complete with a map and pictures.  
10. The lines Charles used during his courtesan role-play are quotes from ‘Moulin Rouge!’.
11. [Hotel Du Moulin](https://www.pinterest.com/pin/780287803860784024/) is a two-star hotel close to the Moulin Rouge.  
12. Michael Fassbender on [simulating sex](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1232498/).
It’s Not up to You to Save Me

Chapter Summary

Charles and Erik are sad to leave the romance and glamour of Paris as the entire production moves to the Canary Islands, and Charles comes up with a plan to matchmake Hank and Raven.

Chapter Notes

This is going to be a double-chapter update, we will have the next chapter up in a couple of days. Thanks to xsilverdreamsx for the graphic!

Soundtrack: Charlene Soraia - ‘Wherever You Will Go’

It had been a long night, and Erik was tired of looking at documents. In front of him, there was yet another stack of unread folders, all filled with info that may - or may not - have devious links to their case. Beside him, Charles was resting his head on the table, having claimed that he wanted to ‘rest his eyes’ for only a few minutes. That had been half an hour ago, and now Erik could hear soft snores emanating from Charles' direction. Chuckling under his breath, Erik found himself reaching out and brushing back a lock of Charles' floppy hair. Things had been a little strange between them since they kissed, as though they were walking on eggshells around each other and the case, both waiting for the other to make the first move.

Erik continued to run his fingers through Charles' hair, stopping when he felt Charles stirring awake. "Oh, sorry," Charles murmured, cheeks turning a little pink when he realised he had fallen asleep. Charles looked around their makeshift office in the Parisian hotel room. "How long was I out?"

Erik started to withdraw his hand, but he was surprised when Charles quickly caught it, stroking the back of Erik's hand with his thumb. "Uh, not long. Half an hour, perhaps. Why don't you go and take a nap?"

Charles sighed, shaking his head and releasing Erik's hand. "No, you look wrecked as well. Let's just do this so we can get some proper sleep."

They shuffled through the documents again, and every so often, Erik couldn't help throwing Charles a lingering glance. He forced himself to focus on the case, though, and was about to dig into a new folder when Charles made a soft noise of surprise. "Michael, look at this."

Erik leaned over his partner's shoulder, frowning down at the open file. There was a grainy black and white security camera photo of a stocky man hurriedly leaving the cafe where Ariadne had been seen, squinting at something in the distance. Although it was black and white, Erik could see that the man's hair was light enough to be blonde. "James, you think this is--" Erik raised his eyebrows at
Charles, who nodded grimly.

"I think this is our man."

They continued to work through the night and the morning, finding out more about their mysterious suspect and why he was interested in Ariadne. Erik remembered what the barista in the cafe had said about Ariadne and the gay rights protest at Notre Dame. He picked up one of the folders on Yusuf, a previous murder victim. Just as he had suspected, Yusuf had been arrested for selling drugs at the Stonewall Inn, situated in the Greenwich Village neighbourhood of New York City and where gay rights protests between the New York City police and rioters had occurred several months ago, not long before the murders first started. Maybe Erik was being hypersensitive due to his own recently questioned sexuality, but his finely honed detective's instincts were telling him to probe further. He held out the folder to Charles, beckoning for him to take a look. "James, do you think all of this is connected to Stonewall?"

Charles frowned down at the folder, then bit his lip. Erik tried not to stare, and Charles finally picked up the phone and made a call, speaking into the mouthpiece after a few short moments, "Oliver, can you run a background check on all the arresting officers at Stonewall?"

Oliver sounded perplexed. "All right, I hope you guys aren't wasting valuable FBI resources on this."

Charles looked grim. "Trust me, we're not."

Erik was just about done with his sixth cup of coffee when they received a call back from Oliver, who read them the information that HQ had dug up so far as he faxed over the photos.

"This is him," Charles said as he picked up one of the pages, staring into the cold eyes of the man in the photo. He was one Dominic Cobb, an NYPD officer who had been on the force for six years. Nothing extraordinary, at least until Oliver mentioned that Cobb had been issued a warning for excessive force during the Stonewall arrests.

Erik got up, moving over to Charles' side and taking the photo from him to have a better look. "Get us everything you can dig up on Cobb. Immediately."

* * * * *

Charles was sad to be leaving Paris; shooting on location often had its perks, and he had really enjoyed himself in the City of Lights with Erik. Still, he was looking forward to a sunnier climate after braving the chilly onset of winter in Paris, and filming in the Canary Islands did seem enticing in that respect. Besides, as long as Erik was with him, that was all that mattered to Charles, really.

The warm, balmy air that hit his skin the moment they got off the plane at the Tenerife airport was a welcome respite, and Erik must have seen him smiling for he squeezed Charles' hand as they walked down the tarmac. "Looking forward to getting tanned?" he asked a little teasingly with a chuckle. "Although I think you're more likely to turn lobster-red than anything else."

"Then you can help rub tanning lotion on me," Charles replied, grinning when Erik stopped laughing, licking his bottom lip instead. "Ah Erik, you seem to like that idea."

"Of course I do," Erik said as they headed inwards towards Immigrations, Remy and Darwin already in front of them with their passports. Leaning in, Erik whispered in Charles' ear, "As though I'd ever turn down a chance to get my hands on your body."

Charles bit his lip, mentally calculating how long it would be until they were able to check into their
hotel room. "Good, because I never want you to," he said to Erik, who was grinning from ear to ear as he kissed Charles slowly.

"Hey guys, don't get us thrown out of the country before we've even gone through Customs, okay?" Darwin said from in front of them, while Remy smirked beside him. "I'd like to actually get through Immigrations first."

"Then hurry up," Erik said with a roll of his eyes. "Or I'm making out with Charles here whether you like it or not."

"He means it," Remy warned Darwin, who sighed dramatically. "I had a front row seat when they were sucking face at the Departure hall in CDG. It was like live porno."

"C'mon everyone, stop lollygagging," Alex called out from where he was already queuing at the Immigrations counter. Charles happily got in line, resting against Erik's shoulder as they stood together, hands linked under Erik's leather jacket.

It was a good two hours before the film crew and cast were finally checking into Hotel Botanico, which was one of the few five-star hotels in Puerto de la Cruz. Charles could see the pristine blue waters from the lobby and couldn't wait to spend their day off at the beach. From the way Erik was staring longingly at the view, he was probably thinking of the same thing.

Charles rubbed his back soothingly. "We'll get a chance to hit the beach with the tanning lotion after we finish the key scenes. It won't be long now."

"Mmm?" Erik seemed distracted as he smiled down at Charles. "Sorry, you lost me at 'lotion'."

"Ahem," Raven said very loudly as she strolled past them, collecting her room key card from one of the PAs. "Don't mind me, I'm just trying not to barf."

"Oh, I've learned to tune them out," Darwin said cheerfully, from where he was standing behind Charles. "I found that it is necessary for my sanity."

"That's it, you're all fired," Erik declared to much laughter, as he started tugging Charles towards the hotel elevators.

* * * * *

The beach was quiet at night, the cool wind rippling against Charles' T-shirt. It had been a while since he had been able to wear such light clothing, and he was going to take every opportunity he could before they had to return to colder weather. He smiled at a hotel employee who was picking up stray towels off the beach chairs, watching her for a while before he wandered down to the water's edge. The full moon hung suspended in the inky black sky, luminous and golden. Charles had heard Darwin mention something about a lunar eclipse, but he didn't know if they would be able to see it from this part of the world.

His phone chimed with a text, interrupting his thoughts, and Charles fished it out. As always, a smile spread slowly on his face when he saw it was Erik. 'Done talking to Alex and Sean about my new lines, where are you?'

Charles texted back, 'Taking a walk along the beach in front of the hotel, come join me.'

He was already settled on the sand, sitting cross-legged and watching the waves when he felt someone press a kiss to his hair. "Sorry," Erik said as he plopped down onto the sand beside Charles. He looked excruciatingly good in a black polo tee, the fitted sleeves showing off the definition of his
biceps. The wind was making his ungelled hair tumble down, and Charles couldn't resist reaching out and brushing it back. In turn, Erik caught Charles' hand and pressed it to his cheek, his eyes so clear and luminous. "I thought it would have been boring for you to sit in on that script meeting, since it didn't involve James."

Charles simply smiled, leaning in to give Erik a slow kiss. "You know I wouldn't have minded."

They continued trading languid, lazy kisses for a while, surrounded by peaceful silence interrupted only by the crashing of the waves. Charles was beginning to find himself tempted to get on his knees and straddle Erik when he felt Erik pulling away, and the serious expression on his face brought Charles' lascivious thoughts to a screeching halt. "Charles, you're coming home with me to Munich, right?"

"Of course." Charles stroked Erik's cheek, feeling the slight bristle of stubble. "I want nothing more than to meet your parents."

Erik's ensuing smile was brilliant. "Good. My mother can't wait either. I have to warn you, though, she may be a bit of a handful with her incessant questions."

Charles brushed a thumb over Erik's plush bottom lip. "Was she like that when you brought other people home?" He couldn't help the strong flare of jealousy in his gut at the thought of Erik with other partners, and he hoped Erik couldn't sense this.

However, Erik shook his head. "I've never brought anyone home before," he said seriously, cupping the back of Charles' neck. "I've never wanted to. You're the first."

Charles couldn't describe the radiant joy warming him all over, making him beam at Erik. "You're such a charmer, Erik."

Now Erik was smiling too. "Yes, I'm doing all this to get you into bed, then I'm dumping you once I've taken your virtue."

"Idiot," Charles huffed out in laughter, while Erik kissed him on the nose. "Then why are you still here? You must have 'taken my virtue' 20,000 times already."

Erik was chuckling now as well. "God, I don't know. Maybe somewhere along the way, I unexpectedly fell in love with you."

"Good thing you fell into my trap, then," Charles said, deadpan, making Erik laugh even harder. Their hands found each other naturally, and Erik bent down to place a very soft kiss on the back of Charles' hand, the touch of his warm lips sending tingles all along his skin.

"I tried to remember the exact moment I really fell for you." Erik's voice was full of wonder as he gazed at the sea. "Then I realised it was a series of moments. Just you, being yourself, really. Being kind, generous, more concerned with the welfare of others than your own..." Erik trailed off, pink spots of colour high on his cheeks, and Charles realised he was embarrassed.

"Hey, come on, love." Charles tipped Erik's chin up, palming the side of his face. "That was very touching. Do go on."

Erik let out a sigh. "I don't know how to express it in words. It's crazy, right? As an actor, we're supposed to know how to portray every other emotion for the screen. But if you ask me here, right now, how I feel about you, it's like asking me to condense the entire universe in a box."

"Oh, Erik." Charles took Erik into his arms, just holding tightly onto him while the waves crashed in
the background, overpowering the constant singing of the crickets. They stayed silent for a long time, just enjoying the moment and being together without the crew and their staff constantly around them in the background. At this moment, Charles felt like he and Erik were the only two people left on earth. "You must never doubt how much I love you, Erik," Charles finally said, feeling Erik nod against him.

"Come here," Erik's voice was low and rough as he pulled Charles onto his lap, his arms tightly wrapped around him. They stayed like this for a while, but it wasn't long before Charles felt Erik trailing kisses down the curve of his neck, his lips coming to settle on the crook where his neck met his shoulder.

"Mmm we're in public, Erik," Charles murmured, tilting his head to give Erik access anyway.

"Since when has that ever bothered you?" Erik sounded amused, before his hot mouth travelled down Charles' shoulder, tugging the rounded collar of his T-shirt down. Charles moaned very softly at the feel of Erik's teeth scraping gently against his skin. "If I remember correctly, we almost made love right up against a lamp post in the streets of Paris--"

"Oh please, you liked it," Charles retorted with a breathless laugh, surrendering more of himself to Erik's kisses.

"And not only that, you almost made me come for real during a supposed fake sex scene in front of God and half the crew," Erik said, sounding so indignant that it made Charles laugh even more. "Trust me, Mr. Xavier, you are very much an exhibitionist."

Charles turned in Erik's lap, getting onto his knees so that he could comfortably straddle Erik, their chests pressed together. Charles could feel the rabbit-quick patter of Erik's heartbeat against his ribs, and he could see the intense love in his eyes. Charles smiled, pushing a thumb against the plush swell of Erik's bottom lip. "If I am an exhibitionist, it's only because you bring it out in me," he said with a smile, slipping his thumb into the moist warmth of Erik's mouth, watching as Erik started sucking on it. "You want everyone to see you taking me, claiming me, marking me as yours, don't you?"

Erik moaned around his digit, eyes heated and liquid as they met Charles' gaze. He released Charles' thumb, edging closer so their lips were only a brush away from a kiss. "I won't deny there's a part of me that likes that," Erik admitted, those beautiful lips quirked up in a knowing smile. "But can you blame me? You're beautiful. Who wouldn't want to make you theirs and claim you for themselves?"

"Ah, but I am not up for claiming," Charles grinned at Erik, stroking back his windblown hair. "I've already given my heart to someone."

"Tell me who he is, and I'll break his legs," Erik said with mock determination, and they exchanged a few sweet kisses before Charles pulled away with a grin.

"Well, now I want to see how you're going to break your own legs, then."

"Cheeky." Erik gave him one last kiss before they both got up, smiling like idiots as they hurried back to their hotel room, and as they made their way hand in hand along the sand, Charles felt certain that he would love Erik until the last wave kissed the shore.

* * * * *

Dominic Cobb was a hard man to pin down. Being ex-NYPD, he knew how to cover his tracks, and Oliver admitted that HQ had a very tough time tracking him down. Thankfully, an informant had tipped them off that Cobb would be back in his home residence in Queens that week. Erik and
Charles found themselves on the very next plane out of France, and Erik couldn't sleep, distracted by Charles' nearness in the adjacent seat.

They got to work the moment the plane landed, hurrying towards the hotel they were being put up in on 102nd Street, near where Cobb lived in Rockaway Beach. Oliver had already sent two vans over for surveillance to monitor his house, and they only had to wait a few days until Cobb slipped up and mentioned Ariadne's name over the phone to someone. "Now that's not a common name," Charles said with a knowing smile as they listened to the tap, and Erik grinned back, relieved to finally have a breakthrough in the case.

The trouble was, how were they going to bring Cobb in for questioning without revealing that they had been tapping his phone?

"Cobb has a wife, where is she?" Charles asked after several days of surveillance. They promptly ran a background check on her and made the discovery that Dominic's wife, Mal, once worked for Transatlantic Airlines as a leading flight stewardess. "You know what that means, right?" Charles said, quirking an eyebrow at Erik.

"No, what?"

"The one who serves First Class is always the leading flight stewardess," Charles explained, and Erik nodded with an 'ahhh'.

"You must be very well-acquainted with stewardesses, James," Erik said dryly, which only earned him a mischievous, knowing grin from Charles, who seemed blissfully ignorant of the pang of jealousy in Erik's chest.

They requested for the logs from all the airlines whose flights had served as scenes of the crime, and it was becoming increasingly clear as the photos came in that Mal had been on each of those flights under a string of aliases.

"Well, we have intel that Cobb is going to meet someone at the Drake Hotel near Rockaway Beach this afternoon," Charles said. "I think we have enough circumstantial evidence to bring him in for questioning."

"Sounds good." Erik didn't know why he had a foreboding sense of uneasiness about this, but this was their only opportunity to apprehend Cobb before he struck again.

They bumped into Hank on their way down to breakfast, and Erik was amused to see that Hank was wearing a Spongebob T-shirt with cargo pants. He wondered if it had anything to do with yesterday's shoot, where Raven had been showing off her new Spongebob wallpaper for her iPhone. Judging from the slight, quirky twist of Charles' smile, he was probably thinking the same thing as Erik.

"You guys should try the French crêpes," Hank said, pointing to the poolside cafe. "Much nicer than whatever the hotel restaurant is serving."

"Sure, we'll try it out," Erik said, about to move on when Charles stopped him, turning to look at Hank.

"You know, Hank, their breakfast may not be good but their dinner courses are amazing," Charles said, shooting Erik a knowing look. "We had tapas for dinner yesterday, and it was wonderful. The ambiance was quite magical too, a Spanish guitarist goes from table to table to serenade you."
Hank looked a little mystified, but he just nodded. "Oh okay, then I'll be sure to try it out."

Charles folded his arms. "Actually, why don't you join Erik and I for dinner tonight? Then you'll see what I mean for yourself?"

Ah. Now Erik understood what Charles was trying to do. "Yeah Hank, you should come, we barely talk outside of work," Erik said, feeling warmed by the grateful smile Charles shot him.

Hank looked pleased at that. "Uh okay, in that case, I'd love to."

"Splendid!" Charles clasped his hands together in barely-disguised glee. "Let me ask Raven if she is free to join us, too."

"Uh, Raven?" Now Hank was turning three shades of red, nervously pushing up his glasses. "She, um, you want to ask her?"

"Of course." Charles was the perfect picture of innocence, but of course Erik knew better. The more innocence Charles projected, the more he was up to no good. "The four of us will have a lovely time, I bet."

"We'll see you later, Hank," Erik said, giving the blushing Hank a little salute as they headed outside to the cafe. Once they were out of earshot, Erik finally gave in to the laughter bubbling up inside him. "Charles, you are so incredibly devious."

Charles shot him the most angelic smile. "I'm just trying to bring them together since they're both being daft."

Erik squeezed his hand. "Charles Xavier, matchmaker extraordinaire." He couldn't resist bending down and kissing those tempting red lips, thinking that Charles was extraordinary in so many other ways as well.

Squeezing his hand back, Charles' smile was now quirked up in amusement. "I'm sure you would have wanted someone like me to meddle and bring us together earlier."

As usual, Charles was right. Then again, Erik would have agreed with him about anything, even if he had declared that the moon was made of cheese, or that tea was better than coffee. "I'm just happy that we found each other in the first place."

Charles chuckled, linking his arm in Erik's as they walked into the restaurant. "Never stop being a sap, darling."

* * * * *

Business at the Drake Hotel was in full swing, so when Dominic Cobb walked in, Charles almost missed him. It was only when Erik nudged him sharply that he sat up, following Erik's gaze. Cobb sat in the lobby for a while, frowning as he flipped through his planner, and he only looked up when a man in a sharp, elegant suit sat down opposite him. The two of them talked at length, and Charles saw the man in the suit pass Cobb a stack of papers, as well as a bottle of suspicious liquid.

"That's our cue, let's go," Erik said as he rose to his feet, Charles quickly following him. They walked up to Cobb and the man in the suit, who were eyeing their approach warily. Erik whipped out his FBI badge, saying, "Dominic Cobb? I'm Agent Michael Fassbender from the FBI, we would like to ask you a few questions--"

"Run!" Cobb shouted at the man in the suit, who took off towards the door, and Charles just missed
grabbing him by mere inches. Cobb had pulled out a gun, pointing it straight at Erik. "Not so smart now, are you?"

Erik was calmly holding up his hands, and Charles took this opportunity to kick Cobb in the knee - a typical FBI trainee manoeuvre, but it worked as Cobb dropped his gun with a howl. Erik was on Cobb in a flash, wrestling him to the ground, but there was a muffled kick, and as Erik rolled away in pain, Cobb jumped to his feet, grabbing his fallen gun and shooting at them. They immediately ducked, but Charles heard screams and to his horror, he saw a few hotel guests behind them crumpling to the ground in pain, bleeding heavily. "Call an ambulance!" he shouted at a terrified clerk nearby who ran to the phone. Meanwhile, Cobb was already sprinting out of the hotel lobby, leaving behind screaming bystanders.

"Michael!" Charles helped him up, and they sprinted after Cobb who had pushed through the revolving door and was already out on the street. Cobb knew the streets better than them, dodging into hidden alleys that served as shortcuts, and Charles started to lag behind Erik, who was the faster runner.

They made a turn down a back alley behind a row of restaurants, and Charles could hear Erik shouting at Cobb to freeze or he would shoot. Cobb ran past a row of gawking chefs on their smoke break, and before Erik or Charles could fire, Cobb whipped out a second gun and started firing at them. They both ducked immediately, and Cobb quickly scaled up the metal fence, swinging himself over and running for his life.

"Fuck!" Erik shouted, and before Charles could react, Erik was rugby tackling him to the ground behind a cluster of garbage cans, shielding Charles with his body.

"Michael, what are you--" Charles' eyes went wide as a loud 'BOOM!' rang out followed by a cry of pain from Erik as glass from the shattered windows rained down on them. "Michael!"

Erik grimaced as he clutched his right arm. "Forget about me, go after him," he yelled, coughing as the smoke enveloped them temporarily. Charles helped him up, and he could see the garbage cans were now on fire. Thankfully, the Chinese chefs were all right, having taken cover in an alcove, and one of them was now running over to help Erik. "What the bloody hell happened?" Charles asked.

"Cobb shot at a couple of LPG cylinders behind the restaurant," Erik said, wincing as the cook tried to bring him into the restaurant. "Quick, go after Cobb, we're losing him. I'll be fine."

It was a split-second decision - Erik was in pain, but the Chinese cook was helping him, and Cobb already had a good few minutes' head start on them. Charles gave Erik's hand the quickest of squeezes before sprinting in the direction Cobb had gone, which was towards the beach, unable to shake the thought of how Erik had selflessly thrown himself on top of Charles to shield him from the blast, and if he hadn't already fallen for the man before this, he surely would have now.

* * * * *

Everyone was huddled around the playback screen in front of Bryan, watching the footage of the explosion. "Fantastic!" Bryan said, pleased as he squinted at the screen, while Erik stood behind him, gulping down a bottle of water, his free arm (the one not covered with fake blood and make-up) slung around Charles' shoulder. Erik liked shooting action sequences; they were familiar territory for him, and they were infinitely easier than sex scenes, especially with a devious co-star who also happened to be his real-life boyfriend and had absolutely no qualms about making him almost come - for real - on camera. He shot Charles an affectionate glance, and the smile he got in return made something in his chest skitter.
They replayed the scene again from a different angle, and now Alex was whooping in excitement as he watched the LPG cylinders explode in slow motion. "Now that's what I'm talking about!" he shouted, exchanging a high five with Sean.

"Ugh, men." Raven was scrunching up her nose in distaste. "You and your guns and explosions."

"That's the best part of action movies, my dear," Shaw said patiently beside her, musing over the scene. "It's what draws audiences to the box office."

Raven shrugged. "All I know is that I liked the scene where Michael threw himself on top of James to shield him," she said with a contented sigh, as Alex made a disgusted face.

"I agree, I really like that part as well," Charles chimed in, squeezing Erik's hand. "Whose idea was it, Alex? Yours or Sean's?"

"You won't catch me writing anything wussy like that," Alex said with a snort. "Totally Sean's idea."

Sean rolled his eyes, but winked at Charles and Erik. "You're welcome," he mouthed to both of them, and Erik grinned at him.

Shaw clasped his hands together, rubbing them eagerly. "All right people, let's do the next shot and not waste any more precious daylight, shall we?"

"Roger," Bryan said automatically. "Places, people!"

* * * * *

Charles spotted Cobb a few streets down, running at full tilt towards the beach. He could see that Cobb was starting to lag behind, his face red and breathless, and he thanked all the deities he could think of that he consistently kept up with his morning jogging habit. Charles dodged past two surfers bearing their boards like leaf-cutter ants, cursing to himself when he saw Cobb heading towards one of the boats.

"Bloody hell," Charles muttered as he stared in dismay. Cobb somehow managed to summon an extra burst of energy as he fled towards the boat, and Charles knew it was only a matter of seconds before they lost Cobb. He unholstered his glock and pulled it out, speeding down the pier and ignoring the screaming beach-goers who were panicking at the sight of a gun and scattering out of his way. He raised his gun, taking aim squarely at Cobb's shoulders.

Cobb tossed a glance over his shoulder, seeing Charles still on the pier, and his squint turned into a clever sneer. Charles knew that look, had seen it on the handful of criminals who had so far outsmarted him, and his face felt hot with anger. If only Erik were here, but he was probably still receiving first aid back at the Chinese restaurant

"Stop, or I will open fire!" he shouted, stopping by a bench on the pier and taking aim, but Cobb had already toppled himself onto the boat, and Charles let out a wordless noise of frustration. He had to get further down the pier.

The Rockaway marina was shaped like a comb, so visitors and anglers could turn in into smaller piers. Charles turned left into the furthest small pier and ran out to try and get closer to where Cobb's boat was going to escape, and already he could see Cobb pointing his gun at the frightened boatman, shouting, "Let's go, let's go!"

"Fuck," Charles said, biting his lip and running right up to the end of the marina. The boat's engine
started sputtering to life, and Charles kept his aim fixed on his blonde target.

"STOP! FBI!" Charles squinted hard, then fired off a clean shot at Cobb's shoulder. Unfortunately the boat veered off to the left at a crucial second, the bullet missing Dom by mere inches. Dom immediately fired back, and Charles dodged down behind a bench. Unfortunately, out of pure vindictiveness, Cobb started shooting at other people on the pier, and Charles cursed when he saw a middle-aged woman clutching her leg, which was bleeding as she screamed.

"Fucking bugger arse--" Charles immediately stood up and took aim again for a second shot, but the boat was now blocked by a much bigger yacht, and Charles was torn between jumping into the water and going back to the restaurant to see if Erik was okay.

Charles gave up after a few seconds. Even if he jumped in, there was no way he could out-swim a motorboat. He ran over to where the injured woman was groaning, reminding her to stay calm and asking her husband to call an ambulance. After this, he was determined to go back to the Chinese restaurant to check on Erik and, if he could walk, they needed to call Oliver immediately.

* * * * *

Charles climbed down the flight of wooden stairs and onto the sand, making his way over to where Erik, Bryan and Shaw were gathered around the cameras watching the playback of the footage they had just captured. This shoot they were doing on the Canary Islands was his first time being involved in filming big budget action sequences, and he had to admit that his previous experience shooting grand romantic sprints through airports and down wedding aisles had in no way prepared him for the demands of a true fast-paced chase sequence, complete with explosions and a getaway speedboat. Everything had to be synchronised perfectly, and the number of angles they had to get for each scene to ensure that the finished product would look outstanding in the IMAX format was daunting. They had spent most of the afternoon filming the sequence where he had to chase Cobb along the pier, and his legs were starting to feel the strain from the repeated takes. Charles shook his head as he chided himself internally, making a note to join Erik at the gym more often. Despite the physical toll, finally getting to be in the thick of things and shooting an action sequence was exhilarating, and Charles was truly enjoying being involved in a production of such a grand scale.

Erik smiled as Charles neared, opening a bottle of ice-cold Fiji water and handing it to him. "Thank you, darling," Charles said as he took it gratefully, downing half of it in one go before placing the bottle against the side of his face, glad that he was finally out of the scorching sun and under the tents the crew had erected along the beach.

"How does it look? I managed to hit all my marks, I believe?" Charles enquired as he leaned against Erik to catch his breath, relaxing as Erik placed a hand on his shoulder and began kneading it.

"Yes, excellent job. This will fit nicely with the crane shots we did earlier." Bryan replied, looking very pleased. "I think we have enough footage to work with, let's call it a wrap."

Charles perked up at that, relieved to finally get out of the stifling suit he was wearing, his body still not acclimatised to the humidity on the Canary Islands. Shaw stepped forward then, frowning as he turned the screen towards himself. "The shot is too calm, it makes James look like he still has everything under control. Cobb just blew up a damn building, there's not enough panic and mayhem." Shaw paused, looking up to scrutinize Charles, his hard gaze making Charles feel a little uncomfortable, "We should do one more shot with a handheld close-up of Charles, exacerbate the jerkiness of the footage to up the urgency of the scene."

Bryan nodded as he took the screen from Shaw to review the footage. "You have a point, we could do that."
"We should at least let Charles take a break first, he's been running around all day." Erik insisted, raising his voice a little as he addressed Shaw.

Charles immediately shook his head. "No, it's fine. I would much rather we just did this now. Time is precious and we should film this before the light changes." Charles tilted up at Erik, running a hand soothingly across Erik's stomach as he addressed him, "Besides, the sooner we're done here, the sooner we get to go back to the hotel and get ready for dinner."

Erik seemed appeased at that and Charles smiled, resting his head softly on Erik's shoulder. If Erik had his way, it would be his stunt double, Wesley Gibson, who would be doing all of these scenes. Charles would hear none of it, of course. He took great pride in doing all of his own stunts, and had explicitly instructed Wesley to just stay in the hotel lobby and have some beers on him. Moreover, this was his first action-thriller, and he would be lying if he said he didn't feel like he had something to prove.

"Thanks, Charles. This shot will be done before you know it, and then you and Erik can go off on your lovely little date." Bryan winked before waving Hank over to give him instructions, "Hank, I'd like you to manage the Steadicam. Just dismount it from the dolly when you get on the pier," Bryan began, pointing at the wheeled contraption before continuing, "You'll be running beside Charles, let him stay on the outside of the turn so we get a sweeping shot of the harbour when the camera pans. There's a red indicator light just before the turn, you have to speed up once it goes on for the final stretch of the chase."

"Okay, understood." Hank nodded as he adjusted his glasses, listening intently.

Erik pulled Charles aside while Bryan carried on briefing Hank, patting Charles' back as he said, "I must say I'm impressed, I was worried you wouldn't be able to handle all this extended sprinting and climbing."

"Well, my stamina's improved, thanks to someone," Charles replied as he flashed Erik a coy grin. Charles placed both hands on the juts of Erik's hipbones, his smile now teasing, "Oh but I would be very, very grateful if that someone could also give me a leg massage tonight, so I have the energy for other activities."

"I'm sure he'll see what he can do," Erik answered, tucking the stray locks of Charles' hair behind his ear when the wind blew them out of place.

The sounds of the crew setting up for the shoot caught Charles' attention and he took Erik's hand in his, gesturing towards the pier, "Walk with me?"

"Of course," Erik nodded, tugging Charles along as they made their way across the sand.

Charles squinted, now that they were back under the tropical sun, using his hand to shield his eyes as he looked up at Erik. "I do hope they serve Galician-style octopus at the tapas place tonight, they're Raven's favourite."

"I'm sure if you told Hank that, he'd dive into the sea and catch one for her if they said they didn't have it." Erik joked, and Charles nudged him with his shoulder as they both laughed.

"In a fight between Hank and an octopus, I think I'd place my money on the octopus. When you're talking Man versus Beast, the odds are usually in the beast's favour, you know?" Charles retorted, swirling his index finger around in the air to punctuate his statement.

Erik grinned, pretending to rummage around in his pockets. "Hang on, let me call Emma for her
expert opinion before we place any bets."

Charles shoved him lightly as he chuckled, "All right, love. This is my stop." Charles climbed a couple of steps before turning around, and was momentarily struck by how beautiful Erik's light-coloured eyes looked just then, the blazing sun shrinking his pupils to the size of pinpricks, so it felt like he was drowning in Erik's pale cerulean irises with their slight tinge of green, just like the ocean around them. He bent forward and placed a kiss to Erik's forehead, whispering, "Hurry back, don't want you to end up with a sunburn."

Erik smiled fondly, brushing his lips against the back of Charles' hand, "I'll catch you on the flip side."

Charles made his way up the steps of the pier, walking over to where Hank was adjusting the Steadicam on his shoulder. He stopped beside him, patting him affectionately on his other shoulder, "Hello, Hank. Let's get this over with so we can all head out for a nice dinner. I don't know about you, but I'm famished."

"Me, too." Hank replied as he nodded, and Charles noticed that he had taken his glasses off for the chase. He looked much more confident now that he was no longer hiding behind them, and Charles had a brief flash of the Hank he'd seen at Halloween, the one with Raven on his arm. A smile crept across Charles' face as he silently swore to try his best to set the two of them up.

"Come on, I'll race you to the end of the pier, see if you can beat me. Don't hold back!" Charles announced as he got into position, earning himself a quizzical look from the young man. Before Hank could even reply, Charles heard Bryan call "ACTION" from the distance and he turned to Hank, quirking a challenging eyebrow up with a smile before he opened his mouth, "On your marks, get set, go!"

* * * * *

Erik stood at the edge of the tent, watching as Charles chatted with Hank on the pier. Charles had done an exceptional job the entire afternoon, completing each sequence in fewer takes than any of Erik's previous co-stars, even seasoned professionals like Brad Pitt and Gerard Butler. To top it off, Charles had not complained even once, no matter how many times Bryan had wanted to reshoot because of a bad camera angle or the extras had cocked up a take, simply smiling it off and heading back to his mark obligingly. But Erik could tell that the relentless demands were taking a toll on him, that enthusiastic spring in his step that Charles always had when dragging Erik from place to place all but gone just moments ago when Erik had walked him to the pier. They had a couple of hours left before their dinner reservation, and Erik was determined to make sure Charles took a nap before they had to leave, his plans involving a lot of cuddling and massages after a long hot bath.

"Action!"

He refocused his attention when he heard Bryan's voice boom from the loudhailer, Charles and Hank taking off running moments after the cue, the both of them neck and neck, hurtling across the boardwalk with Charles on the outer side. They passed the first mark and Hank sped up as they hit the turn, his long legs giving him an added advantage, and Erik had a split-second to register, no he's going too fast, before Charles slammed straight into Hank as the faster man cut into his path, Charles' arms instinctively flying up to shield his face from hitting the camera before the momentum sent him stumbling backwards and over the edge of the boardwalk.

Erik's blood ran cold, jaw slack as he witnessed Charles falling off the pier in front of his eyes, compelled to look on helplessly because he could not tear his gaze away. He only registered that he had started running when he felt the wind whipping across his skin, like he had been split right down
the middle and the other half of him was still rooted to the spot, trapped in a waking nightmare where he was doomed to forever stand by and watch the one person he held most dear plummet in slow motion onto the sand.

"Charles!" Erik's voice came out strangled, barely audible over the pounding of his heartbeat in his ears, his stomach lurching when Charles continued to lie motionless on the sand. He felt like a fool for believing something so perfect could have lasted forever, every remaining dream of his crashing down with each passing second, like waves against the shore.

"CHARLES!"

* * * * *

Notes:
1. The title of this chapter is a quote from 'Titanic'.
2. There was a total lunar eclipse on the 10th of December.
3. The part where there is an explosion and Michael shields James with his body is a reference to ceiling!sex in XMFC where Erik magnetises Charles to the ceiling of the plane when it crashes.
4. James McAvoy played Wesley Gibson in 'Wanted'.
I Want You by My Side

Chapter Summary

When Charles is hospitalised, it causes Erik to spiral down into worry and rage. While Charles recovers, the others try to keep Erik calm and occupied, and at the end of the day, Charles and Erik realise they are playing for keeps.

Chapter Notes

Sorry about the little panic attack we caused the last time! Also, how awesome is Robert Downey Jr. for covering a song about chess?

Soundtrack: Robert Downey Jr. - ‘Your Move’

Erik.

Charles opened his eyes slowly, staring in a daze right into the blazing sun and feeling like a moth drawn to a flame. The back of his head was throbbing as though someone had taken a sledgehammer to it and wouldn’t stop pounding, and he winced when he tried to move, shots of pain searing up his back and making it difficult to breathe. Everything else seemed muted in comparison, faded away into oblivion like the endless blue of the sky before him, and Charles attempted to focus on his breathing, on the blinding ball of fire in the sky, on the grains of sand that were falling through his fingers as he tried in vain to cling on to something, anything that would take his mind off the pain that was wrecking his body.

“Charles. Oh God, Charles,” he let out a sigh of relief when he heard the dear voice that he had spent nights falling asleep to calling out to him, blinking as he let it guide him back to himself like how it would in mornings when he woke in Erik’s arms, and everything seemed to hurt just a little less knowing that Erik was only a moment away. Erik leaned over him, his face blocking out the sun, and the thought that that man right there was the centre of his universe flashed across his mind just before familiar hands were on him, one cradling the back of his head while the other rested comfortably on his chest, just above his heart.

“…Erik, it’s okay. I’m--” Charles answered, biting back a cry when he tried to get up.

“Try not to move.” Erik said in hushed tones as he eased him back down, rubbing small soothing circles on his chest. “Where does it hurt, Liebling?”

“My back, mostly.” Charles grimaced as he spoke, his ribs hurting with the exertion, “And my head.”

Erik paled as he glanced down the length of Charles’ body, “Can you feel your legs?”
Charles froze at that, realising that he had been so focused on the pain that he hadn’t thought of the parts that weren’t hurting. He tried to move his right leg tentatively, heaving a sigh when the limb did as it was told, his left leg following suit. “Yes... yes, I can.”

Erik’s shoulders slumped forward as he wiped at his eyes with the heel of his hand, and Charles reached out to trail his fingers calmly over the underside of the forearm that Erik was using to support his head, his own eyes feeling wet as well. Erik turned his gaze back to him, bending closer to his face as he tilted Charles’ head gently from side to side.

“How bad is it?” Charles asked, biting down on his lip.

Erik nodded slightly. “I don’t see any fluids.”

“Good, that’s good...” Charles said, voice shaky before Erik pressed his lips to his forehead, staying in that position as Charles closed his eyes and placed his hands on Erik’s chest, trying to concentrate on just taking in his scent and getting his breathing back under control, feeling Erik calm slightly under his hands at the same time. Now that he was lying beneath Erik and shielded from the outside world, Charles finally allowed himself to believe that perhaps everything was going to be okay.

“Oh my god, Charles!” He could hear Raven’s panicky voice and the frantic pounding of her footsteps, and then she was by his side, her blonde hair hanging over him like a halo as she pressed a hand to his cheek. “Charles, are you all right?”

The brief morbid thought that if this was it, at least he had the two most important people in his life with him, crept up on Charles. He winced as he tried to move again, and Erik flinched as though that wince had caused him physical pain instead of Charles. “Liebling, try not to move, please,” Erik pleaded, his consonants thicker and heavier. Maybe his accent was more obvious in times of duress.

“Medic!” Raven shouted, waving more people over, and there were more running footsteps before Charles was surrounded by the medic crew in their bright red vests. They were trying to get Erik to release Charles, but Erik simply wouldn’t let go, snarling something at them in Spanish as he held on even tighter to Charles. The medics looked baffled and confused, unsure how to proceed.

“Erik, for fuck’s sake, he needs professional medical attention!” Raven shouted at him, while Bryan and Darwin appeared behind her, shocked and pale with worry. Erik shook his head stubbornly, clutching Charles even tighter to him.

“Tell them to back off,” Erik warned her, and Bryan threw his hands up in despair.

“Erik, come on--” he began, and Erik’s face crumpled in anger and worry.

“I said, back off!” he shouted at everyone else, who were exchanging looks of confusion. Charles completely understood why Erik was worried out of his mind. He would be too, if anything had happened to Erik, but he recognised that he was the only person Erik would listen to at the moment.

“Darling,” he said hoarsely, struggling to reach up and press a hand to Erik’s cheek. Erik looked back down at him, and his eyes were a little too bright. Charles managed a strained smile as he stared up at the one person he cared about more than himself. “Erik, you need to trust them, okay? I’m fine, I’ll be fine. Just let them take care of me.”

“But I--”

“Erik, calm your mind,” Charles said soothingly, brushing Erik’s cheek and wiping away a tear that was tracking its way down. “Calm down, I’ll be fine. I won’t be though, if I don’t get medical attention.”
Erik paused for a long while, and it seemed like an eternity before he finally nodded. He looked up at the crew, beckoning them over with a quick ‘come here’ gesture with his hand, and they immediately ran over, holding Charles as delicately as a priceless Ming vase while Erik handed him over, his face seemingly calm, but his eyes were wild with worry and fear. Behind him, Charles could see an anxious Remy running over, placing a calming hand on Erik’s shoulder, but Erik just shook it off stiffly.

“Okay Charles, just lie perfectly still,” the head medic said in English as she started checking his vitals, then flashed a torchlight into his eyes and peered at his pupils. She said something brief to her crew, but Charles thought he recognised the word “concussion”.

“There’s already an ambulance on the way,” he could hear Bryan telling someone, probably Raven, but now there were more running footsteps and raised voices, and Charles struggled to crane his neck and see what was going on, despite the pain shooting up his back like sharp needles.

“You are a fucking professional!” Erik was shouting, his face red with rage and fury, and Charles could see a pale, shaking Hank standing somewhere behind Bryan. “What the fuck were you doing?”

“I was...looking at the l-l-light,” Hank stammered, and he quickly backed away when Erik advanced on him.

“What the fuck is it with you?” Erik shouted, while Remy was doing his best to hold his boss back. “Think for one fucking second, look what you’ve done to Charles!”

“I didn’t mean to--” Hank began, but he was cut off when Erik lunged at him, hands scrabbling at Hank’s shirt.

“I’m going to kick your fucking ass,” Erik snarled, while Remy was struggling desperately to hold him back, and Darwin was trying to get between Hank and Erik, and Raven was raining her fists down on Erik’s back, screaming for him to stop it. Charles could see the medics shaking their heads in disbelief.

“ERIK!” he shouted as loudly as he could, and Erik finally stopped pulling at Hank’s shirt, chest heaving with rage and exertion. Remy was clinging onto him like a desperate koala, refusing to let go lest Erik went off the deep end again. Everyone was now staring at Charles, wary and watchful, waiting to see what he would say.

“Erik, it’s not Hank’s fault, let him go,” Charles said calmly, while poor Hank hid behind a shocked Bryan. Erik’s face was still red with rage, a vein popping out in his forehead, but he finally stepped away from Hank, his hair tumbling down before he brushed it back. Remy was saying something soothing and quiet to Erik that Charles couldn’t hear, but at least Erik was now nodding stiffly.

The wail of an ambulance’s siren cut through the heavy tension, and the relief that swept through Charles was immense. Now the head medic was yelling for everyone to clear the way, but even she did not have the nerve to stop Erik when he came over and swept the sand out of Charles’ hair with shaking hands, an indescribable emotion in his eyes. Charles wondered if Erik knew just how easy it was to read him like a book just from his eyes, and he managed a tired smile for Erik.

“Stay with me?” he whispered, and Erik nodded immediately, grasping Charles’ free hand. Erik stayed steadfastly by his side all the way, climbing into the ambulance, holding his hand like a lifeline. Charles gripped it tightly, biting back the pain, and he was overwhelmed with gratitude when one of the paramedics pressed a needle to the inside of his arm, followed shortly by a wave of warmth sweeping through him, making him feel weightless, like he was floating in space. The flare
of pain in his back had now faded away, and he smiled up at Erik who was cradling his face tenderly. Erik’s face was the last thing Charles remembered about the ride to the hospital before everything faded to black.

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Erik watched from the little glass window as the large, intimidating hulk of an MRI machine slowly swallowed Charles whole, his fists tightening protectively. Charles looked so pale and helpless, lying on the patient table in his hospital gown which was only a shade lighter than his skin. Erik pressed his forehead against the glass, worry and grief clutching at his chest like a claw. At this point, the doctor inside the MRI room spotted Erik and frowned, saying something to the nurse that Erik couldn’t hear. The nurse slipped out of the room, a sympathetic expression on her face as she led Erik away, sitting him on a couch in the waiting room with a hot cup of coffee.

Erik just stared at the coffee until it slowly, slowly turned cold.

His phone had been buzzing in his pocket the entire time, and he was about to reach for it and switch it off when a rather comforting idea occurred to him, and he wondered why he had not thought of it sooner. On the caller-ID, he could see 13 missed calls from Emma and a few more from Bryan and Raven, but he simply deleted those, then pressed the second button on his speed-dial. The first one was Charles’ number, of course, not that he would be able to pick up now, and the thought caused a terrible pang of ache in Erik’s chest.

The international ring tone beeped a few times, and then a beloved, familiar voice answered in German. “Erik? What a lovely surprise!”

Erik’s lower lip was trembling as he squeezed his eyes shut, feeling tears threatening to spill forward. He was not going to cry, dammit. “Mama?”

He must have sounded lost and broken, for his mother’s tone immediately switched from joyful to concerned. “Erik, what’s wrong?”

“I....” Erik pressed the heel of his other hand to his eyes, he was shaking so hard now. “Mama, Charles....”

There was a soft gasp on the other end of the phone, and Erik could hear his father’s concerned voice booming in the background, asking what happened. His mother remained calm, though. “Erik, what happened to Charles?”

“He.....” Erik forced himself to get a grip, not wanting to completely fall apart in some foreign hospital’s waiting room. “Mama, we were shooting a scene from the movie, and there was an...an accident--”

“Oh, Erik.” His mother’s voice sounded muffled, and he could imagine her hand over her mouth, eyes large with worry. “Please tell me Charles is okay.”

“He’ll be fine,” Erik managed to huff out, and there was a sigh of relief on the other end. It made him feel better, for some reason. “The doctors are now doing some scans on him, but they say he’ll be fine.”

“That’s good,” she said, her voice turning into that soft, quiet coo she used to sing him lullabies as a young boy with. “Erik, my love, you need to stay strong, for Charles.”

“I know.” Erik wiped his face, not even bothering to wonder when his cheeks had become wet. “It just hurts so much, seeing him like this, and the thought of losing him...” Here Erik trailed off, eyes
shut as he cried into his hand, his mother remaining silent on the other end. His voice was hoarse and thick with tears as he whispered, “Mama, I can’t lose him, I c-c-can’t.”

“Alles ist gut, Erik,” she said, her voice as serene and comforting as an old, warm blanket. “Alles ist gut.”

He nodded, even though she wouldn’t be able to see it, but she was right. Everything would be okay, and there were many other worse things that could have happened to Charles. At least he was alive, and Erik was here by his side, and there was nothing that could pry him from Charles now. He forced himself to get a grip, wiping his eyes clumsily with his sleeve. “Alles ist gut,” he repeated to himself.

“Remember that the next time you feel like the world is collapsing, my love,” his mother said gently. “Do you feel better now?”

“Ja.” Erik took in a long, shaky breath, then let it out. “You’re right, Charles will be fine.”

“And you’ll be there for him, and never leave his side,” she reminded him softly, more a statement than a question. She knew him well, and of course Erik would rather die than leave Charles.

“He’s stuck with me, he has no choice in that,” Erik murmured, and his mother laughed softly on the other end.

“Now I really can’t wait to meet him for myself,” she said, amused. “He must be someone really special, to have my son so captivated.”

“Oh Mama, he really is,” Erik said, smiling for the first time since Charles had fallen at the beach.

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Charles slowly blinked, the painkillers starting to wear off. His head felt fuzzy, as though someone had stuffed it full of cotton wool, and his throat felt far too dry. He tried to say, “Erik,” but his vocal chords wouldn’t cooperate and he ended up coughing instead, which just made his head pound a little more. Still, at least the pain in his back had now faded to a dull throb, thanks to the morphine. He winced, trying to shift in bed a bit more, at least so he could reach the glass of water on the bedside table.

The door swung open, and a very rumpled, exhausted-looking Erik slouched in, carrying a book and a blanket. His eyes widened when he saw Charles was up, dropping everything and rushing to his side. “Charles!”

Charles found himself with an armful of Erik, instantly feeling comforted and much, much better than the effects of any painkiller. And then Erik was pulling away and pressing kisses all over his face, ending with a chaste, tender one on Charles’ lips. “Feeling better?” he asked, and Charles could see Erik’s eyes were reddened.

“I am, now that you’re here,” Charles whispered back, trying to kiss Erik again, and he managed a quick one before they were holding each other as much as the back pain would allow him to move. Erik felt warm, solid and safe, smelling of sweat and faded hints of aftershave.

“I was so worried,” Erik admitted, a hand stroking back Charles’ hair, the action soothing and calming. “But my mother told me that things will be all right.”

“I didn’t want to worry her,” Charles murmured against the skin below Erik’s ear, pressing a kiss to it. “You shouldn’t have worried her.”
“I know, but I was going out of my mind.” Erik pulled away to kiss him chastely on the mouth. “I hope you understand, I felt so...lost earlier.”

Charles traced the familiar straight lines of Erik’s eyebrows, the slope of his nose, the sharp planes of his cheekbones. “You’ll never lose me, I promise.”

Erik blinked, and now his eyelashes were wet. “That’s not always up to us, is it?”

Charles felt something tightening in his throat, and he knew it had nothing to do with the after-effects of the medication, and everything to do with the way Erik was looking at him, as though Charles were something very, very precious he had spent years searching for. “No, it’s not.” Charles admitted, caressing Erik’s cheek. “But I’d do everything in my power to make it back to you.”

Erik nodded, leaning into Charles’ touch for a long time. Then he carefully wrapped Charles in a gentle hug, and they held each other for what felt like forever, Charles certain that everything would be okay now that Erik was there.

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They were relatively undisturbed until there was a quiet knock at the door. Erik was on his feet the instant the grey-haired, bespectacled doctor walked into the room with a clipboard in his hand. The man’s name-tag read ‘Dr. Abraham Erskine’.

“Mr. Xavier,” the doctor said, pausing as he glanced at Erik.

“This is my partner, Erik Lehnsherr,” Charles said without hesitation. He was addressing the doctor, but looking straight at Erik. “I’d appreciate it if you could keep him updated on my progress and provide him the same courtesy as you would if he were a member of my family.”

Dr. Erskine nodded, appearing nonplussed. Erik realised that he’d clenched his fists only when he had to make himself relax them. The doctor consulted the chart, nodding as he thumbed through the pages, “I have good news. The CT and MRI scans did not show any fractures or ruptured organs, and the tests we ran did not detect any signs of impaired organ function. You’re very lucky, Mr. Xavier. However, there is still a likelihood of a minor concussion. I recommend you stay overnight for observation. Just to be safe, you understand.”

Charles was very obviously reluctant. “But surely, if I have someone keeping an eye on me-” and there was, of course, no doubt about who he meant by ‘someone’.

And yet, as much as Erik hated being in the hospital, hated seeing Charles bruised and uncomfortable in such a sterile, cold environment... “Charles, if the doctor thinks it’s better,” Erik spoke up, “just for one night. I can’t - if something were to happen...” He wrung his hands as he bit down on his lip.

Charles’ gaze softened and he let out an audible sigh. “All right.”

“Excellent,” said the doctor, smiling as he nodded in approval. “I’ll have a nurse come in and set you up for the night. Barring any further complications, you should be able to check yourself out tomorrow morning.”

Erik swallowed. His eyes sought out Charles. Then, his call to his mother heavy in his mind and also picking up on the way the man delivered his consonants, he said, “Thank you, Herr Doktor.”

“Nichts zu danken,” Dr. Erskine replied, acknowledging him with a nod as he left the room.
“I’m just glad that I can finally get out of this position,” Charles said once they were alone, rolling onto his side to relieve the pressure on his back.

Erik frowned as he tucked the covers around Charles, pausing before reaching for the extra blanket he had gotten and pulling it over him as well. “I don’t know what I would have done if he’d said you needed extensive surgery.”

Charles reached out and caught his hand, squeezing it gently, and it was only then that Erik realised his hands had started trembling again. “But I don’t, that’s all that matters.” Charles said quietly, his eyes soft and bright.

Erik nodded, leaning in to kiss his temple, lingering on just to remind himself that Charles was still there with him, more hurt and fragile than he ever wanted to see anyone he cared about, let alone Charles, but nevertheless still there by his side. He had always known, right from the start, that he had been playing for keeps, that Charles was everything, and the thought of how close he had come to losing it all shook him to his core.

Erik pressed the call button for the nurse to request a couple of extra pillows and she came in soon after carrying them as well as a dose of some oral painkillers, which Charles gladly took. Erik tucked a pillow between Charles’ knees and gave him the other to hug, relaxing a little now that Charles looked more comfortable.

“I would still love you, even if it had come to that,” Erik whispered later while he sat on the edge of Charles’ bed, stroking his hair.

Charles smiled, wiping at his eyes with the back of his hand before he met Erik’s gaze. “I know...”

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It was already getting late, the light outside the hospital window darkening to the soft twilight of dusk, but Erik was showing absolutely no signs of leaving Charles’ side at all. Charles wondered what were the visiting hours at this hospital, and if there was any way they could persuade the nurses to let them bend the rules. Still, he didn’t want to force Erik to sleep in one of the uncomfortable hospital chairs. Hopefully, after lights out, Erik could climb in beside him and hold him while he slept.

Sure enough, not long after, a nurse popped her head into the room, knocking on the door. “Visiting hours are over, Mr. Lehnsherr,” she said politely. Charles squinted at her name tag, which read ‘Carlotta’. “You can come back tomorrow when Mr. Xavier will be discharged.”

Charles could see the lines of Erik’s body go all stiff and tight, reluctant to leave. Before Erik could get into an argument with the nurse, Charles said, “Please, could Erik stay here for the night? It would make me feel so much better.”

The nurse hesitated. “Well, we really shouldn’t--”

“Please, Carlotta?” Charles asked, putting on the same wide-eyed, beseeching look that never failed to make Erik cave. “We’ll be good. And quiet, I promise.”

Carlotta’s face was a little flushed, but she nodded. “All right, shall I get an attendant to bring in a spare bed?”

Erik shook his head immediately, gesturing towards the nearby chair. “No it’s all right, the chair is fine.”
Her face was clouded with doubt, and Charles could practically hear the cogs in her head turning as she thought this over. Surely it must have been obvious that Charles meant for Erik to share the bed with him, which was why he was infinitely grateful when the nurse conceded with a nod. “Will you need anything else?”

“We’re fine,” Erik assured her with a dashing smile that must have melted many women’s hearts, as well as Charles’ own. “We’ll page for someone if Charles needs anything.”

She smiled back at him. “All right, we’ll be done as soon as my colleague gives Charles his sponge bath,” she said, about to head for the door when Erik caught her by the hand.

“Um, could I do it instead?” he asked, and when the nurse turned to look at Charles, he nodded very eagerly.

“All right, I’ll pass you the basin and towel,” she said with a sigh, but she was smiling very broadly. “Just leave those in the bathroom when you are done.”

As promised, she was back in five minutes with a basin of warm water and a small face towel, as well as a larger, fluffier towel and a new set of pyjamas. “Be gentle with him,” she told Erik, who looked mildly offended as though he would even imagine treating Charles any other way. Charles chuckled to himself, waiting until she left and closed the door behind her.

“You heard her, Erik, be gentle with me,” Charles teased him as he started to ease himself up on his elbows, ignoring the dull throbbing in his lower back.

“I wouldn’t even dream of hurting you,” Erik grumbled as he carried the bath items over, setting them on the chair by the bed. After making sure the door was locked and the blinds were drawn, Erik walked over and reached behind Charles, undoing the ties of his hospital gown. Then Erik lifted it away from him, his eyes trailing down Charles’ body. A frown deepened between his eyebrows when he spotted the mottled bruises along Charles’ hip and sides. “Oh, Charles.”

“I’m fine, I really am,” Charles reassured him, recognising the latent anger brewing under Erik’s hurt tone. “If it’s bruising, it means that it’s healing, right?”

Erik’s face was tight and impassive, but he just nodded, picking up the smaller towel and dipping it into the warm water, which had the soothing fragrance of lavender. Charles let out a sigh of pleasure as Erik began wiping his chest tenderly, cleaning him with broad, soothing strokes. Charles just watched him with not quite hidden adoration, his hand gently caressing Erik’s hip.

When Erik bent over to reach behind Charles’ back, their faces were only an inch apart as Erik calmly and methodically wiped his back clean, starting with his shoulders. Charles stared at him, half-lidded, drunk on Erik’s nearness. He could see Erik was trying very hard to behave and do his job, but Charles couldn’t help leaning in just a little closer, their lips brushing together.

Charles.” The way Erik said it, determined to remain dedicated to his task, was only undermined by how husky his voice had become, usually when he was inside Charles.

“Erik,” Charles whispered against his lips, before kissing him slowly, taking comfort in the chaste kiss. “Thank you.”

Erik pulled slowly away from the kiss, blinking and looking a little dazed. Then he shook his head firmly, continuing with the sponge bath with a little frown. “Don’t do that again, my willpower is only so strong.”

Charles chuckled as Erik wrapped him up in the larger fluffy towel, then went to work on wiping his
Erik gave him a wry look. “I can see that,” he deadpanned, casting a glance down at the most obvious evidence that ‘Little Charles’ very much enjoyed having Erik nearby and was rising up to say hello. “But I’m not going to put you in danger just because I can’t ‘keep it in my pants’, as Raven so often advises us to do.”

Charles sighed. “I suppose you’re right. Carry on, then.” He watched as Erik finished wiping his legs, ending with an unexpected - but rather glorious - foot massage. Erik smiled up at him as he kneaded the ball of Charles’ right foot, and for the first time Charles could see the tired lines around his mouth, the heavy bags under his eyes. He wondered when was the last time Erik had rested.

Once Erik was done, he slipped the new set of pyjamas on Charles, who was feeling contented and happy by now. “Go on, Erik, you should take a shower,” he reminded Erik, who cast a longing glance at the en-suite bathroom.

“Are you implying that I reek?” Erik asked with a tired grin, and Charles chuckled, brushing his foot against Erik’s thigh.

“I’m not implying it, I’m saying it. Now go on, I’ll be fine.” Charles pointed to the call button beside his bed. “I’ll call the nurse if I need anything, I promise.”

Only then did Erik nod, reluctantly, and Charles laid back in bed, listening to the sounds of the shower running. There was a brochure by the side of the bed, detailing the various world-class facilities that Hospiten Bellevue had in their care. There was also a small paragraph on the back of the brochure regarding donations to the hospital, and Charles made a mental note to ask Darwin to look into it.

His phone chimed at that moment, and Charles was surprised to see the battery was still full. Erik must have remembered to charge his phone for him. It was Raven’s smiling picture on the caller-ID, and he pressed the ‘Answer’ button. “I’m still alive, if that’s what you’re asking.”

“Ha ha, very funny.” Raven sounded relieved, though. “I came over to see you earlier, but you were getting some scans and Erik was on the phone and he looked so heartbroken, so Darwin and I went off first.”

“Oh.” Charles blinked; it must have been when Erik was talking to his mother. “Um, thank you for coming to see me, but the doctor said I should be discharged by tomorrow. So I’ll see you back at the hotel?”

“Sounds good,” Raven said. “Erik’s still there, isn’t he?”

It was more a statement than a question, but Charles wasn’t really surprised. “Yes, he’s spending the night here.”

“Good.” Raven sounded so vehement that Charles felt his eyebrows jump. “If he comes back here, I’d be tempted to yell at him. He was so mean to poor Hank. It was just an accident, after all.”

Charles just felt very, very tired. “Raven, I’ll see you tomorrow, all right?”

There was a pregnant pause, and for a moment Charles was sure that Raven was going to start an argument, but in the end she just sighed. “Take care, call me or Darwin if you need anything."

“I will.” He hung up just as Erik emerged from the shower, wearing a new T-shirt and grey yoga trousers. “Where did you get those from?” he asked, surprised even as he was unable to stop ogling
“Remy came by earlier and passed these to me.” Erik looked down at himself. “I look okay, right?”

“More than okay,” Charles said, as Erik blushed a little. “Come to bed, Erik.”

Erik nodded, towelling his hair dry before tossing the used towel aside. Charles tried to move aside to make room for him, but Erik told him to stop. “There is more than enough room on the bed for both of us,” Erik said gently, and Charles only nodded, holding out his arms to Erik.

Charles rested his head on Erik’s shoulder as Erik laid on his back. He smelled of the same lavender soap that Charles had gotten a whiff of in the bath water earlier, and he sighed happily when Erik draped a careful arm around him, burying his nose in Charles’ hair. “How do you feel now?” he asked softly, his breath warm against Charles’ skin.

It was a good thing that Charles had to sleep on his side, which meant that he could tilt his head up to face Erik while they huddled together on the hospital bed. He slid his palm across Erik’s chest and squeezed his hand, their fingers twining together. “I always feel better when you’re around, injury or no injury,” he said truthfully.

“I meant your back,” Erik said, the smile obvious in his voice. “Let me know if you need any water, food, painkillers, trashy magazines...”

“Good thing all I need is you, then,” Charles said with a chuckle, tangling his legs with Erik’s. “I’m in so much trouble,” he admitted. “I can’t sleep without you next to me.”

Now Erik was leaning over, pressing a kiss to his forehead. His eyes had that indescribable emotion in them again when he pulled away. “I can’t either,” he breathed out, and Charles shifted slightly so they could trade a few kisses. Charles’ eyes fluttered shut as he rested his head back on Erik’s shoulder, their hands still linked, finding it easier to block out the traumatic memory of the fall with Erik there, holding him like he was the only person in the world who mattered. Erik slid the fingers of his free hand into Charles’ hair then, gently rubbing small circles into the nape of his neck with his thumb until Charles slowly succumbed to the blissful comfort of sleep.

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Charles sat upright in his hospital bed, legs dangling off the side, already dressed in the change of clothes that Darwin had brought over earlier which Erik had just helped him into. Dr. Erskine had come in about an hour ago during his morning rounds and checked his pupils one last time before cheerfully declaring that he was fit to be discharged, seeing as Charles had not suffered any seizures or nausea during the night. Charles was feeling much better, the pain having lessened overnight to a dull throb even after downgrading from morphine to oral painkillers, and he was now mainly contending with a stiff back rather than anything else.

Erik had left the room to sort out the paperwork for his discharge, and Charles smiled to himself, grateful that he had Erik with him through the whole ordeal. He hated being in hospitals, the thought of so much pain and suffering being trapped within the sterile walls, lying in bed and wondering who else had laid there before him, consumed with regret over a life filled with mistakes and words they could never take back, or struggling to cling on because they were not yet ready to leave. Charles shook his head, clearing his thoughts. Erik had been there every step of the way, and Charles did not want to think of what it would have been like if he hadn’t, not sure if he would have even made it through still whole without him.

He looked up when the door to his room opened, flinching slightly when he saw what Erik had
brought along with him. “Erik, what is that for?”

“To help you get into the car. What else?” Erik asked, perplexed as he looked down at the wheelchair and back up at Charles.

“I’m not getting in that. My legs are perfectly fine, I’m not an invalid. I’ll have no problem making my way out of this building on my own two feet. And the photographers that have undoubtedly camped outside will have a field day selling pictures of that pathetic sod Charles Xavier, stuck in a wheelchair,” Charles answered adamantly as he moved to stand, wanting to prove his point.

Erik was beside him in an instant, holding him down by his arms securely but with every bit of gentleness, his tone unyielding, “Dr. Erskine said that you need at least a week of complete bed rest, so you are either leaving in this wheelchair or I am carrying you out because I’ll be damned if I let you walk out of here and aggravate your back due to something as trivial as your pride.”

Charles blinked as the room filled with a stunned silence. Erik seemed to regret the words that had come out of his mouth instantly, letting go of Charles’ arms and stepping back, a pained expression on his face. “Erik,” Charles began softly, “Are we fighting? Why are we fighting?”

“I’m sorry,” Erik said immediately, sitting down on the bed next to Charles. He reached out, about to place his hand on Charles’ thigh before he paused just above his leg, unsure. Charles placed his palm on the back of Erik’s hand, bringing it down to rest on the top of his thigh before looking up at Erik. Erik squeezed his leg gently, continuing, “I’m sorry. Let’s not fight anymore.”

Charles reached over to cup Erik’s face, running his thumb over the bags under his bloodshot eyes. “Did you sleep at all last night?”

Erik shook his head and Charles leaned over to kiss his cheek, his heart breaking a little. “I’m sorry, too.” Charles took an exaggerated breath, smiling broadly as he gestured to Erik, “Come on, help me in. Let’s get this show on the road. Could we attach some bells and whistles to this, do you think? And maybe some helium balloons? To make the picture a little more colourful.”

He let out a yelp as Erik picked him cleanly off the bed and dumped him unceremoniously in the chair. Erik shook his head, retorting, “You know I’d smash their cameras before they even got a shot.”

Charles laughed, trying futilely to get back at Erik before he retreated behind him, “Where’s the fun in that? And you’ll just give poor Remy a heart attack.”

“Good, he deserves one after all the uplifting inspirational crap he’s been texting me non-stop.” Erik answered without any heat.

“Really? Let me see.” Charles continued chuckling as he dug into Erik’s overnight bag for his phone, pausing when Erik began wheeling him out of the room. “Oh you should try levitating me with the chair. Now that would really give them something to talk about.”

* * * * *
The hotel was more than accommodating when they learned that Charles would be recuperating in the suite he shared with Erik, providing them with a direct number to their own personal concierge who would be on call 24 hours a day. The hotel was also very helpful in corresponding with the hospital, and Erik was relieved that he could leave all the small details and do what he did best: taking care of Charles.

He made sure that Charles had his favourite English breakfast, and Remy did a fantastic job in hunting down an entire stack of DVDs for Charles to watch and pass the time (it was no coincidence that the only movies Charles was interested in watching were the ones Erik had starred in, and Remy - the sly idiot - seemed to have foreseen that as well.) Erik also spent the time reading to Charles, and when Charles seemed physically uncomfortable and restless, Erik gave him long, soothing massages, his hands running all over that familiar pale, freckled skin, occasionally stopping to bend down and press a kiss to it. These impromptu massages always ended with Charles holding his arms out to Erik for a hug, and Erik would happily crawl into bed with him, both of them just holding each other and listening to the drone of the TV in the background.

“I think sometimes,” Charles told him sleepily that afternoon, “about what could have happened if I had been more seriously injured. What if I couldn’t work anymore?”
This made Erik’s heart clench in his chest. “Don’t say that.”

“Erik, you know that it could have been more serious.” Charles’ eyes were so clear and blue, and Erik brushed back the hair from his forehead.

“Then I’ll quit and take care of you,” Erik said without question. “We’ll move somewhere nice and quiet, in the mountains, and I’ll cook you meals that made you wish we lived nearer to a McDonald’s.”

Charles laughed, burrowing closer to Erik. “You’d really take care of me?”

“Of course,” Erik said, leaning in close so that their noses brushed together. “What other meaning would my life have, if you weren’t in it?”

Charles smiled at him, the corners of his eyes crinkling. “I think you’d make a better rom-com actor than I would.”

Erik grinned at him. “If you’re trying to flatter me into getting you roast chicken for dinner, it’s not working.”

It shouldn’t be a surprise that Erik did end up getting him roast chicken, along with Charles’ favourite scalloped potatoes, and he pretended not to hear it when Remy made a whipping sound before grinning smugly at him when they bumped into each other outside the restaurant.

Unfortunately, Erik had only been given one day off, and he had to report back to the set the very next day. He waited until Darwin and Raven turned up, armed with magazines, movies and a giant teddy bear for Charles. “Don’t worry man, we’ll take good care of him,” Darwin assured Erik, but Raven still wouldn’t meet his gaze, her lips pursed in displeasure. Erik didn’t quite care; Hank had been in the wrong, and she couldn’t be so blindly in love with the man that she didn’t realise this.

While Darwin and Raven went out to get lunch first, Erik seized the opportunity to give Charles a goodbye kiss. “All right, love, I’d better go before Bryan sends a S.W.A.T. team to look for me.”

Charles looked up at him with those electric blue eyes. “Come here, Erik.”

The kiss was meant to be chaste, but Charles tilted his head so that his mouth slanted across Erik’s, their lips parting, and Charles was tightening his fingers in Erik’s hair, making his breath hitch. Erik let Charles pull him down even more, their tongues twining together, and Erik moaned when Charles caught onto his bottom lip, sucking it into his mouth, and this resulted in a second longer, wetter kiss that had Erik hard in seconds.

Charles finally released him, eyes half-lidded, that beautiful mouth bruised and more red than ever. “You’d better go, someone has to pay the bills,” he said, biting his lip teasingly and making Erik stare.

“Oh, okay.” Erik bent down for one last peck on the lips, quickly pulling back before he changed his mind and crawled back into bed with Charles. Charles was recovering, and there was no way Erik was going to make him strain his back for his own gratification.

“All right, I’m off.” Erik brushed back the dark floppy hair. “I love you.”

“Love you, too.”

In the hired car on the way to the set, Erik felt his phone buzzing in his pocket and thought it was Charles, but it was actually Emma’s number. Sighing, he picked it up. “Hello, Emma.”
“Please tell me Charles is all right.” This was the most worried Emma had ever sounded to him. “Remy updated me on what happened, but I’d rather hear it direct from you.”

“He’ll be fine,” Erik assured her, giving her the brief rundown on what had happened at the hospital.

“All right.” Now Emma’s voice sounded a little more relaxed. “How are you coping? How many people have you already torn apart with your bare hands?”

“Very funny,” Erik said with a yawn. He hadn’t gotten much sleep, and the majority of his concentration was still back at the hotel with Charles. “I’ll call you back later during my break? I’m almost at the set.”

“Well, you’d better call me back.” Emma sounded doubtful. “And for god’s sake, don’t do anything stupid like kill anyone.”

“Bye, Emma,” Erik said loudly before hanging up, massaging his temples.

Reporting back to the set, Erik tried his best to take his mind off Charles and focus on work, but it was useless. The worry was always hovering in his thoughts, and as Erik made his way to Bryan’s tent, he could sense everyone around him eyeing him warily, Bryan included. “How is Charles, Erik?”

“He’s fine, resting back at the hotel.” Erik took a deep breath. “Let’s get this done as soon as possible?”

Bryan nodded worriedly. “All right, so since Charles is not here, we’re going to reshoot the scene where you’re getting medical treatment for your arm after the explosion...”

Erik listened as Bryan went on and on, only catching half of what he was saying, but he froze when he spotted Hank walking around the set as usual, laying down cables. “What is he doing here?” Erik said through gritted teeth.

“Who?” Puzzled, Bryan looked around the set, but his frown melted in understanding when he spotted Hank. “Erik, stay calm—”

Erik didn’t even stop to listen as he stalked over, rage blinding the rest of his senses and narrowing his vision down to Hank’s pale, frightened expression. Even though Hank was at least a good foot taller than him, Erik was clutching his shirt and pinning him against the wall, ignoring the panicked shouts of the crew around him. “Why are you still here? Going to try and kill someone else?”

Hank was shaking his head frantically, looking around for help. “I’m sorry Erik, it really was an accident, I swear!”

“Erik!” A sharp voice said to his left, which Erik immediately recognised as the condescending tones of Shaw. “Erik, let him go right now!”

“Erik!” A sharp voice said to his left, which Erik immediately recognised as the condescending tones of Shaw. “Erik, let him go right now!”

“You.” Erik dropped the frightened Hank, spinning around and grabbing Shaw by the lapels of his ridiculously elaborate suit. “We were done for the day, and you were the one who made Charles do it one more time.”

Shaw’s icy eyes were filled with cold fury. “You’d better let me go if you know what’s good for you. I’m not some silly cameraman you can push around.”

Erik felt someone pulling him away, even as his gaze remained fixed on Shaw. “Come on, Erik,” Remy said quietly, and Erik was nonplussed to find that Alex and Sean were tugging him away as
well. He could hear Bryan announcing over his loudhailer for a break, but even that didn’t break up the crowd standing around and watching, quickly clearing the path for Erik. It wasn’t until Remy frogmarched him to his trailer that Erik finally started to calm down, taking the beer that Sean was handing him and downing it in one go.

“Relax, mon ami,” Remy said calmly as he sat beside Erik, patting his thigh. “If you get fired, I won’t have a job as well.”

Alex nodded with a chuckle. “And trust me, Sean and I don’t want to have to rewrite the whole script.”

Erik closed his eyes, massaging his temples. “I think I’m losing it.”

“You probably are,” Sean agreed, shrinking back when Erik glared at him. “But hey, I understand, I’ve been in love before.”

“‘Before’?” Alex snorted, making Remy chuckle as well. “I’m surprised Moira MacTaggert hasn’t slapped a restraining order on your stalker-ish ass.”

Sean rolled his eyes while the other two laughed at him, but Erik was still shaking with anger when there was a knock on the door, and Remy jumped up to open it. An apologetic Bryan stepped in, casting a wary look at Erik. “Can I come in?”

“Sure,” Erik said flatly. “So is Shaw just firing me, or is he suing me for assault and battery as well?”

Bryan shook his head. “He understands you’re on edge. And you’re not fired, but Hank is.”

Now everyone’s heads swivelled towards Erik, waiting for his reaction. He had imagined that he would feel some kind of relief at the thought of it, but the truth was that it didn’t change the fact that Charles was still injured. He didn’t know why he felt so awful, but he was too choked up to say anything, so he just nodded. Bryan sighed with relief, saying, “I’ll see you back on the set in five,” before leaving the trailer.

* * * * *

There was some old Julia Roberts movie playing on TV, but Raven was barely paying it any attention as she continued buffing Charles’ nails, which were starting to look nice and shiny. Darwin was absorbed in the movie, though, stuffing Doritos into his mouth with his feet up on the chair. Raven eyed his toes before continuing to work on Charles’ nails. “You know, Dar, you could do with a pedicure. Badly.”

Darwin made a distracted sound that could have been a ‘yes’ or a ‘no’, while Charles rolled his eyes. “You know he doesn’t pay attention whenever Julia is on screen,” he told Raven, before turning to Darwin. “Hey Darwin, the Queen of England is coming here to give me her underwear.”

“That’s nice,” Darwin said distractedly, while Charles and Raven exchanged eye rolls.

“Anyway,” Raven said as she flipped her hair back over her shoulder, “Like I was saying, I think Erik totally overreacted. He completely freaked out, especially the way he yelled at poor Hank. I mean, come on, it was an accident.”

She could feel the exact moment Charles stiffened under her touch, and then he was slowly pulling his fingers out of her grasp. “Erik was just upset,” Charles said a little tightly, his face carefully blank. “He was worried about me. I would have been upset too, had our roles been reversed.”
Raven threw her hands up in dismay. “Are you kidding me? You’re defending his erratic behaviour?”

Charles was blinking very rapidly, a clear sign that he was pissed off. “Let’s talk about something else.”

Raven swallowed back her words of protest, not wanting to upset Charles when he was still recuperating. She could tell that Darwin was paying attention now, giving both of them sidelong glances, and she didn’t want this to erupt into yet another fight. She picked up the nail file once more, reclaiming Charles’ hand and starting again.

“It’s not that I don’t think you and Erik aren’t good together..” she began.

“Good,” Charles said stiffly. “Because I don’t need your approval.”

“Jesus,” Raven muttered under her breath, even as Charles raised an eyebrow at her. “I see spending time with Erik hasn’t toned down your stubbornness one bit,” she said a little louder this time, and she could see Darwin nodding in approval. So he was paying attention after all, the sneaky bastard.

She was expecting an argument with Charles, but to her surprise, he was smiling a little. “Erik does give in to me a lot,” he admitted softly.

Raven snorted, working on the nail of Charles’ ring finger. She suspected it wouldn’t be long until there was a gold band around it. “Are you kidding? Angel said he is as whipped as the family pig.”

There was a loud guffaw from Darwin at this, and even Charles was laughing now. “I suppose he is.” There was a fond, faraway look in his eyes now, and Raven wondered what it would be like to have someone - Hank - think of her that fondly. Maybe if she ever felt that deeply about someone - again, Hank - she might have understood what it was like to see them hurt or injured, and experience the fear of losing them.

“Are you all right?” Charles’ gentle voice interrupted her thoughts, and Raven nodded with a smile. “Of course, you and me will never fall out over a guy.” Her grin grew wider. “Hos before bros, you know?”

Charles pretended to look indignant. “Are you calling me a ‘ho’?”

Raven shrugged. “A monogamous one, at least,” she said with a giggle. Charles promptly smacked her on the thigh as he shook his head, while Darwin laughed even louder at both of them.

* * * * *

Charles was reading ‘Pride and Prejudice’ when Erik came back, his arms full of paper bags of food, and Charles could smell the tantalising aroma of chicken and pasta for dinner. Still, Charles was far more delighted to see Erik above all else. Charles beamed up at him as he tossed away the book, holding out his arms for a hug and a welcome-home kiss as Erik put down the food. However, he could tell something was off: Erik wasn’t quite meeting his gaze, and the kiss he gave Charles was a little distracted. Charles grasped Erik’s biceps to hold him in place, and he realised Erik was shaking slightly. “Erik, what’s wrong?”

“Nothing.” Erik’s face was tight and impassive as he started laying out the cartons of food on the bedside table so Charles could eat. “Are you feeling better today, Liebling?”

Charles watched him carefully, realising that Erik was hiding something from him because he didn’t
want Charles to worry. “Erik, sit down here beside me and tell me what’s wrong.”

Erik hesitated.

“Please.” Charles’ eyebrows were knitted together in worry, and Erik sighed loudly as he ignored the food and slumped heavily on the bed, his back resting against the headboard. Charles immediately reached for his hand, twining his fingers in Erik’s and watching him closely. “Tell me what happened.”

“Hank,” Erik said hoarsely, shutting his eyes and pinching the bridge of his nose. “I got Hank fired, and I threatened Shaw.”

“What?” Charles’ eyes widened as he slowly arranged himself so he could look at Erik more closely. “Talk to me, tell me everything from the beginning.”

He listened patiently as Erik told him about the events of the day and how he had raged at Hank, then Shaw. He wasn’t exactly surprised; Erik had never really made a secret of his temper, although he had never, ever unleashed it on Charles. Now that Charles was hurt, he could understand that Erik felt lost, angry and worried. Hell, he would be too if it had been Erik in his place.

He waited until Erik was done speaking, staring into space while glumly picking at his nails. Charles wrapped an arm around him so that Erik’s head was resting on his shoulder, thinking carefully over what he wanted to say.

“Charles?” he heard Erik’s tentative voice. “You’re being unusually quiet.”

Charles sighed. There were going to be points in their relationship where he and Erik would disagree, and this was one of them. “Erik, you need to go and talk to Bryan, and get Hank rehired.”


This was it, Charles thought. He cleared his throat, absently brushing a thumb over the back of Erik’s hand. “Because what happened with Hank was an accident, he didn’t mean any harm.”

“He is a professional,” Erik said angrily, and Charles could see the bright fury in his eyes. “You almost got killed because he didn’t do his job properly. What if something worse had happened to you?”

“But it didn’t,” Charles reminded Erik, noting the tight set of his jaw. “And Hank did do his job properly, it was just an accident. You’ve been on dozens of other sets, you know how accidents happen.” Charles kept his tone gentle, pressing his forehead against Erik’s temple. “Erik, you know Hank wouldn’t harm a fly.”

“No.” Erik’s voice sounded choked. “He harmed you instead.”

Charles let out a deep sigh. “Erik darling, I want you to calm your mind, all right? I know you’re angry now, and upset, and tired, because you went to get dinner for me after a long day of shooting. I appreciate it, I really do. But I need you to listen to me about this. What if it was me who had accidentally caused Hank or someone else to get injured? Would you be as hard on me as you are being on Hank now?”

Erik looked away, but his hand was still gripping Charles’ tightly, so that was a good sign.

Charles tipped Erik’s face towards him, kissing him softly. “Erik, you know I’m right. What happened with Hank was an accident, yes. And all right, maybe he was careless. But we have to rise
above this, Erik. We have it in us to be the better men.”

Erik’s face was stricken. “You have no idea how I felt when I saw you fall,” he whispered. “I wanted to hurt everyone else, especially those who hurt you.”

Charles nodded, stroking Erik’s stubbled cheek. “I know, my love, I know. I would feel that way too, if you were hurt in any way. But you must forgive Hank, he didn’t know any better. Look me in the eye and tell me you’re actually glad that he lost his job.”

Erik did look at Charles, but his lower lip was trembling. “Why do I feel terrible and guilty instead?”

“Because you’re a good man,” Charles said, smiling softly at him as he brushed Erik’s hair back. “I would be concerned if you started rejoicing in the misfortune of others.”

They sat in silence for a long time, Charles gently stroking Erik’s back, hearing his breathing get slower as he relaxed. “I need to go and make things right,” Erik finally said, sounding determined.

Charles kissed his temple. “Go apologise to Hank, take him out for a drink. I’ll talk to Bryan, all right?”

Erik nodded, bringing Charles’ hand to his lips and pressing a kiss to the back of it. “You really do make me want to be a better man.”

Charles grinned at him. “You already are.” He gestured to the cooling food on the bedside table. “Eat something before you go.”

Standing up, Erik shook his head as he tidied his hair and straightened his shirt in the mirror. “I’m not hungry. I’ll go find Hank now, before it’s too late.”

“All right.” They shared a goodbye kiss, then Erik caressed Charles’ cheek before leaving. Picking up his phone, Charles called Bryan immediately. The director sounded wary on the other end of the line, but Charles assured him that he had talked to Erik, and that Hank should be rehired immediately. Bryan was relieved as he agreed, and they talked for a while before Charles heard an incoming call beeping on his phone. “Bryan, I’ve got another call.”

“Okay Charles, thanks again and take care.”

Charles saw that it was Raven’s number, and pressed the ‘Answer’ button. “Hello, my dear.”

The immediate anger and vitriol in her voice stunned him. “What the fuck, Charles? You’ve got to get a hold on Erik before he tears the set apart and gets the rest of the crew fired!”

“What?” Charles frowned, tugging at his sheets. “Wait, is this about Hank?”

Raven snorted. “Jesus, of course it is. Angel just told me what happened. I can’t believe you’re letting Erik get away with murder!”

“I’m not,” Charles said sharply. “I told him he was wrong to do that, and now he’s gone to find Hank to set things right.”

The silence on Raven’s end was almost deafening. For a moment Charles thought he had lost the connection, but Raven finally spoke, “You told him he was wrong?” She sounded suspicious and tentative.

“Of course I did,” Charles said indignantly. “Raven, I’m not Erik’s puppet or something. If he does
something I don’t agree with, you’ll bet he has to bloody hear about it.”

“Oh.” Raven seemed to be mulling over something. “So is Hank rehired?”

“I’ve talked to Bryan, and he says he’ll gladly do it.” Charles heaved a long, heavy sigh. “It’s been a tough few days, I’ll grant you that.”

“Definitely.” Raven sounded glum. “Anyway, I’m sorry I yelled at you, it’s just...Erik’s been flying off the handle. A lot.”

“I know. And I apologise, on his behalf.” And really, Charles did feel a little bad, but at the same time, this entire episode had served to show him the depth of Erik’s love for him, and it left absolutely no doubt in his mind that they were both in this for the long haul.

* * * * *

Erik knocked quietly on the door, hoping he had gotten the correct room number. There was no answer, and he knocked again. He saw the peephole darkening, but still the door remained closed, so he deduced that Hank was in but still too afraid to open the door. “Hank, it’s me, I’m not going to kill you, I promise.”

A long moment passed before the lock clicked, and the door swung open slowly, Hank’s wide blue eyes peeking out. “I have pepper spray.”

“For God’s sake.” Erik ran a hand through his hair, forcing himself to calm down. “Hank, I came to apologise, okay? I lost my temper, I shouldn’t have gotten violent. It was an accident, I see that now.” Erik held out his hands as though to calm a spooked horse, keeping his voice gentle. “I’m very, very sorry, okay?”

Another long pause, then Hank cautiously swung the door open even wider. He nodded once, and was about to close the door again when Erik stopped him, making him jump back with an ‘eep’.

“No wait, I mean, I want to take you out for a beer or something,” Erik pleaded, feeling even more guilty at the way Hank was quaking in front of him. “Please, let’s just go sit down and have a talk, yeah?”

Hank eyed him like a man on the edge of a shark-infested tank. “Just to talk, right?”

Erik nodded again. “Come on, my treat.”

They found themselves at the hotel’s karaoke bar, where a drunk group of English tourists were currently ripping apart Mariah Carey’s ‘Without You’ and making the bar staff cringe. Erik was already on his third beer, while Hank was still nursing his spritzer, visibly uncomfortable. Normally the tourists would have gotten on Erik’s nerves by now, but their accents reminded him of Charles, so he ended up looking like a complete (and psychotic) sap, smiling into his beer.

“Come on, drink up,” he told Hank, who frowned before downing the rest of his glass in one gulp. “Ah, that’s much better.”

“I can’t really hold my liquor,” Hank said with a sigh, setting down his empty glass. “I don’t want to get too wasted.”

Erik snorted, raising his hand to the bartender to signal for another round. “It’s all a state of mind,” Erik reassured Hank, who looked rather dubious. “You’re only as drunk as you allow yourself to be.”
“I think there are a lot of traffic cops who will disagree with you,” Hank began, but he quickly shut up when Erik shot him a dirty look. The bartender set down two new bottles of Heineken in front of them, and Erik picked his up, clinking it against Hank’s.

Hank drank a lot faster this time, and Erik started grinning when he saw Hank’s bottle was already half-empty. “That’s the spirit.”

Hank blinked dispiritedly at his bottle. “Do you think Raven will go out with me?” he blurted out.

Erik sighed. Charles was the one who was a lot better at these things, at encouraging people to act on their strengths. Erik belonged more to the push-someone-into-the-deep-end school of thought, believing that people would never take action unless they were forced to. After all, he would have kept quiet about his growing feelings for Charles if Charles hadn’t shown up at his trailer door and shoved his tongue down Erik’s throat.

Now Hank was looking at him, brow furrowed in worry. “You really think she won’t date me?”

“Huh?” Erik blinked, chasing away thoughts of kissing Charles out of his head. “Sorry, I was distracted. C’mon, Hank, she really likes you. You just have to open your mouth and take a chance.”

“Really?” The growing smile on Hank’s face was pure sunshine. “I didn’t know. Um, that she likes me.”

Erik downed the rest of his beer, feeling a little too much like he was trapped in an episode of Gossip Girl. “I think we need more alcohol.”

Sometime after their seventh beer, Erik and Hank ended up joining the rowdy English tourists, singing along to ‘I’m Too Sexy’ amidst a sea of hysterical laughter. Erik deliberately put on his natural native accent at its thickest, which made Hank double over with giggles. “Barkeep, more beer!” one of the tourists was yelling, while his wife was waving a €20 bill at Erik. Hank was swaying from side to side like a cobra being hypnotised by a snake charmer, and Erik downed another shot before launching back into the song. “I’m too sexy for my shirt, so sexy it hurts...”

“Take it off, Erik!” one of the women yelled, and Erik shook his head vigorously. Only Charles got to see the goods, and Erik felt absolutely no shame at all in sending Hank to the slaughter, pushing him forward instead.

“What? No, no, no, no...” Hank’s face was beetroot red, flushed with laughter and alcohol and embarrassment. “No, I’m very shy about my body--”

“He’s a liar!” Erik yelled over the music with a laugh. “He dressed up as Superman for Halloween!”

“Oh, now we have to see this,” someone demanded, and Erik couldn’t help snickering even more as Hank tried to escape the sudden flood of attention. Sinking back into the cushioned seat of the booth, Erik picked up the remote and selected another song that sounded familiar and wouldn’t be too hard to do. He blinked blearily at the screen. ‘500 Miles’ shouldn’t be too difficult a song to sing, right?

In minutes the Brits had completely forgotten about taking off Hank’s shirt and everyone was now marching together on the spot, hollering, ‘AND I WOULD WALK 500 MILES AND I WOULD WALK 500 MORE!’ and even the rest of the patrons and staff were joining in.

“Da da lat da!” Erik sang.

“DA DA LAT DA!” the rest of the bar echoed back at him, and this continued until the song had finally finished, Erik reaching for Hank beside him and hugging him tightly.
“You’re the besht,” Erik slurred, thumping Hank on the back. “I’m s-sorry I yelled at you.”

“S’okay,” Hank mumbled back, waving his hand about ineffectually. “S’ water under the, uh, the, um—”

“Bush?” Erik suggested with a frown. It sounded right, but right now he didn’t really care. “Anyway, I’m sorry. So sorry. I was so scared of losing Charles.”

Hank nodded in understanding, his glasses slipping down his nose. “Would you walk 500 miles for Charles?”

Erik nodded with a laugh, finding it really funny for some reason. “And I would walk 500 more. Wherever he wants me to go.”

“You’re lucky to have each other,” Hank said glumly, before passing out on Erik’s shoulder, and Erik blinked at him in a daze, determined to get him and Raven together once and for all.

* * * * *

Charles was trying to find a comfortable spot in bed as he flipped through the various stations. They had HBO and a few other channels with Spanish subtitles, and there was even a local one that was showing ‘The Blind Date’. Charles grinned as he and Moira squabbled over something on the screen, remembering how their argument had been so natural and organic that the director had really believed they wanted to kill - and then sleep with - each other in that very take.

Just as he was debating whether to give Moira a call, there were sounds of scuffling at the door, and Charles could hear Remy’s muffled voice and Erik’s slurred, louder one. Then the sound of the key card slipping into the slot before the door swung open, a harassed Remy and amused Darwin carrying an extremely drunk Erik between them into the room, depositing him onto the bed.

“My God, what happened?” Charles asked in amazement as Erik started groaning, shielding his face from the lights.

“From what I’m guessing, he and Hank have made up,” Darwin said dryly. “And also, in the process, they may or may not have drunk every last drop of alcohol left in the Canary Islands.”

Charles was shaking his head, holding back a smile. Trust Erik never to do things halfway. “Is Hank all right?”

Remy nodded. “Oui, Alex and Sean helped to carry him to his room.”

“All right.” Charles looked down at Erik’s dazed expression. “Help me get him into bed, and I’ll take it from there.”

Once Erik was settled in more comfortably, Remy and Darwin bid him goodnight as they left, closing the door behind them. Charles stroked Erik’s hair back, fishing for a piece of Kleenex and mopping the light sweat off his brow. Erik murmured something, and Charles wondered if Erik was feeling hot and would prefer to sleep with his shirt off. He started unbuttoning Erik’s shirt, but he was confused when Erik slapped his hands away with a frown, murmuring, “No, I don’t want to...”

Charles was puzzled. “Erik, what do you mean?”

“Leave me alone.” Erik wriggled away from Charles’ hands. “I’m taken, he’s waiting upstairs for me.”
It took a moment before what Erik meant finally sunk in, and Charles just couldn’t stop smiling. “Oh Erik, it’s me, you are already upstairs—”

“No,” Erik said flatly, pulling his shirt closed even tighter. “I want Charles.”

“Jesus.” Now Charles really had to laugh, finally releasing the hem of Erik’s shirt. “I’m going to tell you about this in the morning and laugh really hard at you.”

Erik simply scrunched up his nose at that, but it wasn’t long before his breathing evened out, his hold on his own shirt loosening. Only then was Charles able to get at it, unbuttoning it with practised ease and slipping it off his shoulders. It took far more effort this time, thanks to his injury and Erik’s body being a deadweight, but finally Erik was shirtless, and he seemed far more comfortable now, the little frown between his eyebrows smoothing out.

“Life with you is never boring, darling,” Charles murmured as he shrugged off his own shirt, then curled up with Erik on their sides in their usual spooning position, drifting off to sleep to the sound of Erik’s steady breathing behind him.

* * * * *

Remy walked into the hotel room with a cheerfully startling, “Bonjour, cher, I am here!” that made Charles drop the magazine he’d been perusing. He smiled at Remy as he handed Charles a gold box of expensive chocolates. “Here, chocolat from you-know-who.”

Charles couldn’t stop the broad grin stretching across his face. Erik had taken the time to scribble him a quick ‘Miss you!’, adding a little heart at the bottom of the small card. From the way his usually neat handwriting was rather jagged and messy, Charles suspected Erik must have ducked out quickly during a shooting break to get him this. “Please thank him for me,” Charles told Remy. “And as lovely as your company is, I don’t actually need someone to keep an eye on me at all hours.”

“Who says this is all about you?” Remy retorted airily. “Erik may have patched things up with Hank, but he will continue to be unreasonable and borderline homicidal while you are on the mend, n’est ce pas? So I’m here on everyone’s behalf.”

Charles blinked. “Surely it can’t be that bad.”

Remy gave him a look that conveyed, no telepathic powers needed, how he thought Charles was a sad, sad man with foolish delusions of sanity in people who were named Erik Lehnsherr. “It must be nice, in this imaginary world you live in where your paramour isn’t a nervous breakdown away from moonlighting as a serial killer.”

“Oh, Erik is all bark and no bite,” huffed Charles. Well, he mentally amended, except for when the biting is being inflicted on me. He could feel himself blushing, and ducked his head in the hopes that Remy wouldn’t notice.

Remy’s arched eyebrow indicated that he was not successful. “Merde, it is not like your friends want to know more about your sex life.” Thankfully, that seemed to be all he was willing to say on the matter. He looked around the room. “So, what shall we do?”

“Hmm.” Charles considered the options. “I was thinking we could just watch a movie, and maybe order some food.”

“And here I was hoping that I was wrong about you, that you’re not un pantouflard despite your old man outfits,” said Remy, giving Charles a disappointed look. It was remarkable how communicative the man’s expressions were.
“What does ‘un pantoufard’ mean?” Charles asked, half-afraid to know the answer.

Remy gave him a dismissive wave. “Oh, just someone who doesn’t like to party.” Now he seemed to be considering something else. “What about -” he gave Charles a speculative look that had Charles fearing that his immediate future was going to be filled with excitement, likely against his will.

“Just remember - serial killer boyfriend,” said Charles, in a last-ditched attempt to avert whatever was coming.

A handful of playing cards appeared in Remy’s hand, as if by magic. “Ah, I was just going to ask if you know any card tricks,” said Remy. But the speculative gleam in his eyes promised uncertain perils waiting to befall in what did sound like a fairly benign activity. “Non? Then I must teach you some.” He grinned. “I am told that I am quite lethal when it comes to cards.”

“I’m sure,” Charles said dryly as he started to clear the small table in front of him. He could tell that Remy was staying not because Erik had told him to deliver the chocolates, but because Remy genuinely wanted to be there. Remy seemed happy and excited, and not at all in a hurry. “All right Remy, school me on the finer tricks of cards.”

Remy showed Charles a few rudimentary tricks that he had already seen on TV, but he politely kept quiet and pretended to applaud as Remy went through the motions. However, Remy started pulling out more heavy duty tricks that Charles had never seen, the most impressive of which had Charles signing his name on a queen of hearts before Remy took out his lighter and set it alight. Charles was very sure that he had seen the black ashes of the card floating away, so when Remy asked Charles to look in his pocket, he was shocked to find the exact same card with his signature on it. “How did you do that?” he asked in awe.

Remy took a graceful bow. “I told you, I’m superb,” he said with a huge grin.

“More,” Charles said, clapping in glee, and Remy laughed as he reshuffled the cards. This was infinitely better than reading a backdated copy of ‘Hello!’ or watching TV, wondering how long it would be until Erik finished work.

After exhausting his supply of tricks, Charles and Remy started up a leisurely game of blackjack, not that he could remember who was winning because they were caught up in an excited conversation about going home for the holidays. “I can’t wait to go home and eat my mother’s galette des Rois for Christmas,” Remy said, a dreamy nostalgic look in his eyes.

“What’s that?” Charles asked, his curiosity tempered only by the sad realisation that his own mother had never established any Christmas traditions.

Remy thought for a while. “I think the direct translation is called ‘king cake’? It’s this lovely cake made of puff pastry and almond filling.”

“Sounds wonderful.” Charles drew another card, adding it to his fold. “Erik and I are visiting his parents in Munich for Hanukkah.”

Remy laughed. “Mon Dieu, yes I know. He’s told me a million times about that, and pestered me to book the flight tickets and make sure your passports are updated.”

“Oh, sorry.” Charles was now chuckling too. “Erik can be a little....intense, I know.”

Remy shrugged as he drew a card as well. “I knew what I was getting into.” Now he seemed rather thoughtful. “It’s touching, actually, how much he cares about you. I don’t really believe in relationships, but you and Erik are good together.”
Charles eyed him over his cards. “You’re not going to settle down yourself?”

“Oh non, not for me.” Remy winked at him. “I like window shopping too much to actually make a purchase.”

Charles laughed for a minute or so; it was a great analogy. “Well, consider me bought and paid for, then.”

The knowing smile Remy gave him was rather amusing.

* * * * *

“Darling,” Charles began, sliding his arms around Erik’s waist and teasing his lips apart for a slow, sensual kiss. “I’m feeling much better today, but do you know what would make me feel even better?” Charles murmured as he trailed kisses down Erik’s neck, popping the top button of Erik’s pyjama top.

“No, Charles.” Erik protested, shifting Charles’ hands off his open collar. “You still haven’t fully recovered, I don’t–”

Charles hushed him with another kiss, trailing a hand down to hook a finger around the waist of Erik’s pants and pulling him towards the bed. Erik had been denying him all week, and he had needs, dammit. He honestly was feeling a lot better, and the bruises on his back were already fading to green and yellow. Besides, for once Erik had not treated him like he was made of glass when he scrubbed his back, soaking together in the tub just before this. And if even Erik was conceding that he was looking better, Charles needed no further proof that he was well on the road to recovery.

Charles sat down when the backs of his legs hit the bed, still unrelenting with his kisses as he slid backwards across the covers, dragging Erik along. He leaned back when he hit the pillows and was about to work on getting Erik’s sleep pants off when Erik pulled away, shaking his head.

“No, Charles,” Erik asserted, sounding completely wrecked.

Charles huffed. “Oh come on, you of all people know my bruises take a long time to go away.” Charles paused, raising an eyebrow teasingly, “I’m almost good as new, really.”

Erik smiled as he shook his head, “No, Liebling. Let’s play some chess.”

“Oh, is that what we’re calling it now?” Charles smirked as he sat up, leaning towards him.

Erik laughed, reaching over to the bedside table and grabbing the bag that he’d placed there earlier. “No, we’re really just playing chess. I saw this set when I was getting you dinner, and you told me once that you used to play when you were in boarding school.”

Charles lit up when he saw the familiar pieces falling onto the bed between them, like old friends suddenly showing up at his door. Chess was one of the few things that he had sought solace in, all those years away at boarding school. “Yes, I did. All right, we’ll play a round, but I’m not done with you yet.”

Charles picked up the white queen, tracing its curves with his forefinger before placing it down on his side of the board. He heard Erik let out a chuckle, looking up in time to see him smiling as he nodded his head. Charles raised his eyebrows in confusion. “What?”

“I’m not surprised at all. White always makes the first move,” Erik replied as he leaned across the board, cupping Charles’ face as he kissed him before picking up the black pieces and arranging them
Charles made himself comfortable, and allowed himself to be distracted by the precise movements of Erik’s hands. Lord, but he loved Erik’s hands - strong and broad and long-fingered. Erik touched him a lot; in some ways, he’d been touching Charles more since the accident, as if to reassure himself that Charles was alive and present nearby. But he’d been damnable stubborn about keeping things chaste - well, relatively - between them while Charles was recovering. And Charles missed all the other kinds of touching: Erik possessively gripping his hips while fucking into him, those strong hands holding down Charles’ wrists, those long fingers sliding inside Charles-

Erik cleared his throat, in a pointed way that suggested he’d been doing it for a while. Charles felt his face warm. He took his time arranging the white pieces on his side, though.

The game began fairly normally. Charles advanced a few pawns, watched Erik do the same, assayed a knight in a half-remembered gambit meant to tempt Erik into sending his bishop out into dangerous territory. It was only when the gambit actually worked that Charles realized just how distracted Erik must be.

Charles let out a thoughtful “hmmm” with a purr-like tease at the end. Erik’s eyes immediately darted up, stopped at the level of Charles’ mouth, then dropped back to the board with the weight of a guilty, guilty imagination.

It almost didn’t seem fair to take Erik’s bishop. But then, Charles reasoned, the game had quite entirely changed. He brought out his other knight and plucked the black bishop from the board. No need for Erik to know, just yet, how little Charles’ triumphant smirk had to do with the game.

Erik peered at the board like it held all the secrets of the universe. His next play - another pawn, really? - suggested that his concentration hadn’t improved any over the last few minutes.

Humming again, making sure the sound came from deep in his chest, Charles tilted his head, frowned as if faced with indecision, and absently nibbled on the bishop that was still in his hand.

Charles felt a flash of heat, like lightning, at the way Erik’s gaze zeroed in on the chess piece between Charles’ lips. It was an old habit of his, playing with the pieces while deep in thought, and the suggestiveness of it had never quite occurred to him.

He held Erik’s gaze, and teased the tip of his tongue around the pointed top of the bishop. He saw Erik’s eyes grow darker.

“I was a fairly good player, back at school,” Charles said. He kept his voice casual and quiet, though he steadily met Erik’s gaze and the simmering heat within. “I’m not overtly aggressive, you see. I was known for being able to lure my opponents into a false sense of security.” He pressed the bishop-top down on his lower lip, just enough to flick it lightly. “Once I had... penetrated their defences... and took control of the board, I was free to... have my way with them.”

“Charles,” rasped Erik. Charles couldn’t tell if it was meant to be a warning or a plea or a question - he suspected Erik didn’t know, either.

“My poor darling.” Charles put the bishop down, deciding. “I want to see you.”

“Charles-”

“You don’t have to touch me, if you insist on being noble.” Charles let his eyes drift down Erik’s body, settling on the area between Erik’s legs where his interest was... telling. “But there’s no reason why you can’t touch yourself.”
Erik swallowed, and Charles was momentarily distracted by the cords of muscles on Erik’s neck. “Not fair to you.”

“You think I don’t get off on it?” Charles asked, putting as much heat as he could into his voice. “You think I won’t enjoy watching you touch yourself?”

Erik’s hands lifted and came to rest on the waistband of his sleeping pants. He still hesitated, staring at Charles in a way that made Charles want to fling himself over the forgotten chess board and fuck Erik into the mattress, healing injuries be damned.

“Let me, Erik,” he growled. “Let me make you come without laying a single finger on you.”

That seemed to do it - Erik’s pants disappeared in a flash of fabric. Charles let out a pleased groan at all the bared skin on display: those distressingly long legs, topped by powerful thighs, and the rising glory of Erik’s cock, already half-hard.

“Touch yourself,” he ordered. Erik eagerly gripped himself, letting out a sharp, hitched gasp at the first jerk, the second. “Oh, you are gorgeous.”

A particularly fetching flush was making itself known over Erik’s distinctive cheekbones. Charles discovered that he did enjoy this, very much indeed; being slightly removed from the action and thus able to appreciate the parts of it that tended to get lost amidst the sweat and the frantic drive of lust. “That’s it,” he breathed, when Erik was fully hard and the skin underneath his hand was distinctly slick, which hadn’t taken much time at all. “A little harder - yes. I love how desperate you are for me. I can almost taste how badly you want to fuck me. How much you’ve been holding yourself back, when all you want is to touch me all over.”

Erik let out a soft whimper.

“I can’t wait to feel your hands on me again,” Charles said huskily. He felt too hot under his clothes, and considered taking them off, but that would mean looking away from the vision that was Erik, flushed and panting with arousal, slowly stroking his own cock with one of his utterly distracting hands. Erik’s eyes roved all over Charles’ body, and then his gaze fixed on Charles’ eyes, heavy-lidded and full of intent, as if he was perfectly capable of ravishing Charles just like this.

Charles felt pinned, for all that there was no physical contact between the two of them, held in place by Erik’s attention alone.

Then Erik was making those soft, hitching little sounds at the back of his throat that Charles was so familiar with, his eyes so dark, pupils fully blown. And all this just from looking at Charles, jerking off to the sight of him and the memory of previous bouts of scorching, mind-blowing sex. Erik’s head fell back as he let out a low moan, baring the beautiful line of his throat which was only interrupted by the bump of his Adam’s apple. Charles could still see the ghost of a mark he had left on Erik last week, and his mouth watered, remembering the taste of Erik’s skin beneath his tongue.

That was it. Charles was only human after all, and which human could resist the sight of Erik Lehnsherr in front of them, stroking himself like this and making those beautiful noises?

Charles rose to his knees, pushing aside the forgotten chess pieces, not caring whether they rolled to the side or fell off the sheets as he climbed over to the other side of the bed where Erik sat with his legs spread. Straddling Erik’s lap, Charles smiled when Erik’s eyes flew open in surprise, mouth already open to protest. “Let me,” he murmured before taking Erik’s mouth in a slow, leisurely kiss, his hand clutching Erik’s hair and tugging on it to tilt his head back so Charles could deepen the kiss.
Erik didn’t seem to mind, judging from the pleased noises he was making, and it made Charles greedy, sucking on the tip of Erik’s tongue while his nails scratched down the curve of Erik’s neck. He wanted Erik so, so badly, wanted Erik inside him, driving into him with those short, sharp thrusts that drove Charles insane.

Erik finally pulled away, gasping for air, eyes wild and dazed. “Charles, we can’t--”

“Can’t what?” Charles nuzzled against his stubbled cheek, a hand sliding across Erik’s flat stomach and sending a surge of lust curling in his belly, pooling at his groin. Charles let his mouth be claimed by Erik, thoroughly enjoying the desperate way Erik wanted him - so he obviously wasn’t the only one feeling deprived. He ground his cock against Erik’s stomach, simultaneously wanting Erik to pin him down and fuck him, hard, as well as lube himself up and ride Erik until they both came all over the chess board and sheets.

“Oh, Erik,” Charles moaned, wrapping his fingers around the thick shaft of Erik’s cock, needing it so badly inside him, but since Erik wasn’t going to fuck him, he’d be content with this for now after a whole week of deprivation. There was a sheen of sweat on Erik’s forehead, his face flushed with arousal, eyes so dark that his pupils were ringed only with a thin blue-green circle. Charles had never wanted Erik more, his hand pleasuring Erik with the long, slow strokes that Erik liked.

Erik was panting against Charles’ ear, his breath hot and sweet. “Love you,” he huffed out, a hand stroking Charles’ hair as he started thrusting up into the tunnel of Charles’ fist, eyes squeezing shut. Charles buried his nose in Erik’s neck, taking in the sweaty, manly smell of him, his hand starting to get slick with drops of Erik’s precome. Charles was aware he was murmuring nonsense peppered with Erik’s name and ‘love’ and ‘darling’ and he honestly believed he would never, ever want or love anyone this much ever again, that Erik would always be more than enough for him. He began kissing the crook where Erik’s neck met his shoulder, occasionally letting his teeth scrape the skin, making Erik moan as his fingers tightened in Charles’ hair.

“Oh, God--” Erik panted in his ear, then he stiffened, and Charles’ hand was slick with come as Erik’s head dipped, groaning his release against Charles’ shoulder. Charles continued to stroke him still, completely turned on by the way Erik was losing control in his arms, clutching onto Charles so tightly (yet carefully). He took this opportunity to tilt Erik’s head back, slipping his tongue into Erik’s open mouth for yet another kiss - seriously, Charles could kiss Erik all day - the outline of his cock in his pajama trousers rocking against Erik’s stomach. He shouldn’t enjoy rubbing himself against Erik like this, but he was, loving how well their bodies fit together even when he was straddling Erik.

He let out a yelp when Erik unexpectedly picked him up, gently depositing him on the bed so that Charles was laid out before him. Charles was silenced by the intense heat in Erik’s eyes as he began kissing a line down Charles’ neck, then rucked up his T-shirt, the kisses trailing down his chest, and Erik’s tongue swirled around his right nipple, making Charles arch up into his hot mouth.

“Down, boy,” Erik murmured, smiling before continuing the trail of kisses down to his stomach, spending an inordinate amount of time there just nuzzling and mouthing the pale skin. Charles watched, fascinated even though his cock was already straining in his trousers, aching for Erik’s touch.

Erik seemed to get the idea, gazing up at Charles while tugging down the waistband of Charles’ trousers, down until Charles’ aching erection bobbed up, brushing Erik’s cheek. Erik kept his gaze on Charles as his mouth wrapped around the head, so tight and so warm, and Charles slid his fingers
into Erik’s hair, gasping for breath. Erik loved sucking him off, loved watching Charles writhe and beg under him like this, slowly losing control. And Charles completely loved surrendering to Erik like this, watching the way his cheeks would hollow as he slowly took Charles into his mouth, getting off on Charles’ pleasure.

“Oh God, Erik--” Charles knew he must be a sight, flushed red, lips parted, fingers deeply entrenched in Erik’s hair. And then Erik relaxed, his mouth fully taking in Charles’ cock, and Charles just lost it, thrusting up into that wet heat and coming so hard, fisting in Erik’s hair, feeling Erik’s grip tight on his hips and holding him still so Charles wouldn’t strain his back. It was messy and hot and wet and perfect, and Charles fell back onto the pillow, fighting to regain his breath. After an entire Erik-less week of deprivation, this was lovely. “Oh Erik, really, your mouth should win awards.”

Erik was wiping his chin, grinning as he climbed up to take Charles into his arms, both of them sweaty and breathless. “Does this mean I’ll have to convince a panel of judges?”

Charles swatted at him. “Then no awards for you, because the only person your mouth is getting anywhere near is me.”

Erik yawned as he spooned himself behind Charles, tucking his knees behind Charles’ own. “Good, because I’m not interested in offering anyone else my services.”

Charles blinked, smiling sleepily. “I’m sorry to deprive the world of the services of Erik Lehnsherr.”

“No, you’re not,” Erik said, smiling against his shoulder.

“Oh, I’m not,” Charles admitted, making Erik laugh. “I missed this.” He searched for Erik’s hand under the sheets, clasping it tightly and pressing it to his chest. “I missed you.”

Erik kissed his ear. “Then it’s good that I’m not going anywhere.”

* * * * *

Erik had his arm slung around Charles’ back as they waited for their turn outside Dr. Erskine’s door, leaning his head against Charles as he watched him scroll through travel websites on things to do in Munich on his phone. Charles was in good spirits, chattering on about Christmas markets and the different types of lager they could try, and to say that it was a huge relief to have Charles back like this would be the understatement of the year. The past week had honestly been the most harrowing experience of his life, the thought that he could just as easily have lost Charles forever on that beach still kept him up at night, and his hands still turned cold each time he remembered how pale and drugged-out Charles had looked the last time they had been in this hospital.

“Charles, at the rate you’re going, you’ll be the one guiding me around my own country,” Erik teased as he kissed Charles’ temple.

Charles laughed, squeezing Erik’s leg. “I’m just doing a little research. I’ve had too much free time, you see. There are so many things I want to do when we get there. Are you regretting asking me along yet?”

“Never.” Erik replied as he held Charles a little closer.

Their number flashed on the queue number display outside Dr. Erskine’s room and Erik held open the door as Charles entered, closing it behind him and walking over to the spare chair while nodding his head in greeting to the doctor.
“Good afternoon, Dr. Erskine,” Charles greeted before he sat next to the physician.

“How are you feeling today, Charles?” Dr. Erskine asked cheerfully as he leaned forward in his seat to shake Charles’ proffered hand.

Charles smiled, sitting up straighter. “I’m doing very well, thank you.”

“Good, good. Any dizziness, memory loss, headaches?” Dr. Erskine questioned as he turned on his flashlight, and Erik found himself thinking back through the past week, looking for instances where Charles seemed to have been suffering from any of those symptoms but not finding anything that stuck out.

“No, none that I noticed,” Charles answered as Dr. Erskine shined the light into his eyes, and Erik felt a warm wave of relief flood through him.

“Excellent.” Dr. Erskine got up and motioned for Charles to get on the examination bed, Erik rising to his feet as well, drawing the curtain around them as Charles climbed onto the mattress. “Now if you could take off your shirt so I could look at your back.”

Charles proceeded to unbutton his shirt obligingly, letting it fall off his shoulders as he shifted on the bed to give the doctor better access to his back.

“How’s your back pain?” he asked as he examined Charles’ back, pressing down lightly on the areas that were still lightly coloured.

“It’s gone now, I’ve stopped taking the painkillers,” Charles replied, eyes flicking off to glance at Erik beside him.

Dr. Erskine made his way back around to address Charles, signalling for him to put his shirt back on. “Your hematomas have resorbed but there’s still some very light bruising which should fade in a few days, nothing to worry about.”

Charles was grinning at that, and Erik wanted so badly to pick him up in his arms and never let go, extremely thankful that the entire ordeal was over. Charles swung his legs over the edge of the examination bed as he buttoned up his collar, and Erik felt that familiar sense of foreboding when he saw Charles’ right eyebrow arch up, “Can I ask a question?”

Dr. Erskine looked up from where he was putting Charles’ file away, smiling. “Just one.”

Charles looked at Erik pointedly and winked before turning back to Dr. Erskine, “It’s all right for us to have intercourse now, yes?”

Erik summoned all his strength in a bid to not to hide his face in mortification. The doctor laughed, his eyes crinkling at the corners. “I suppose that’s the only question that matters. Your back is fine, I don’t see why not.”

Charles placed a possessive hand on Erik’s waist, looking up at Erik and smiling. “Then we’d like to get tested.”

* * * *

Erik held on to Charles’ hand as he helped him out of the car, brows knitted in concern. “Please don’t push yourself. If you’re feeling uncomfortable at any time, just say the word and--”

“Erik, darling, I’m perfectly fine,” Charles insisted as his kissed the corner of Erik’s mouth. “Dr.
Erskine said I could resume all my regular activities, remember? Would it convince you if I dropped to the ground right now and got into the Downward Dog position?"

“Charles.” Erik shot back in dismay.

Charles laughed and kissed Erik’s cheek, smirking as he pulled away. “Tonight, then.”

Charles led the way as they headed towards the set, glad to finally be back. He had been bored out of his mind cooped up in their hotel room recuperating and, despite the excellent company that Raven, Darwin and Remy were, he had spent much of his time missing Erik and had even occasionally caught himself staring into space, waiting for Erik to walk back through the door.

“Hey, look who’s back!” Charles heard Alex shout from across the set the moment he and Erik walked in, followed by a high-pitched whoop from Sean as he ran over to grip him in a tight hug.

“Man, I’m so glad you’re back.” Sean said as he released him, grinning uncontrollably. He was followed by a string of people from the crew, some of whom were locals that Charles had only met briefly before the incident, and Charles was beginning to feel slightly overwhelmed by the sudden and odd outpouring of relief and affection.

“Please don’t take this the wrong way, I’m very excited to be back and I’ve missed all of you, but isn’t this a bit much? I’ve only been gone for a little over a week,” Charles commented in bewilderment as he returned a hug from a teary-eyed lady he recognised as being from the local craft service.

Darwin laughed, shaking his head. “You don’t even know... Just yesterday, Erik yelled at Angel just for taking too long to do his makeup.”

“Oh Erik...” Charles exchanged a look with the man next to him as he sighed.

Erik held up his hands defensively. “I just don’t see why we have to waste precious time painting my face when I could spend that time back in the room with you.”

Angel crossed her arms as she spat back, “Excuse me? You expect to get away with shooting a scene showing off dark circles the size of Russia?”

A visibly shaken Bryan appeared before either he or Erik could reply, hurrying over to wrap his arms around him. “Charles, please never leave us again,” he pleaded into his shoulder before grabbing his face and planting a kiss on his cheek. “I’d rather go through hellfire than another week of that.”

“My word...” Charles shifted when Bryan let go, sliding over to Erik and rubbing a hand over the small of his back. “I do apologise for the grief that Erik may have caused any of you and hope you understand that we were all going through a difficult time.” Charles paused, clapping his hands together and putting on his best smile, “I am sure we are all looking forward to a break, so let’s just shoot this scene quickly and then we can all go off and enjoy the holidays, shall we?”

“You heard the man. Everyone, off to your places.” Bryan concurred, earning loud cheers and applause from the people gathered around.

* * * *

Charles staggered to the back of the ambulance where Erik was sitting, out of breath. All around them, paramedics were rushing to give the victims of the blast medical attention, the area around the Drake Hotel still in the process of being cordoned off and evacuated by the NYPD. Charles warily took a cursory glance around the ambulance, making sure they were alone before he sat down next
to Erik, running his thumb gently across the cuts above his left eye.

“Are you all right?” Charles asked as he took in Erik’s bandaged arm, remembering how Erik had used it to shield him from the blast.

Erik nodded. “I’ll be fine. Did you manage to catch him?”

“No, he took off in a speedboat. But we’ll get him, next time.” Charles replied as he rubbed Erik’s knee, cleaning up the cuts on Erik’s face with alcohol swabs from the first-aid kit in gentle dabs.

Charles put the used swabs and bandages away when he was done, taking one last look around them before cupping his hand around Erik’s neck, leaning in to kiss him softly on the lips.

“Thank you... for saving my life.”

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**Notes:**

1. Erik’s freakout over Hank’s mistake is based on Christian Bale’s real life rant at his Director of Photography on the set of ‘Terminator: Salvation’. You can see the original video [here](#) or see the hilarious dance remix [here](#).
2. Dr. Abraham Erskine is the doctor in the Marvel universe who created the Super Soldier serum that was given to Captain America.
3. ‘Nichts zu danken’ means ‘No thanks needed’ in German.
4. Hospiten Bellevue is a private hospital in Tenerife, the Canary Islands.
5. The songs that Erik and Hank massacre during their karaoke session is Right Said Fred’s ‘I’m Too Sexy’ and The Proclaimers’ ‘(I’m Gonna Be) 500 Miles’, which are embarrassing karaoke staples.
6. The ‘king cake’ that Remy refers to is a traditional cake that is popular in the Christmas season (Christmas Eve to Epiphany) amidst Francophile countries. You can see a picture of it [here](#).
7. “Can I ask a question?”,”Just one.” and “I suppose that’s the only question that matters.” are quotes from ‘Captain America’.

Happy Holidays, everyone! We’re going off for a little break and will be back in the new year with the holiday special! Drink lots of booze, stay safe, and if you’re anything like Hank, remember to wear your glasses at all times.
Chapter Summary

This is the Holiday Special, in which Cupid strikes - repeatedly - and Charles and Erik spend time with each of their respective families. They also have mountains of sex, and then sex on a mountain.

Chapter Notes

We apologise for how late this chapter is! It was supposed to be a holiday special and we hope you still enjoy it even though it is already January. This chapter is over 33k words and we’ve put in dates along the way to help break it into shorter sections. Anyway, we would like to thank everyone who has patiently stuck with us and recced this story, and we would especially like to thank xsilverdreamsx for her beautiful artwork for this series.

The Chinese translation of Chapter 4 is up here, translated by the wonderful Yaegakisawa.

Soundtrack: OneRepublic - ‘Good Life’
December 20th

Erik had never been so glad to be greeted by the familiar, orderly sight of Munich Airport. It had been quite a harrowing experience for both Charles and him in the Canary Islands, so there had been a collective sigh of relief on the set when Bryan finally dispersed all of them for the holiday break. Also, this was the first time he was bringing home someone very important, and from the way Charles was clutching his hand tightly while gazing out of the plane window, it was a good guess that this was a Very Big Deal for Charles as well. “You look very excited,” Erik told him, resting his chin on Charles’ shoulder as the plane started taxiing down the runway. “I have to warn you, Munich isn’t very exotic or exciting like Shanghai or Johannesburg.”

Charles flashed him a smile. “It’s not that, I don’t care about that. This is your home, where your parents live. Of course I’d rather be here than anywhere else.”

Erik took his hand, planting a kiss on the back of it. “You’re such a sweet-talker.”

It didn’t take long to disembark the plane and get through Customs, and thankfully Remy had already arranged in advance for a car to pick them up at the airport, saving them a long queue for a taxi. Charles dozed off in the car, his head resting on Erik’s shoulder while Erik texted his mother to let her know they were both on their way. He raised an eyebrow when her reply was entirely in caps, which should have given him a warning of some kind.

Still, he was glad when they finally pulled up to his parents’ house on the outskirts of Munich, gently
waking Charles who was blinking blearily. “We’re here?”

“Yes, let’s get our things.” Erik kissed him on the cheek before exiting the car, but the staff were already helping with their luggage. They were happy to see Erik again, shaking hands and exchanging holiday greetings, and a few were surprised to see Charles emerge from the car as well.

“Frau Lehnsherr is waiting for you inside,” one of the staff told Erik, and he could see the silhouette of his parents by the window, where they were waving at him. By the time he and Charles had made it up the driveway, he could see his parents beaming in the main doorway. His father was smiling quietly, his usual reserved self, but his mother practically had hearts in her eyes as she stared at Charles in utter glee.

“You’re here!” she squealed as she flung her arms around him, hugging him to death. Erik and his father exchanged raised eyebrows, and the servants were chuckling as they carried all the luggage inside. “Ah Charles, you are even more adorable in person than you are in the movies!”

“Thank you,” Charles said, beaming, although Erik had to bite back a laugh when his mother started pinching Charles’ cheeks, then mushing his face together.

“Mama, nice to see you, too,” Erik said dryly as his father started chuckling. “Don’t forget I’m here as well.”

“Oh, psssh.” His mother flapped a dismissive hand at him, still beaming at Charles. “I can see you anytime, but we must welcome Charles properly to our family home!”

“Thank God you’re here,” Erik’s father muttered as he leaned in. “She wouldn’t shut up about it for days.”

Charles was now turning a very nice shade of pink. “Um, maybe we can all go inside and get better acquainted?” he suggested, then his eyes widened with shock. Erik was mystified until he noticed that one of his mother’s hands was hidden.

“Ma, did you just pinch Charles on the tuchus?” Erik demanded to know. “No pinching!”

His mother didn’t even look remorseful, bundling an alarmed Charles into the house as Erik and his father watched in disbelief. “Did I just see what I thought I saw?” Erik asked his father, who had a long-suffering expression on his face.

“You can’t blame her, this is the first time you’ve brought anyone home,” he reminded Erik gently, clapping him on the back. “Come on, let’s grab a beer and go save your Charles from your mother.”

* * * * *

When he was a child, Charles had never particularly thought of the family kitchen as a place of warmth and love. For one thing, the one from his childhood was huge and gloomy, even though there were usually a number of sullen servants bustling about to prepare the family meals. His mother had barely ever stepped in, wrinkling her nose in distaste at the various pots and utensils and calling it ‘common work’ to prepare food (thankfully, not in front of the staff). Charles could only recall one clear memory of finding her there, when she had stumbled home drunk in her favourite red dress after some fancy gala. It had been such a shock to find her peeking in the fridge that he had simply stood there in his pyjamas, staring at her, and it had been a bigger shock when she had smiled at him and offered to make him hot cocoa.

Charles had cautiously agreed, tamping down the flutter of hope in his chest that he was getting to see a new, warmer side of his mother. Then, to his disappointment, she had woken up the maid to do
Now, as Charles sat in the Lehnsherr family kitchen, he was finally beginning to see why some people called the kitchen ‘the heart of the home’. It was much smaller than the one of his childhood, but there was so much laughter and chatter in comparison. Edie was happily peeling potatoes with Erik, and Charles was helping them to shred the potatoes for the latkes, but he kept stopping to laugh as Edie relentlessly teased a bumbling, blushing Erik. There was no escaping the rehashing of embarrassing childhood stories, of course, and Edie was recounting the story about the time Erik was 5 and liked to take off his pants before running around the neighbourhood.

“Oh my God, this really happened?” Charles wiped the tears of laughter off his face, casting a fond glance at Erik who was trying to hide behind the mountain of potatoes.

Edie was shaking her head with a sigh. “You should have seen him! I’d take my eye off him for just one second and he’d be running off pantless, screaming ‘wheee!’ as he did it. And the neighbours would be yelling, ‘Frau Lehnsherr, your little boy is at it again!’ That was how I got my exercise, running after him.”

“Mama, please stop,” Erik groaned. “I promise I’ll mop the floor, I’ll put up those new shelves that Papa has been putting off, just stop, please?”

Edie lifted her shoulders in a shrug. “Why? It’s a cute story, punim. You were so adorable, running into Mrs. Herschmeyer’s house naked.”

Charles was still chuckling. “Thank goodness Erik grew out of it,” he said, before pretending to throw Erik a stern look. “You did, right? Or is there something you’d like to tell me?”

“Oh God.” There was a soft thump as Erik’s forehead hit the counter, and Charles exchanged a wicked smile with a grinning Edie. He knew he should feel bad about ganging up against Erik with his mother, but it was far too much fun to stop.

Charles leaned in, whispering in Erik’s ear, “You know, I’d have no objections if you wanted to drop your pants now.”

Erik lifted his head, and Charles had never seen such a conflicting mix of arousal and dismay. “Charles, not in front of my mother,” he hissed, and Charles could see his knuckles whitening as Erik’s grip tightened on the counter.

“Oh you boys.” Edie wiped her hand clean before patting Charles on the cheek. “You know, I’d have no objections if you wanted to drop your pants now.”

Erik lifted his head, and Charles had never seen such a conflicting mix of arousal and dismay. “Charles, not in front of my mother,” he hissed, and Charles could see his knuckles whitening as Erik’s grip tightened on the counter.

“Oh you boys.” Edie wiped her hand clean before patting Charles on the cheek. “You’re just as bad as when your father and I were first married.”

Charles laughed even more, while Erik was blinking at the potato peeler on the table. “If I stab myself with this, how long do you think it will take me to pass out from the blood loss?” he asked Charles.

“Don’t be so dramatic,” Edie instructed, grabbing her groaning son and planting a kiss on the top of his head. “It’s perfectly normal for a couple in love to want to...express themselves.”

“Oh dear God,” Erik said.

“You know, they say men who have more regular orgasms live longer,” she said, leaning in conspiratorially towards a curious Charles. “I think there’s some truth in that. Erik’s father is as healthy as a horse at the ripe old age of 65.”

“Mama,” Erik said, “I swear I will go drown myself in the Rhine river right now if you don’t stop.”
Charles was trying so hard to keep a straight face. “Really Erik, you should be glad that your parents still have such a loving and healthy relationship.”

The soft, adoring expression on Edie’s face was unexpected as she leaned over to kiss Charles on the top of his head, her lips warm and dry. “See, *punim*, Charles understands.” She patted him heartily on the shoulders before returning to her potatoes, shooting him a fond look that reminded him of the way Erik sometimes glanced at him, from this particular angle.

“It’s true, Erik.” Charles pursed his mouth in amusement as Erik let out a long-suffering sigh. “Isn’t it good that your parents set the example for a strong, long-lasting relationship?” Charles let his eyes say the rest: *They will be a good example for us.*

Judging from the long, slow smile Erik gave him, his eyes lighting up, it was clear that he got the message, and Charles found Erik’s large, warm hand sprawled on his lap, rubbing gently.

Edie was smiling even harder as she continued peeling the potatoes. “Would you like me to leave the kitchen?”

Blinking, Charles tore his gaze away from Erik’s to look at her. “Why would we want that, Mrs. Lehnsherr?”

“Hush, child, call me Edie or Mama,” she said with a quick wink. “And I’m offering to leave because Erik clearly looks like he wants to bend you over the counter and--”

“Mama!” Erik interrupted, entirely scandalized. “Okay that’s it, I’m going to see what Papa is doing.”

“Oh Erik, come on.” But Charles was laughing far too hard, and so was Edie as Erik firmly pushed off his stool and gave both of them a quick kiss each before hastily escaping the kitchen. Now it was just the two of them there, chuckling amidst a mountain of potatoes as Charles picked up another one to grate.

“I’ll bet Erik has gone to join his father in watching football in the garage.” Edie sounded vastly amused as she shot Charles a mischievous look. “You know I’m just teasing, right, Charles?”

“Yes, *Mama,*** Charles said with a smile, and this made Edie clasp her hands over her mouth in joy, right before she came over to hug him tightly.

* * * * *

It turned out that Edie was one of those mothers who kept every single news article that had mentioned her baby boy, and of course she owned all of Erik’s movies, even the ones where he had no speaking parts. Charles was absolutely amazed by her collection as she led him inside the den, where there was a sleek LED TV mounted on the wall in front of a curved brown sofa. On the walls were several framed articles of Erik in ‘People’, ‘Entertainment Weekly’ and the centerpiece was the ‘GQ’ article that Charles and Erik had done together. Surprised and touched, Charles ran a finger down the picture of the both of them, Erik sprawled on the floor and leaning back against Charles’ armchair. They really did look good together.
“That’s one of my favourite pictures,” Edie was saying, coming to stand beside him. “And believe me, I have a lot of pictures of Erik. He looks....happier now.”

Charles smiled, before letting his hand trail away. “Erik really is photogenic,” he said modestly, although he did think, deep down, that Erik had started smiling more ever since they started dating.

Judging from her scoff, Edie seemed to be thinking the same thing. “He’s always been so moody in pictures before you came along, I know the difference.” She smiled at him before bending down to retrieve a box of videos from under the entertainment console. “You mentioned you wanted to see some home videos of Erik when he was younger? I don’t have that many, because we couldn’t afford a video camera until he was in his teens.”

“Oh, yes please,” Charles said eagerly, kneeling down beside Edie and peeking into the box. There were quite a few tapes, but he didn’t know their contents as the labels were all in German. There was a DVD-R at the top of the pile, though, and it was labelled ‘Erik und Charles’. “What is this?”

Edie laughed. “Oh, this is a collection of all the clips on the Internet of the two of you. I’m not good with computers, but one of our staff helped to compile this for me so I could watch it on a bigger screen, on the TV.” She tapped the corner of her eye. “My eyesight isn’t so good now, you see.”

“Ah, sorry to hear that,” Charles said sympathetically, making a mental note to rope Erik into bringing Edie for an eye check-up.

She gave him a dismissive wave. “I’ll be fine, Erik basically threatened the finest of Munich’s eye doctors to take a look at me.” She popped the DVD into the sleek Bose player, then pressed the ‘Play’ button. The screen flickered to life, and Charles found himself watching the TMZ footage of them leaving the Bossa Nova restaurant together, Erik shielding him from the paparazzi and yelling at them to back off.

There were also quite a few segments about Charles and Erik ‘coming out’ on E! News and Entertainment Tonight. It wasn’t anything that Charles hadn’t already seen before, but his eyebrows jumped when a video of them on stage with Lady Gaga during Halloween started playing. “Oh my goodness, you have this?”

“Of course I do.” Edie sounded both triumphant and amused. “Jakob was quite sure that with a wig, Erik would look like me, but this proves him wrong.”

Laughing, Charles stroked his chin as he watched the video of them singing ‘Bad Romance’ on stage. Wow, he seemed really drunk in the footage, and he was amazed they had made it home in one piece (and even managed to have sex in the limo). Edie didn’t need to know that, of course.

However, there was something else that he hadn’t noticed before. While Charles was busy riling up the crowd and getting them to sing along, Erik was staring at him throughout the whole thing. At first Charles thought Erik might have been staring at Gaga, but when she moved away to grasp a fan’s outstretched hand, Erik’s gaze was definitely still fixed on Charles.

And the way he was looking at Charles, mouth all soft and fond, eyes like a blue-green lazer, as though Charles were the only person in the world who mattered....Charles swallowed around the lump in his throat.

“Charles? Mama?” There were footsteps clumping down the stairs, and Erik appeared in the den. “What are you two doing?”

“Watching videos of the two of you,” Edie said cheerfully, but Erik’s attention was already fixed on
the screen. Charles turned to him with a soft smile as realisation dawned on Erik, who was now looking rather embarrassed.

Charles now crossed over the den to stand in front of a flushed Erik. “I didn’t know you were looking at me,” he said, stroking the side of Erik’s face.

Erik gave him a gruff shrug, but there was a smile tugging at the corners of that beautiful mouth that Charles loved to kiss. “I am always looking at you, Liebling,” he said softly. “Even when I’m not aware of it.”

“Don’t be embarrassed,” Charles said, brushing back Erik’s fringe. His cheeks still had a pink tinge, which was funny because Erik was always teasing Charles about being the one who blushed so easily. Now that the tables were turned, Charles found it absolutely endearing: no wonder Erik liked to tease him just to see him turn pink.

“I’ll leave you two alone,” Edie was saying, sounding amused as she slipped out of the den, heading up the stairs. “I’ll call you boys when dinner is ready.”

Charles shot her a grateful smile before wrapping his arms around Erik’s neck, tugging him forward so that their foreheads rested against each other’s. They just stood there quietly, Erik’s thumbs bracketing the base of Charles’ throat, occasionally brushing against his collarbone. Charles let out a contented sigh, just soaking in the feeling of Erik in his arms.

“Thank you for bringing me here,” he said quietly. “I really feel at home.”

Erik’s smile could have lit up the whole of Munich Airport. “I’m glad you do, because my parents love you almost as much as I do.”

In a flash, Charles thought about the way Erik had looked at him in the Halloween video. “I really doubt anyone loves me the way you do,” he said with a laugh, as Erik stole a kiss. “And I’m glad for that.”

* * * * *

“Hank?”

Raven tentatively stepped into the editing suite, not wanting to startle Hank when he was knee-deep in editing. She had done that once, by accident, and he had almost accidentally erased an entire sequence, much to Bryan’s chagrin. However, the suite was empty, and Raven relaxed a little. It wasn’t that she was uncomfortable with Hank - far from it - but she had no idea where she stood with him. Some days he blew hot, and others, he blew cold, avoiding her and making her wonder what she could have done wrong. Charles had prodded her to just tell him, but she was understandably hesitant about throwing herself at the guy she liked.

Just because it worked for Charles didn’t mean it would work for her.

“Oh, Raven,” she heard behind her, and she spun around to smile at Hank, who was not-so-subtly averting his eyes from her gaze. *Fuck, it was going to be another one of those Cold Days again, then.* Her smile faded a little, particularly when Hank pretended to busy himself with a stack of tapes. “What do you want?” he asked.

“Oh, um, I have an idea for a Christmas present for Charles and Erik,” she explained, trailing her fingers down the cushioned back of Hank’s favourite chair. It was still warm, from his body heat. “I was wondering if you had the raw footage from the kissing scene? It would be fun to send them a video with several different angles of it.”
To her surprise, Hank was now looking directly at her, thoughtful and a little pensive. “That’s a really nice present,” he finally said, blushing a little as he frowned down at his tapes. “I wouldn’t have thought of that.”

Raven shrugged. “I mean, if I got to kiss the man of my dreams for the first time, I’d love a video of it too,” she admitted, feeling her cheeks heat up. Fuck, she hoped she wasn’t blushing like a stupid teenager. “So I think they might like that.”

Hank was now biting his lip, considering. “I think I have the dailies for that day either in here or in Bryan’s office,” he said speculatively, tapping a finger against his bottom lip. “Let me take a look.”

They both rummaged around the small suite, and Raven felt her face heat up even more when Hank’s chest brushed against her back at one point, his breath warming the back of her neck. Maybe it was her imagination, but she thought he heard him taking an extra deep breath, his nose barely nuzzling her curls. Before she could turn and confirm it, he was already stalking out of the suite. “I think I left it in the office,” he called out over his shoulder as he hurried out. “I’ll be right back.”

Raven took in a long, shuddery breath, remembering how close Hank had felt earlier, towering behind her, so warm and solid and safe. She shook her head as though to clear it, distracting herself by sifting through the stack of memory cards on the editing console. However, one of the dates caught her eye. Wasn’t this the date Charles and Erik first kissed? She remembered it particularly because she had to withdraw money from her Boots Fund to pay Emma when she had lost the bet, and she had been sore about it.

It was worth a shot. Raven slid the card into the slot, then clicked to open the video files. She was disappointed when she realised this was footage of a scene that was shot after The Kiss, and she was about to click the little red ‘X’ at the top right corner when she realised the camera was slowly zooming in on her walking behind the cameras, smiling as she talked on the phone. Wow, she looked rather dorky there, but she was at least having a good hair day.

The camera lingered on her for quite a while, and she was starting to get curious. She closed the file, then opened one of an even later scene. She could see the top of Sean’s red curls, and he was chuckling with someone. Then the camera quickly panned to where she was standing, sipping her iced coconut latte and chatting with Marie near the director’s chair. Then Sean’s loud, recorded voice shocked her: “Hank, what are you doing? The scene’s over here, man!”

“Sorry, sorry,” Hank was saying, and then the camera panned back to the set where Charles and Erik were chatting, not at all hiding the fact that they were eyefucking each other. Rolling her eyes, Raven quickly closed the video file and opened another one.

Her face, again. This time, her head was tilted as she watched Bryan talking earnestly to one of the actors.

Another video showed yet another variation of the same thing, Raven pointing at Alex’s shoes and teasing him about his small feet. When she looked up at the camera, it quickly spun away.

“Oh, my God.” Raven was now opening videos at random, and they were all of her. The last straw was one where Raven was talking to Erik, and Charles was behind her, mouthing at the camera: ‘Make a move, Hank!’ while Erik silently smirked the whole time as Raven chattered on obliviously. Holy fuck, was everyone in on it? How long had she been in the dark?

“Raven.” The stunned voice behind her made her turn around, facing a shellshocked Hank who by now was definitely aware she had found the footage. His face was flushed a deep beetroot red all the way to the tips of his ears. “Raven, I can explain--”
“They’re all of me.” Her voice sounded faraway, even to her own ears. She just kept staring at him, and he just stared back at her, his jaw tightening.

“Yeah,” Hank admitted, seemingly at a loss for words, just nodding. “Yeah, yes.”

They stood there in silence for a long, drawn out moment, Raven trying to absorb this new information while Hank shifted his weight from one foot to the other, seemingly agonised. “Um, don’t show it around too much,” he finally mumbled as he handed her a memory card, scraping a hand over his face. “Needs a bit of, uh, editing—”

“Hank.” Raven was surprised at the steel in her own voice. “Shut up and kiss me.”

Hank blinked at her like a goldfish. “Wait, what?”

She grabbed fistfuls of his shirt and yanked him down, so he had to stoop over for their mouths to meet. She teased his lips apart, licking at the seam until he parted them to let her in, their kiss deepening as he unexpectedly surged forward, wrapping his strong arms around her waist. The thought of him filming her secretly every day and worshipping her from afar was overwhelming, and she gently bit down on his bottom lip, sucking on it to soothe it. Hank made a drugged, muffled ‘mmph’ sound that Raven greedily swallowed, stroking the soft hairs on the back of his neck.

When they broke apart for air, Hank’s glasses were askew and half of his hair was standing up in spikes, having been mussed by Raven’s hands. “Um, wow.” He suddenly laughed, scooping her up in her arms.

“You should have said something earlier,” she chastised him, running her hands down his firm chest.

“Glad you finally listened, then,” he murmured, before his hands landed on her waist, thumbs brushing against her skin as they kissed once more.

After all, they had a lot of lost time to make up for.

* * * * *

Charles didn’t know much about Hanukkah, despite having several colleagues and friends in Hollywood who were Jewish. It had always seemed like a quiet, family celebration of sorts, as opposed to the glitz and tinsel of modern-day Christmas. The Lehnsherr family were more than happy to school him on the eight days of Hanukkah, starting with the lighting of the menorah on the first day, right after sunset. After Jakob recited the three blessings, Erik lit a candle, then guided Charles’ hand to use it to light the tallest candle in the middle, which was the shamash. Next, they then lit the first candle for the first night of Hanukkah. Charles learned that for the subsequent night, a second candle would be added, and this would continue for all eight nights. He looked forward to doing it tomorrow night as well, guided by Erik’s careful hand just like tonight. His parents watched from a short distance away, Jakob smiling widely while Edie kept wiping her eyes.

After the candles were lit, Jakob stepped forward and led his family in a solemn hymn that Charles later learned was called ‘Ma’oz Tzur’. He didn’t know the words so he kept silent out of respect, smiling as Erik reached over and squeezed his hand.

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After they were done, Charles was surprised as Edie reached over and hugged him tightly, followed by a more reserved but just as warm hug from Jakob, who patted his back affectionately. “Now we can exchange presents, eat and spin the dreidel!” Edie announced, tugging Charles to sit at the table that was laden with the latkes they had made earlier, along with a smorgasbord of other fried food. “Charles, what would you like to do?” she asked him, her hand clasped on top of his.
“We could exchange presents?” Charles suggested, because it seemed like a good opportunity to finally give them the gifts he had brought for them.

Erik nodded immediately. “Excellent idea, Liebling. Come, let’s get our presents.”

A good while later, Edie was still fawning over the Hermes scarf she had received from Charles, pestering Jakob to tie it on for her. After she was done, she helped to knot the Christian Dior tie that Charles had bought for Jakob. It went well with the cufflinks that Erik had gotten his father, and of course Edie loved the Cartier necklace from Erik, which he tenderly latched for her around her slim neck.

Charles was very surprised that he had received gifts as well: Jakob had gotten him a sleek, volcanic black Mont Blanc fountain pen that was identical to the one that everyone in the Lehnsherr household used, and Charles had a feeling that Jakob was very subtly trying to tell Charles that he was already a part of the family as far as he was concerned. Edie’s gift was no less touching; it was a double-sided picture frame, joined in the middle by hinges, and the left frame bore a photo of Erik as a baby, smiling up at the camera. Charles was stunned to find his own baby picture in the opposite frame, a photo that Raven had once passed to People magazine when they were doing an in-depth article on his rise as a rom-com star. His hair had been lighter in colour and curlier as a child, and he had been snapped mid-laugh while reaching for something off-camera, most probably the photographer’s assistant. “Where did you get this?” he asked a beaming Edie.

“I found it on the Internet, and one of our staff helped to print it out on glossy paper,” she told him, squeezing his shoulders. “Do you like it?”

Charles was so touched that he could do nothing but pull her into a hug. She had a tall and thin frame, which Erik had inherited, so hugging her felt familiar. “Thank you, Mama,” he whispered, holding on to her and the photo frame even tighter.

* * * * *

It was good to be back in LA. Sean enjoyed travelling, he really did, but at some point he would start missing the comforts of home, the people he loved hanging out with. And okay, maybe there was one person in particular he was eager to hang out with, and she had promised him a dinner date. During several points of the trip he had taken out her agent’s name card, now creased and dog-eared, and stared at the numbers scrawled on the back in her neat, careful handwriting. He had wanted to call (or at least text) her, but he had always lost his nerve. This wasn’t some random girl he wanted to take out on a date, this was Moira freaking MacTaggert.

“That thing again?” he heard Alex groan beside him. Sean quickly shoved the card back into his pocket, but it was too late. Alex was already giving him that look, the same look when Sean dragged his feet about going to the gym or writing a particular scene. “How many times are you just gonna stare at it?”

“I’ll call her,” Sean said defensively, looking down at his bitten nails. “I’m just, you know, waiting for the right time.”

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“I’ll call her,” Sean said defensively, looking down at his bitten nails. “I’m just, you know, waiting for the right time.”

“Look, man.” Alex’s voice was surprisingly gentle as he slumped down beside Sean on the sofa. Their apartment was in the exact same mess it was when they left it, and the half-ripped copy of ‘People’ with Kim Kardashian on the cover was still on the table. Sean found himself staring at it now as Alex loped a companionable arm around his back. “If she gave you her personal number, I’d say that’s a pretty good sign. Don’t wait until she forgets who you are, y’know?”

A dull panic rose in Sean’s chest. “She’s not going to forget me,” he said, hating how his voice came
Alex heaved out a sigh. “Okay, whatever.” He got up, striding across the living room and pausing outside his bedroom, glancing at Sean. “When you’re a sad old man living alone, you can tell your 48 cats about how you once had Moira MacTaggert’s phone number.”

“Dude, shut up.” But Sean couldn’t help thinking Alex was right. What was he so scared about? Since she had given him her number, it was as good as giving him her implicit permission.

He quickly pressed in the numbers before he lost his nerve. Nothing could describe the terror that flooded his veins, making him cold all over. The phone rang twice, and then the soft, sweet sound of that well-loved voice: “Hello?”

Sean shut his eyes, forcing himself to concentrate. “Hi, Moira. How’s it going?”

“Um, fine.” She sounded rather amused. “Who is this?”

“It’s Sean Cassidy.”

“Oh, Sean.” The warmth that flooded her voice was reassuring. “I thought it might be you, but I wasn’t sure.”

_Holy shit she remembers me._ “Um, uh...” Sean fought his nerves and forced himself to take a deep breath. “Yeah, sorry it took me so long to call.”

“It’s all right,” Moira said cheerfully. “So I take it you just came back from the Canary Islands? Must be fun, trapped on an island with a homicidal maniac.”

Sean was surprised by the loud laugh he just emitted. “Yeah, Erik was pretty crazy,” he said, feeling a little more at ease. “It was like working on set with a deranged pitbull. At least, until Charles came back.”

“Bet you guys were kissing the ground he walked on,” Moira said dryly, which made him laugh again. “I had to listen to Charles bitching on the phone about how the injury meant no sex for him.”

“Gah, my brain,” Sean groaned, which now made Moira giggle. “Please don’t make me imagine them doing...anything, it’s like thinking about my parents having sex.”

“God, you’re right.”

“Anyway, are you free Friday night?” Sean asked. Better to rip the band-aid off quickly, he thought. To his surprise, she made a pleased noise on her end.

“Yes, actually, my yoga instructor cancelled, he has the stomach flu,” she said.

“Pussy,” Sean snorted, while Moira laughed. “Anyway, his loss is our gain. Dinner?” Out of the corner of his eye, he could see Alex dancing in front of him, heartily giving him two enthusiastic thumbs up.

“I’d love to,” Moira said, the smile obvious in her voice. “I’ll meet you at Madeo? Around 8?”

“Sounds great, see you there.” Sean stared at the phone in disbelief. He had a date with _Moira freaking MacTaggert._ “Holy shit, she agreed to dinner to me,” he told a gleeful Alex.

“See? I told you to stop being such a wuss,” Alex said, grinning as he dumped an overnight bag onto the couch, smoothing his hair in the mirror.
“Wait a sec, where are you going?” Sean blinked, still not quite over his initial euphoria. “Didn’t we just get back?”

Alex ran his fingers through his hair, teasing it into spikes. “Yeah, but I’m heading up to New York for a bit to see one of my brothers. I might as well spend New Year’s Eve watching the ball drop.” He flashed a grin at Sean. “Want anything? A T-shirt? A hooker?”

Sean rolled his eyes. “If you end up in jail, please don’t call me and interrupt my dinner with Moira.”

“Some friend you are,” Alex grumbled, walking over and picking up his bag.

Sean checked his watch. “Come on, I’ll drive you to the airport.”

“Great!” Alex clapped him on the back. “And on the way, I’ll give you tips for getting Moira in the sack.”

“Dude, shut up,” Sean said with a laugh as they both left the apartment.

* * * * *

As glad and warmed as Erik was to see his parents again, he couldn’t help letting out a sigh of relief the moment he closed his bedroom door behind him. He let himself slump back against it - sturdy, seasoned wood, nothing like the well-loved but oft-repaired features of his childhood home - and lazily cast his gaze over to where Charles was rummaging through his bag on the bed. A low chuckle escaped Erik; slung over Charles’ shoulder was one of the pair of His & His towels that Erik’s mother had prepared for them.

It rushed over him, in a wave of warmth and an aching tightness in his chest: Charles with his family, chatting warmly with Jakob and smiling earnestly at Edie’s enthusiasm. He could so easily imagine many more holidays with similar scenes. And birthdays. Milestones. Anniversaries.

“Erik?”

Blinking, Erik realised that he must have been staring for a while. Charles was smiling, though, his eye soft with affection, so Erik figured the other man had an inkling of what was going through his mind.

Erik cleared his throat and went over to his own bag, slipping a hand inside. He drew out a small box, wrapped expertly in red paper with embossed silver designs. He held it out to Charles. “I, um. Here is your gift.”

Charles’ smile grew wider, and he took the box with an eager “thank you!” The unabashed delight on his face as he tore at the wrapping left Erik smiling hard enough for his jaw to start aching. He felt strangely light, like gravity had lost a little of its pull, and also unexpectedly nervous.

But the nerves melted away when Charles opened the box stamped with Cartier and let out a soft gasp. He carefully drew out the elegant silver men’s watch that Erik had spent ages dithering over after scouring the length of the Champs-Elysées. “Oh, Erik, it’s beautiful.”

Charles immediately put the watch on. He sent Erik a soft, wide-eyed look, face flushed with pleasure when he saw that the strap fitted his wrist perfectly. Erik let his gaze flick to the floor momentarily before returning it to Charles, once again feeling a little shy. “I think I’ve waited for you all my life, this is just so we don’t waste another minute.”

Charles slid a hand through the hair at the back of Erik’s head to tilt it down, resting his other hand
against Erik’s throat as he tiptoed so that he could whisper against Erik’s temple, “My sincere apologies, I did not mean to keep you waiting.” The kiss that followed was not unexpected, but Erik gasped into it all the same, parting his lips and happily inviting Charles’ tongue to lick inside his mouth.

“I have something for you, too,” Charles said a few minutes later, distinctly breathless. The reason for his earlier rummaging was made clear: he pulled out a clumsily wrapped package, including a bow that had apparently gotten tangled with the sleeves of a knit sweater, and placed it in Erik’s hands. “Happy Hanukkah, love.”

Erik carefully tore off the wrapper, realising it was a standard A5-sized Moleskine in black leather. It seemed like a practical present, which was rather uncharacteristic of Charles, and Erik was about to say “thank you” and put it away when Charles impatiently tapped on the cover. “Open it,” he instructed. The light dancing in his eyes was hard to miss.

Erik flipped through the first few pages. He was stunned to see it was filled with receipts, stubs, Charles’ messy writing and even some restaurant napkins. Ah, there was a paper napkin emblazoned with the Bossa Nova logo, which Erik recognised from their first date. On another page, there was a photo of Charles and Moira at the Ivy, which Erik had snapped for those fans, and he unexpectedly chuckled when he saw Charles had drawn an arrow pointing to Moira and written, ‘I really wanted to take the photo with YOU, Erik!’

It amazed him just how Charles had been keeping track of their relationship from its infant stages, and Erik’s hand shook when he saw the hospital wristband from the Canary Islands, and Charles had scribbled, ‘Thank you for taking such good care of me, darling.’ and it left Erik feeling choked up.

“Do you like it?” Charles asked rather anxiously, but his features eased when he saw how visibly touched Erik was.

“Thank you,” Erik said. His voice was oddly scratchy. He pulled Charles in close, crushing their lips together hard. Several more thank-you’s escaped his lips, mumbled right into Charles’ mouth, and Charles breathed each of them in, sucking wetly on Erik’s lower lip for good measure.

They ended up on the bed, Erik on his back with Charles on top of him, both of them lost to the heated exploration of each other’s mouths. Erik skimmed a hand up Charles back and, in the same motion, pulled Charles’ shirt off. Charles hummed in agreement and retaliated by removing Erik’s shirt, and then both of them were sliding off all remaining clothing without separating their lips for longer than a few seconds.

“Love kissing you,” whispered Erik, during an irritating few seconds when Charles’ trousers got caught on his socks and he had to sit back to pull it all down.

“Oh, reminds me, wait,” gasped Charles, “there’s something else.” He flailed his arms, though not to any particular effect since he went right back to kissing Erik. Yet his hand must have managed to snag the crumpled ball of wrapping paper. Erik reluctantly detached his lips from Charles’ when he felt Charles shoving it at his chest; he looked down to see Charles pulling something out of the mess of wrapping.

It was a fedora. “Complete with mistletoe!” Charles pointed out. He was flushed and naked and panting and brightly smiling, the worst of all temptations rolled into one. Erik wanted to devour him. “So I have a ready excuse to kiss you whenever I want.”

As if anything could stop Charles kissing Erik whenever he wanted. “You seem very dedicated to maintaining holiday traditions,” Erik said, grinning. He carefully detached the mistletoe from the
fedora and held it over their heads. Charles grinned back at him and obliged with a kiss. Erik pulled back before the kiss could deepen. Charles whined in protest.

“According to tradition,” continued Erik, “does the kiss have to be on the mouth?”

Charles’ eyes widened, and took on a familiar gleam. “But where else could I kiss you?” he asked, affecting a look of innocence.

“I have a few ideas,” said Erik. He lowered the mistletoe, and held it over his chest. Charles obediently kissed the skin under the green sprig, lips trailing down the line between Erik’s pectorals. Erik’s hand drifted to one side, and Charles followed with his mouth, sealing his lips over Erik’s nipple and teasing the nub with the flat of his tongue, as if he was playing with Erik’s tongue.

Erik’s let out a gasp, breath hitching. When he transferred the mistletoe to the other nipple, Charles started using teeth, grazing the sensitive skin as he would Erik’s lips. Erik arched his back, unable to help it, gasping, “God, Charles, your mouth, what you do to me.”

The mistletoe drifted lower. Erik forced himself to go slow, trying not to think about how hot and wet Charles’ mouth felt on his skin, ignoring how much his cock was aching to plunge into that heat. Charles worked his impatience out by biting and sucking on every inch of Erik’s skin that passed under his lips.

*Good thing it’s winter*, Erik thought through the haze of lust in his mind. He wouldn’t be able to go anywhere shirtless without advertising the exact path Charles was taking to go down on him.

A path directed by Erik.

He finally placed the mistletoe right below his belly button. Charles let out a low, hungry noise, and those blue eyes flicked up to meet his, heavy-lidded and pupils blown. He eased off a little and placed small, dry kisses along the light trail of hair leading downwards. Erik’s hips jerked up, despite his best efforts.

“Charles,” he groaned.

The first touch on Erik’s cock was a welcome relief, but Erik looked down and saw that it was not Charles’ hand, as he was expecting, but Charles’ cheek. Charles’ pale skin, brightly flushed, was a contrast to the darker flush of Erik’s cock, and when the pre-come at the head left a slick streak right next to Charles’ candy-red mouth, Erik nearly came there and then.

“Mmm,” Charles said, breathing over the sensitive skin, “is this what you want me to kiss?”

“Charles.”

“Well, it is tradition,” Charles conceded, and swallowed Erik down.

* * * * *

December 22nd

Charles could not help feeling a slight sense of unwillingness as they made their way to the front door. Edie and Jakob had welcomed him into their home with open arms, graciously inviting him to be a part of their family traditions, and Charles had truly felt like he belonged with them that night, lighting the menorah as Erik guided his hand. Edie had embraced him after dinner and showered him with kisses that his own mother never had, even getting slightly handsy again much to Erik’s chagrin, and Charles was thankful and glad knowing that Erik had grown up in a home filled with so
much warmth and love.

He smiled to himself as he recalled the breakfast all of them just had together, how he and Erik had arrived at the table and he had spotted the fried matzah among the spread. Charles had felt his eyes mist over as he remembered that morning all those months ago when Erik had wrapped him up in his arms and they had fed each other fried matzah as they looked through old albums after their first night together. It felt like they had come full circle, the faces he’d come to love from the photos finally alive and moving before him, not just hazy imaginations he’d constructed from Erik’s memories. He must have spent a good deal of time sitting there staring at the dish, because when he had turned to Erik, he’d found him looking right back at him tenderly, eyes bright like they were sharing a secret. They had just stayed that way, smiling at each other like fools as the world faded away, as it so often did these days, while he remembered how it had felt like that morning in Erik’s house, as though they were standing at the brink of the rest of their lives, until Jakob had cleared his throat and said that the food was going cold. Erik had placed some of the matzah on his plate then, and Edie had rested her face on her hand and smiled as Charles kissed Erik’s chastely on the lips, not letting go of his hand under the table the whole time while they enjoyed their breakfast.

"Have a nice time in Hohenschwangau," Edie said, gripping Charles in a tight hug while Erik loaded their suitcases into the car.

"We will," Charles replied as he kissed Edie on the cheek, hugging her one last time when he noticed that she had started to tear.

"Mama, I promise I’ll bring Charles back soon. You’re acting as if I’m stealing Charles away from you forever," Erik said dryly as he kissed her other cheek. Edie finally released her hold on Charles, clasping Erik’s face in her hands and pulling it down to plant one on his forehead. Charles wrapped an arm around Erik’s waist as he tried his best not to snicker.

"Take good care of Charles, yes?" she said, smiling.

Erik’s father laughed as he gripped his son’s shoulder. “I suggest you leave now, or your mother might insist she goes along.”

"Ma, no. You wouldn’t dare...” Erik warned, appalled when her face lit up, which was also the point when Charles lost the battle and had to stifle his guffaw with his hand.

They said their last goodbyes, Charles embracing Jakob before taking Erik’s hand and walking to the car. They climbed in, waving through the window as the engine started up and the driver set the car in motion down the driveway.

"Your parents are lovely, Erik," Charles said as they drove past the front gate, rearranging himself into a comfortable position draped over Erik for the long ride to Hohenschwangau. Charles found he wanted to stay, for dinners, for holidays, even forever.

Erik snorted, and Charles could feel him shaking his head as he buried his nose in his hair. "I think my mother wants to throw me out onto the streets and adopt you instead."

"Don't be silly, we'll be sure to put you up in a nice little home," Charles teased, laughing when Erik squeezed him in his arms and growled as he nipped him playfully on the ear.

They were driving through the medieval townscape of Füssen in an hour, and Charles could see the magnificent Neuschwanstein Castle sitting serenely on the top of the snow-clad hills as they took the B17 to Schwangau, then on up the beautiful frozen hillside to Villa Jägerhaus where they were staying. The staff were very helpful once they spotted Erik, and Charles smiled in amusement seeing
as they were clearly fans of Erik’s, the receptionists and porters exchanging excited words in German before promptly handing them their keys to Room 62 and sending their bags up.

Their suite was in the attic of the villa, luxuriously decorated and with a canopy bed in the middle. Charles walked across the room and drew the curtains apart, momentarily awestruck by the stunning view of Neuschwanstein Castle surrounded by snow-capped Ammergau Alps in the distance, like something straight out of a Christmas card. He felt Erik's arms around him then, strong and safe, and Charles pressed his back up against Erik's chest as Erik began mouthing at his neck. Charles hummed as he rested his hand against the cold windowpane, warm breath ghosting on the glass.

"Are you ready to leave?" Erik asked as he slipped a hand under Charles' shirt.

Charles gasped as Erik's thumb rubbed across his left nipple, his voice shaky when he replied, "You say one thing but do another."

"It's my revenge for all the torture you put me through over Hanukkah. Do you know how many times I almost bent you over the kitchen counter? In front of my parents?" Erik retorted indignantly as he sid his hand in a slow path down Charles' stomach. Charles’ breathing went erratic, fogging up the glass as Erik’s other hand pinned the one Charles had raised against the window flat onto the surface, their fingers laced together.

“We really should go,” Erik whispered against the shell of Charles’ ear, hot breath sending shivers down his spine, and Charles felt himself on the verge of begging Erik to fuck him there and then against the window, in broad daylight for the world below to see.

Erik picked his other hand up, balling it into a fist but leaving his index finger out before sliding his own finger torturously slowly down the back of it. He held it against the fogged up window, rubbing it in measured circles against the windowpane until they could see the castle through the patch of clear glass. “I made a reservation for us at Neuschwanstein, don’t want to be late.”

Charles made a sound of protest, tilting his head back to nudge at the side of Erik’s face, “Just twenty minutes isn’t too late.”

“Do you honestly think we’ll be done in twenty minutes?” Charles could hear the smile in Erik’s voice, and he let out a laugh when Erik kissed his cheek and pulled him away from the window by the waist.

He had in fact wanted to see the fairytale castle, before Erik had distracted him with his maddening hands. Charles raised a finger and looked Erik in the eyes, “Very well, under the condition that we’re not leaving this room tomorrow.”

Erik grinned devilishly. “You have my word.”

They shrugged on their winter coats, Erik making sure Charles put on his proper leather gloves instead of the fingerless woollen ones he usually favoured, and then they were out the door and making their way down to the lobby. The staff wished them a pleasant day as they left, and soon they were stepping out onto the snow-covered sidewalk and making their way up the slope.

Charles gripped Erik’s hand tighter when he saw the horse-drawn carriage parked a stone’s throw away outside Hotel Müller, immediately excited by the prospect of dragging Erik on it with him. Erik always put on a show of protest, but Charles knew that deep down inside, Erik enjoyed doing all these embarrassing touristy things as much as he did. “Erik, you know we could spend an hour climbing up or--“
Erik just rolled his eyes and pulled him in the direction of the horses, “Really, Charles. A little exercise never killed anybody.”

“Well, that’s what tomorrow is for.” Charles answered, quirking an eyebrow up and giving Erik a lopsided smile before kissing the corner of his mouth.

Erik spoke to the coachman and slipped him some money as Charles climbed into the carriage and tried his hardest not to laugh. Not even in his most unabashedly cheesy movies had he had the occasion to show up in a horse-drawn carriage, and yet here he was riding one up to the inspiration for Walt Disney’s castle for Sleeping Beauty, surrounded by a winter landscape that any director making a holiday movie would sell non-vital organs for.

Charles intertwined his fingers with Erik’s as he climbed in beside him, kissing him just above the collar of his turtleneck before pointing towards Neuschwanstein. “Take me to your castle.”

Erik chuckled as the horses began trotting up the hill, “I’m sorry if it’s a mess. I’ve been spending all my time with you, and you just can’t trust the help these days.”

Charles laughed. “That’s all right, I’m only interested in your wine cellar.”

It was getting chilly now that they were going up the slope, and Charles unfolded the thick blanket that was on the seat beside him, wrapping it around them before slipping his arms around Erik’s waist and pressing a cheek against Erik’s chest to hide it from the biting wind. Erik tucked Charles under his arm, holding on tightly. Charles sighed contentedly as he watched the pine trees that were coated in a thick layer of snow go by them and listened to the calming sound of the horses’ hooves on the road, getting lost in the familiar scent of Erik’s cologne as he stayed warm and nestled in his arms.

He heard his Blackberry beep then and reluctantly extricated himself to fish his work phone out of his pocket. “You have to hand it to your countrymen. The reception here is excellent.”

Erik’s Blackberry went off as well, and they exchanged a look before hurriedly checking their devices. Charles’ eyes lit up when he saw the screen. “It’s from the hospital.” He grinned brightly as he held the e-mail up to Erik, “My tests came back clean.”

Erik smirked as he flashed him his results as well, “Mine, too.”

And that was all he could remember before Erik’s mouth was on his, hot and wet and insistent, a gloved hand tugging on the curls at the nape of his neck to tilt his head back for better access as Erik fucked into his mouth with his tongue. Charles grabbed fistfuls of Erik’s clothing as he let Erik crowd him into the corner of the carriage, his mind fully occupied with thoughts of how he couldn’t wait until tonight when they were back in their room to let Erik claim every last part of him, the anticipation of finally feeling Erik inside him already making him half-hard. Charles let out a hitched breath when Erik bit down sharply on his bottom lip before proceeding to sooth it with his tongue, and was about to grab Erik’s face in his hands and kiss back when they were interrupted by a loud grunt from one of the horses in front. Erik buried his face in Charles’ shoulder and laughed, and Charles kissed Erik’s ear before smiling into his hair.

“I’m pretty sure that one’s name is Raven.” Charles remarked lightheartedly, thankful that the coachman had not turned around.

Erik let out an exaggerated sigh before prying himself off Charles, “I suppose it’s too late to go back to the room now.”
“And whose fault is that? Someone thought it would be a lovely idea to whisk me away to a beautiful castle up on a hill,” Charles teased as he kissed Erik chastely on the lips, running his thumb over Erik’s reddened mouth, proud that he was the one that had made it that way. “I feel like we need a moment of silence for all those condoms we wasted. Poor Darwin.”

Erik smiled as he shook his head and Charles laughed, full and hearty. That whole ‘Louie Louie Debacle’ was actually hilarious in retrospect, and Charles imagined they could tell it someday (when they were thoroughly sloshed) just to torture Darwin.

They were at the castle soon enough, and Charles thanked the coachman sincerely when he hopped off the carriage, thereafter sneaking into Erik’s coat to steal some warmth. “Let’s go inside somewhere, grab a snack since we’re early?”

Erik nodded, bundling Charles in his arms as they made their way across the snow and into Schlossrestaurant Neuschwanstein nearby. They settled into a booth seat in the restaurant, Charles choosing to slide in next to Erik instead of across so he could slip his hands under his turtleneck in an attempt to warm them up. Erik shuddered but did not move away, tucking Charles under his arm instead. “Liebling, you’re freezing.”

Charles rubbed his palms in circles across Erik’s lower back and stomach, both to speed up the thawing process as well as to take advantage of the sudden access he had gained to Erik’s skin. “Not anymore.” Charles answered, smiling as he peered over the menu. “What are we having, darling?”

“How about some Glühwein to get you warmed up?” Erik suggested as he rubbed his leg against Charles’ under the table.

Charles wrapped his arms around Erik’s chest and hugged him tightly, resting his chin on his shoulder. “That sounds splendid.”

Erik called the waitress over and placed an order for two glasses. They did not have to wait long for their drinks to arrive, and Charles handed Erik his cup of mulled wine, turning to face him as they clicked their glasses, “Prost, love.”

Charles locked eyes with him over the rim of his glass and a corner of Erik’s mouth turned upwards as he blew on his drink, “Careful, it’s--”

Too late, Charles choked as the vapours of alcohol from the warm drink shot up his nostrils, holding up his hand when he saw the alarmed look on Erik’s face. “I’m fine, really.” Charles said as he cleared his throat before downing a couple gulps of the red wine. There were strong hints of cinnamon and cloves with a slight zing of orange and a generous dash of rum, and Charles hummed contentedly as he slouched back down against Erik, feeling the drink warm his tummy. “This is delicious. The cinnamon reminds me of some of your mother’s cakes.”

“I wouldn’t know. You ate all of them.” Erik chuckled when Charles grumbled while shoving at him playfully, and Erik retaliated by cupping Charles’ face and kissing him, running the tip of his tongue tenderly along the seam of Charles’ lips, warmer than usual thanks to the drink, and Charles really had no choice but to melt against his chest, that sly bastard.

Charles kissed the tip of Erik’s nose before pulling away. He picked his glass back up, taking a large sip from it and warming his hands on its sides as he stared into the deep red liquid. “Oh, I just remembered. I’d like to send Raven a postcard. We should head to the souvenir shop before we start the tour, if we have the time.”

Erik raised his glass, clicking it against the side of Charles’, “Bottoms up.”
“Isn’t this postcard lovely? Almost as beautiful as the real thing,” Charles said over his shoulder as he pulled out one with an aerial shot of Neuschwanstein Castle.

Erik nodded his head, sliding up behind Charles to hold him around the waist, taking a deep whiff of Charles’ neck before resting his chin on his right shoulder. He should probably have gotten Charles to wear a scarf prior to leaving their room, but now he was enjoying pressing his face against the warm skin of Charles’ neck too much to fret over that. As far as Erik was concerned, he should be given an award for not attacking Charles’ throat in public, what with it being so long and pale and smelling as good as sin. “I’ll send one to Emma as well, pick one for me?”

“That’s very sweet of you,” Charles remarked, humming in approval as he rubbed the shell of Erik’s right ear between his bare fingers, turning the postcard rack with his other hand as he searched for one for Emma. “How about this?” he asked, showing Erik a postcard that was similar to the one he had chosen himself, except that this one had the castle and surrounding woods blanketed in a thick layer of snow and frost.

“Wonderful.”

Charles brought them over to the cashier and made the payment, and then they headed for a quiet corner to write on the postcards. Erik was done in no time and busied himself watching Charles pen what appeared to be a short essay on the back of his postcard, amused at how his forehead would wrinkle up in concentration every once in a while when he paused in between sentences. Charles finally looked up when he was done, smiling, “We could go to the post office later when we head down into town, get them to express mail these so the postcards get there in time for Christmas.”

“Sure, Liebling,” Erik responded as he handed his postcard over to Charles.

Charles took one glance at the back of Erik’s postcard and shot him a look that was somewhere between disapproving and fond amusement.
Erik chortled at that, shrugging his shoulders innocently. “What?”

Charles burst into giggles, sliding an arm around Erik’s lower back as he leaned against his chest, “Darling, can’t you be a little nicer?”

Erik tried his best to hold back his laughter as he guided them towards the exit, feeling quite lightheaded. Fine, perhaps it was not a very wise decision drinking that wine on an empty stomach. “This is me being nice, I even said I was thinking of her,” Erik responded, attempting to sound incredulous. “And we got her diamonds for Christmas, I’d say that’s being very, extremely nice.”

“Oh, right, of course,” Charles replied as they stepped out into the snow, shaking his head and
smiling, “You’re a bona fide Prince Charming.”

Erik arched an eyebrow as he glanced down at Charles, with his blood red lips and pale skin, chuckling as he kissed the apple of Charles’ cheek, which was rosy from the cold winter air, “I guess that makes you Snow White.”

Charles let out a noise of mock irritation as he shoved at Erik’s chest with the hand that wasn’t slung around his waist, and it was a testament to how tipsy the Glühwein had made the two of them when neither Charles nor Erik managed to steady the other before the two of them went tumbling onto the snow in a tangle of limbs. Charles landed on top of him, a familiar weight pinning him down, and the pair simply stayed there laughing until the thin, frozen air left them gasping for breath. The truth was Erik would have been contented to remain that way, holding on to Charles until they ran out of hours and days.

Charles propped himself up eventually, bare hands pressing against Erik’s shoulders as he brushed his lips lightly against Erik’s, just a whisper of skin on skin, before he got back onto his feet. “I’m sorry, love. You’d think we’d be able to hold our liquor better after all our binge drinking.” Charles bent over and grinned, brilliant as the sun, holding out his arm. “Take my hand.”

Erik simply stared into Charles’ devastating blue eyes, somehow even deeper than the sky behind him from Erik’s vantage point, as though it had been Charles’ gentle gaze that had overwhelmed Erik and knocked him flat on his back. Erik understood then that everything felt different when he looked at Charles, not at all like how he would glance at people he had been acquainted with for years and get the sense that he fully knew them. With Charles it felt like he recognised him, like Charles was that someone he had been looking for his whole life. He gaped for so long that he was sure that the people around them were beginning to stare at them as well, and yet he couldn’t bring himself to care. Charles tilted his head, his smile growing softer as he extended his fingers, “Erik, take my hand.”

Erik reached out and grasped it. He had always been aware that Charles’ palm fitted perfectly in his, soft and comforting against the bony angles of his own, his skin warm once more thanks to the wine. Erik let Charles pull him back up on his feet, unable to shake the feeling that this one action alone defined what they were to each other, with Charles always the one reaching out and pulling him out of the depths to which he had fallen to, rescuing him from himself.

“You’re being very maudlin all of a sudden,” Charles commented as he stroked his arm. “There’s that look on your face again.”

“What look?” A corner of Erik’s lips quirked upwards right before he leaned in and kissed Charles deeply, hands burying in his hair.

Erik placed a light peck on Charles’ lips before pulling away, and Charles let out a short laugh, the puff of mist his breath created distracting Erik momentarily. “I can’t describe it, I’ll be sure to have my camera ready the next time.” Charles sidestepped and dusted off the snow on the back of Erik’s coat, lacing their fingers together and tugging Erik along, “We best get going, or we’ll never make it inside the castle.”

Erik had arranged a private tour for the two of them, and their guide was already waiting for them at the entrance when they arrived. She seemed like a pleasant enough middle-aged woman, thankfully not one of those deranged fans hoping to try and get closer to them, and she walked over to greet them with a warm, “Guten Tag!” prior to shaking their hands. “I am Kristin and I will be your guide for today.”

“Good afternoon, Kristin. I’m Charles, how do you do? And can I just say that you have such
beautiful hair?” Charles began running his fingers through her blonde curls, and Erik was starting to feel just a little sorry for her, knowing exactly where this was going.

“Oh, thank you.” She blushed, tucking her hair behind her ears as Charles continued, “Might I ask you for a huge favour, love? I was hoping that perhaps Erik and I could view the castle on our own? And you could have the lovely afternoon off to relax, I’m sure you’ve had such a tiring morning.”

She looked around the room uncertainly. “Oh... I’m sorry, but we require that all visitors be accompanied by a guide.”

Charles turned the full devastation of his large pleading eyes on her, complete with a quivering lower lip, and Erik had to summon all the skills he’d picked up from his years of acting to keep a straight face. He knew that look very well, had been at the receiving end of it countless times, the poor woman was done for. “But Erik has been here before, I’m sure he could show me around. Please? I promise we won’t cause any trouble.”

She chewed on her lip, nodding after a pause. “Okay, but please stay along the tour route. And no photography inside the castle.”

“Thank you so much, my dear.” Charles took the maps and brochures from her and kissed her on the cheek, and Erik smiled at her before following Charles down the hallway, trying not to laugh at her shell-shocked expression.

Erik slung an arm around Charles’ waist, stifling a chuckle into his shoulder now that they were out of earshot. “I really should be more alarmed at how you have no qualms about manipulating unsuspecting bystanders.”

Charles stared up at him innocently, “What do you mean? All I did was ask her nicely.”

Erik patted Charles’ cheek on the opposite side of his face fondly. “Have you looked at yourself in the mirror lately? Your eyes are a weapon of mass destruction. Also, the one time I came here, I spent most of the tour making sure my mother didn’t break anything. I’m probably not going to be a very good guide.”

“I get to kiss you in nooks and on spiral staircases, I’d say that already makes you the front-runner for the best guide I’ve ever had.” Charles gripped his hand, smiling from ahead as he walked backwards, “Come on, Your Majesty. Show me around your palace.”

* * * * *

It took all of five minutes for Charles to realise that Erik’s claims to not know anything of the castle were simply him being terribly modest. Erik went into detail about how the murals on the walls were in Gothic and Romanesque styles, depicting the original myths that Richard Wagner’s operas were based on. The paintings were exquisite, portraying scenes of love and guilt, repentance and salvation, and Charles could not help but wonder how anyone could have thought that King Ludwig II, with his appreciation for culture and beauty, was stark raving mad. Poor chap, he’d probably be rolling in his grave knowing that the castle he had ordered to be built for his own personal retreat from the public eye was now one of the most visited castles in the world. And it was truly such a shame that it never was completed.

They made their way to the topmost floor of the castle that was open to public and found themselves in the Singers’ Hall with its elaborate coiffured ceiling, meant to host banquets and musical performances and offering awe-inspiring views of the countryside, which reminded Charles of a place he hadn’t been to in a while. Charles stepped in front of Erik, resting his hands on Erik’s
hipbones as he peered up at him after he was done explaining how the room was a monument to
knights and legends of medieval times. “You know, I have a little retreat myself, tucked away from
the rest of the world. No one would find us there. Not as nice as this place, of course. Though I
swear it is most definitely in livable condition, if perhaps a little dusty.”

“Charles Xavier, are you asking me to run away with you?” Erik teased, leaning in as he tilted
Charles’ chin up with the side of his curled forefinger.

“Yes, I am.” Charles smiled, wanting desperately to kiss the mouth that had been spouting all about
European history, music and literature. Nothing turned him on more than an intelligent man, and of
course it helped that Erik was basically sex on legs. Charles slid his hands up Erik’s chest, coming to
rest on his shoulders so he could use them for support as he closed the distance between them, eyes
falling shut as he began kissing Erik languidly in the middle of the large hallway, not caring whether
a tour group decided to come barging in.

He loved the way Erik kissed, tipping his head down to make up for their height difference, tongue
instinctively sliding into Charles’ mouth to claim it, to claim Charles for himself. Erik was a
possessive man by nature, apparent from the way he often let a hand settle on the small of Charles’
back at the most random times. In fact, he was doing that right now, his fingers splayed across the
curve of Charles’ spine, pushing Charles closer into Erik’s space. Charles let out the slightest,
breathiest moan which Erik was quick to capture, his other hand sifting through Charles’ hair like
grain.

Erik stepped closer so their bodies were flush together, pressed tightly from chest to thighs to feet,
and Charles let himself be manoeuvred backwards a little so Erik could thrust his tongue in even
deeper, losing himself to the feeling of Erik inside him and the heady scent of Erik’s skin. Charles
did not notice it at first, the distant sound of music that had begun wafting down the hallway, likely
from a nearby room, the soft instrumental phrases shimmering in strings and harp, lapping over one
another in burgeoning harmonic tension. Erik withdrew himself slowly, only to whisper breathily
into his ear, “That’s the ‘Liebestod’, from Wagner’s ‘Tristan und Isolde’.”

Charles grinned, taking in how Erik’s hand was still on the small of his back and the way his palms
were still resting on Erik’s shoulders. Erik’s other hand was now warm against his neck, and Charles
wrapped his fingers around it, holding it out to the side. “Can I have this dance?”

His mother had made him pick up ballroom dancing once he had come of age, for high society
charity dinners and debutante balls, which he had tried his very best to get out of as much as
possible, though the skill set had come in very handy for a few of his movies. They had all been
obligations, snotty displays of poise and pretence, and Erik was the first person he had ever really
wanted to dance with. Erik raised his eyebrows in response, looking highly amused. “You’ll have to
teach me, Liebling. I’ve never learned how to.”

“Oh, we could practice together someday. The steps I was taught are all wrong now, seeing as how
you’re taller than me,” Charles nuzzled the side of Erik’s neck, taking a small step backwards and
smiling when Erik followed perfectly. They continued that way, just swaying slowly with the music,
not bothering about posture and poses, just letting the prolonged cadences move them gently in small
circles on the spot. Charles angled his face a little, just enough for Erik’s nose to brush against his,
and soon their lips found each other again, trading chaste kisses as their bodies melded together.
Charles could have stayed that way forever, with the soft orchestra music and the sunlight streaming
in through the windows that ran along the length of the hallway. The notes began to swell then, and
Erik tipped him backwards as the music climaxed, swallowing his small gasp of surprise with a
passionate kiss that would have made his knees buckle had they not already, and all Charles could do
was wrap his arms around Erik’s neck, never wanting to let him go.
“Is this thing working?”

Charles practically draped himself over Erik’s back in order to lean over his shoulder and tap at Erik’s iPad. Erik could have brought the device closer to himself, but it wasn’t exactly a hardship to feel Charles pressed against him. “I think it’s still trying to establish a connection. Give it a minute or two.”

The blank box in the center of the screen flickered, and then Raven’s face was peering out at them, several seconds before her voice joined in: “- I think I can - hey boys, how’s it goin’?”

Charles winced. Erik quickly lowered the volume on his iPad. “Very well, thank you,” answered Charles, beaming at the blonde. “Europe is beautiful in the winter. We just sent you a postcard!”

Raven grinned. “I’ll keep an eye out. Where are you right now?”

“Neuschwanstein,” Erik replied.

“Still a bright beam of sunshine, you are.” Raven tilted her head and adjusted the webcam on her end. “So, how did it go? Meeting the in-laws, I mean.”

“Splendidly. Jakob and Edie are lovely people, and they were very welcoming to us.”

For a brief moment, Raven’s expression softened. It was gone before Erik could be sure, but it made Erik wonder if she’d somehow been worried about Charles meeting Erik’s parents. “Of course,” she sniffed, as if the occasion couldn’t have gone any other way. “I bet they absolutely love you. I mean, your acting career has practically set you as the bar for all the nice boys mothers want to be introduced to.”

Erik cleared his throat. “How are the video and audio on your end, Raven?”

“Clear as a bell. The video lagged a little at first, but it seems to have figured itself out.”

“Thanks for helping us test it out,” Charles chimed in.

“No problem. Thank fuck for technology, right?”

Erik could only nod in agreement. Charles gave her a rueful grin. “It’s not anywhere as good as having the real thing close,” he said, one hand grabbing on to Erik’s shoulder to help keep his balance. “But it’s better than nothing.”

“Oh, hey, I have a present for you guys!” she announced. A second later, Erik’s iPad notified him that he had a message. He opened it to find that it had a video attached. “Enjoy! Though, on that note, maybe watch it later after we’re done talking. Don’t want you guys getting all distracted with me still on the line.”

“We have a present for you, too,” Charles announced, sporting a faint flush over his cheeks.

“What is it?”

“You’ll have to wait and find out.” Charles was laughing as Raven huffed out an annoyed scoff which blew at her fringe. “Wow, this app is so good that I can tell just how irritated you are with me right now.”

Raven rolled her eyes. “Isn’t that my usual frame of mind?”
Erik, who had been distracted by a patch of Charles’ exposed skin just below his collar, suddenly spoke up. “Now kids, be nice,” he said, waggling a finger at Raven in a no-no-no manner. “Let’s not play this game.”

“But Charles was the one who--” Raven began, but she was promptly cut off as Charles hit the ‘mute’ button.

“Mein Gott, you two really are like brother and sister sometimes,” Erik said with a laugh, un-muting the indignant Raven.

“All right, I can take a hint,” she said, giving them a quick salute. “Enjoy the video, you ingrates.” Her expression softened as she halted above the ‘disconnect’ button, “And enjoy the holidays together, you two.”

The brilliant smile Charles shot her ensured that all was forgiven. “You too, my dear.”

Once she logged off, Erik scooped Charles into his arms. “Come on, let’s go watch this mysterious video she sent us.”

* * * * *

All in all, Raven and Hank had done an excellent job with the video. It really covered every angle of The Kiss, and Erik felt like he was rediscovering a well-treasured memory shot for IMAX 3D. He chuckled as he held Charles closer, the two of them gaping at the screen. No wonder people always told them to knock it off whenever they kissed in public: they did look like they were trying to eat each other.

However, there was something about the way Charles kissed that Erik had never noticed before from his usual vantage point. Now, from an outsider’s perspective, he couldn’t help noticing the earnest, sweet way Charles kissed him, slow and exploratory, eyebrows knitted together in concentration, his plush lips slowly teasing Erik’s apart. It was a world of difference from the way Erik kissed him, possessive and focused, his mouth firm and fully intent in pillaging Charles’ sweet red mouth. It made Erik mad with desire all over again, breathing deeply as his trousers got tighter and tighter.

Fuck, all this just from kissing. No, actually, just watching himself kiss Charles.

“Erik, are you all right?” he heard Charles ask, and when he turned to look at the real flesh-and-blood article, Charles’ eyes were unreal. His pupils were dilated, surrounded by a ring of electric blue. Maybe Charles wasn’t even aware he was doing it but he was running his tongue over that plush bottom lip, the same lip that Erik loved to suck and nibble on.

Erik didn’t even know he was instinctively leaning in until his lips were brushing against Charles, their breaths mingling, and he was so close he could see Charles’ dark lashes resting on his cheek as he gazed down at their almost joined mouths. Almost, even though Erik didn’t know why he was holding back. Drawing out the anticipation, probably.

His head dipped forward, lips seeking Charles’, and the resulting kiss was long and drawn out, agonizingly slow as Charles’ fingers threaded through his hair. Erik loved this, loved the feeling of Charles’ fingernails scraping gently against his scalp. Then Charles was tilting his head, half-muffling a soft moan, one of the most erotic, sweetest sounds Erik had ever heard. If he were a scientist he would record every single one of the noises Charles made during sex and study them. Best of all, he would study the different methods to see which would produce what sound.

Erik leaned in closer, capturing the tip of Charles’ tongue and sucking on it like he would the head of
Charles' cock. Ah, this produced a helpless ‘ngh’ sound that made Charles shudder sweetly, his cheeks turning pink. Erik ran an experimental hand down Charles’ chest, stopping halfway to rub the hardened nub of his left nipple through his shirt. *That* produced a hitch of Charles’ breath, his eyes fluttering shut in ecstasy. *Oh yes.* Erik could spend an entire day just seeing what brought Charles pleasure.

Now his hand continued sliding down past Charles’ stomach, caressing it gently before Erik’s hand dipped between his legs, cupping the growing hardness he could feel. He rubbed the heel of his hand against Charles’ crotch, and *that* caused Charles to moan desperately into Erik’s mouth, his fingers tightening in Erik’s hair. Erik rubbed some more, enjoying the fact that he could feel a damp spot growing where the head of Charles’ cock would be.

He pulled his mouth away and Charles immediately chased after it, but Erik denied him the kiss, keeping his hand between Charles’ legs. “I love you so much,” Erik blurted out of instinct, because this was something he did without having to think, it was so deeply ingrained in his bones that he felt like Charles was in his blood all the time, even as he slept. Charles in his dreams, Charles in his head, Charles in the very place that mattered, the space in Erik’s chest that had been dark and empty for a long time.

“I love you, too,” Charles whispered back, equally as instinctive, his arms looping around Erik’s neck as he climbed into his lap. The kiss this time was far more urgent and uncontrolled, raw with bites and the scraping of teeth, and Erik *felt* more than heard Charles gasp when he began stroking Charles through the fabric of his trousers again. Erik smiled into the kiss, pulling Charles even closer to him before his lips started trailing down Charles’ jaw, kissing a line down to that smooth, pale neck.

“Love the way you taste,” Erik murmured before latching his mouth there, feeling a surge of lust at the broken way Charles moaned. He loved knowing the spots that Charles was extra responsive, whether it was his neck or that warm patch below his ear. Erik made his way up there now, holding Charles steady as he started to arch into Erik’s hand, greedy and impatient. “Patience, Liebling.” Erik whispered, before sucking on his earlobe, the soft curls of Charles’ dark hair tickling his nose.

Charles smelled so *good*, like shampoo and sweat and the soft worn cotton of his cardigan.

“Erik, oh *Erik.*” The way Charles was grinding against his hand was ridiculously sinful, as though Charles were made to this, to move with him in sync like this. “Erik, please take me to bed, *please.*”

Fuck, the way Charles begged him for something Erik was *dying* to give him anyway...Erik couldn’t stop his hips from giving a slow, experimental thrust upwards into the valley of Charles’ open thighs, making Charles gasp into Erik’s hair. Despite the fact they both still had all their clothes on, there was no mistaking the intent of what Erik wanted to do to Charles. Repeatedly. All night. *Naked.*

“Your wish is my command,” Erik whispered against the shell of his ear, making Charles shiver. He slid both his arms around Charles’ body, manoeuvring them off the couch and as he slowly rose to his feet, Charles obediently hooked his legs around Erik’s hips, clinging onto him tightly. “Hang on, *Liebling,*” Erik huffed as he carried them both to the bed, but it was hard to concentrate with the way Charles was kissing his neck, sucking wetly on his skin. Erik shivered as he gently laid Charles down on the bed, the mattress creaking softly with their combined weight.

However, the way Charles was looking up at him now - eyes half-lidded, lips moist and parted, cheeks flushed pink with exertion - was making Erik weak in the knees. He climbed on top of Charles, who was already slipping his hands under Erik’s shirt, warm against his skin. “You’re beautiful,” Erik whispered without even realising it, bending down so that his nose was brushing against Charles’ flushed cheek. It felt warm and downy, heated against Erik’s own skin. Erik pressed
a kiss there, feeling Charles’ cheek muscles flex as he smiled.

“You’re not so bad yourself,” he whispered into Erik’s ear. “Can’t wait to feel you inside me, with nothing between us this time.”

Yesyesyes, Erik thought, drunk with anticipation. Since they both had a clean bill of health, condoms were out the window. The thought of having Charles like this, without any barrier within them whatsoever, was intoxicating. “I want you,” Erik murmured against his ear, feeling Charles shiver in his arms. “I want to come inside you.”

“Oh, fuck yes,” Charles huffed out, arching up against Erik, but he was trapped by Erik’s larger body, and Erik managed to claim those red lips in a kiss as he reached up to pin Charles’ wrists down.

“You’re not going anywhere,” Erik growled, watching as Charles started panting below him, writhing in anticipation. As silly as it sounded, Erik truly believed Charles’ body - shorter, softer, paler - was made to fit against his own perfectly in every single way, to respond to his every single touch. He pushed a knee between Charles’ legs, spreading them further apart. “You’re mine, and I’m going to fuck you so hard that you won’t be able to get out of this bed tomorrow.”

“Yes, yes, please yes,” Charles frantically begged, twisting under Erik’s grip. With his dark, mussed hair and sweet parted lips, he really did look like Erik’s wet dream come true. Even better, one that could interact. Charles thrust up against Erik’s hips, and Erik moaned shakily when he could feel the hard, hot line of steel sliding against his own. “Erik,” Charles was pleading, his voice bringing Erik back down to earth. “Erik, I want you so badly.”

Erik bent down, brushing his lips against Charles’ wet ones. “I know, Liebling, I know.” And then they were kissing again, soft and sweet and tender this time.

He pulled away just so he could unbutton Charles’ shirt, feeling like he was unwrapping a prize. Charles watched him, smiling as he palmed the side of Erik’s face. Erik took in the pale, flushed chest, his gaze raking over the hard, pert nipples that were begging for his mouth and, as Erik finally finished unbuttoning the shirt, the smooth, white stomach. Erik couldn’t resist bending down to lavish kisses there, feeling Charles lazily raking his fingers through his hair.

“Erik...” He could hear Charles’ singsong voice above him, but there was an edge of urgency in it, signalling Charles’ impatience. Erik took his time, though, running his tongue over the smooth, slightly salty skin, and he let it nudge into Charles’ soft belly button.

There was a groan above him, and Charles’ hands tightened in his hair. Erik licked again, and he swore he could feel Charles’ cock twitch in his pants. Smiling against Charles’ stomach, Erik began undoing the button, then dragged the zip slowly down with his teeth.

They both let out a soft whoosh of breath, and Erik locked eyes with Charles as he slowly slid down Charles’ trousers. Charles grinned slyly at him, lifting his hips to help as Erik tugged down his underwear as well. Charles was already more than hard, his cock as pink and rosy as the rest of him but just a little darker, a drop of pre-come beading at the tip. Before Erik even knew what he was doing his mouth was kissing it away, licking it up greedily and making Charles surge up with a moan.

In the background, Erik could hear Bryan yelling “CUT!” on the video, and they were both startled. Erik hadn’t even realised Raven’s video of the kiss was still playing, since he and Charles had gotten so carried away. Now Charles was chuckling breathlessly, pink spots of colour high on his cheeks, and Erik couldn’t resist crawling back up for a kiss or ten.
“You taste so good,” he whispered before fucking Charles’ mouth with his tongue, hearing a muffled noise of agreement from Charles trapped beneath him. He could feel Charles’ hands sliding down his chest, then tugging insistently at the hem of his turtleneck. Erik didn’t need to read his mind to know what Charles wanted; he broke the kiss so that Charles could whip off the offending garment, then he was running his hands reverently down Erik’s chest. His eyes were following the same path, and Erik couldn’t get over just how hypnotizing those eyes were.

“Charles?” Erik waved at him, and those electric blue eyes jumped up. “Charles, I’m up here.”

There was a wry twist to Charles’ mouth. “But I like the view from here.”

Erik pretended to look surprised. “You do?” Although he was reluctant to pull away from Charles’ touch, he had to do so, so that he could get his pants off. Erik was about to roll off when Charles began kissing down the path his hands had traced, gripping him by the hips and flicking the tip of his tongue against the skin just below his navel, which Charles had come to learn was especially sensitive, driving him mad. “Charles,” he gasped out, arms starting to tremble from the things Charles was doing to him and from supporting his own weight.

Charles released the hold he had on one of his hips, reaching up to nudge Erik’s corresponding hand out of place before mercifully rolling Erik onto his back. Charles popped the button of his pants, pinning Erik’s thighs down and attacking the freshly exposed sliver of skin with his tongue and teeth before blowing on the wet skin gently, the cool air sending shivers down Erik’s spine and straight to his straining cock. Charles arched an eyebrow up, voice deep and dark, “Would you like me to take off your pants?”

“Yes, oh God, fuck, Charles. Yes,” Erik groaned out, hands clawing at the sheets.

Charles pulled the zip down, mouthing at Erik’s cock through his underwear as it was slowly released from its confines. He hooked his fingers over the waistline and pulled roughly as Erik lifted his hips, tugging Erik’s pants and briefs all the way off and throwing them onto the floor. Charles crawled back up the bed, running his thumbs in circles around the pulse on the sides of Erik’s neck as he kissed him, loose dark curls falling in waves around them. “Better?”

Erik’s only response was to cup Charles’ ass in his hands, gripping them tightly like how he remembered he had that day they kissed in the studio, thrusting his cock along Charles’ as he would have, had the entire world not been watching. They both let out a groan, Charles digging his nails into Erik’s shoulders as Erik had his way with him for a while, rubbing their erections against each other with abandon, and Erik felt Charles’ hot, wet cock twitch against his as Charles pressed his forehead against the crook of his neck and keened.

Charles then rested his hands on Erik’s chest and pushed him down into the mattress. Erik stilled and Charles grinned wickedly just before he brushed his lips against Erik’s sternum and slid his tongue out, licking circles down Erik’s chest and the line of his abdomen as Erik arched up towards him, then finally wrapping those swollen, red lips around the head of Erik’s cock and taking Erik into the devastating heat of his mouth as far as he could go.

Erik let out a shout followed by a string of mindless babbling punctuated by “fuck” and “Charles” and “yes”, having no idea how he was going to keep this up without coming embarrassingly early, what with Charles tracing patterns down the inside of his thighs with his fingers.

“Wait, wait.” Erik’s hands were scrabbling at Charles’ shoulders, urging him to stop. He was too close, gasping for air as he fought down his impending orgasm. It didn’t help that Charles was looking up at him through his lashes, rubbing his cheek against the head of Erik’s straining cock. “Wait, I’m close. If you keep this up, I’m going to come soon.”
Charles raised an eyebrow at him. “Erik, that’s the point.”

“No.” Erik was shaking his head, propping himself up on his elbows. “Not like this. It’s our first time barebacking and I want to be inside you.”

Charles visibly melted, pressing a last kiss to the tip of Erik’s erection and crawling up to kiss him again, Erik wrapping him in his arms and tasting himself in Charles’ mouth. This turned him on even more, and he flipped them over gently, mindful of Charles’ back injury, so that Charles was now laid out in bed beneath him. Erik bent down, pressing a kiss to a prominent freckle on his shoulder. God, he loved Charles’ freckles.

“My mouth is here, darling,” Charles said, sounding amused. “You’re kissing the wrong spot.”

Erik trailed his mouth upwards, pressing kisses all the way. “Am I?” he whispered as his mouth finally reached Charles’, their lips only an inch apart. “For me, the ‘wrong spot’ means ‘anywhere not on Charles’.”

“You giant sap.” Charles gifted him with a slow, sensuous kiss, a warm hand squeezing his ass. “Go get the lube, I can’t wait any more.”

Erik got in another quick kiss before he groaned, remembering where his bag was. “Dammit, I left my bag in the other room.”

Charles grinned at him, those remarkable blue eyes lighting up. “No need, my bag is right here.” He pointed to the side of the bed, wiggling his eyebrows at Erik. “I thought to bring my own tube, just in case.”

Erik shook his head, laughing. “This is why I love you.” One last kiss, and then Erik bent down over the side, rummaging through Charles’ bag for the lube. He spotted something that looked like a page torn out of a magazine, and out of curiosity, he pulled out the rumpled page, realising that he was staring at a shirtless photo of himself at the beach. Laughing, he held it up to show Charles, who was quickly turning pink with embarrassment.

“It was just something I saw in one of the mags Raven brought me when I was recuperating in the Canary Islands,” Charles babbled, trying to take it out of Erik’s hands. “I mean, you looked so good, and I was missing you a lot--”

“Oh, Charles.” Erik kissed his forehead gently, letting the forgotten page flutter to the floor. “I think it’s cute.”

“Thank God you don’t think I’m some kind of stalker,” Charles mumbled, and Erik gave him a quick grin before diving back inside the bag for the lube. He finally found it, a brand new tube still in the original packaging.

“I wonder what the cashiers think when we’re paying for these,” Erik remarked as he tore off the plastic, settling in between Charles’ legs again. Charles eagerly spread them for Erik, wrapping his arms around Erik’s neck and pulling him down.

“Stop talking so much,” he whispered in Erik’s ear. “And fuck me, hard, before I tie you down and ride you like there’s no tomorrow.”

Erik shivered deliciously at the thought of that. “And what if I want that?” he mouthed against Charles’ jaw.

“Too bad, you’ll have to fuck me first.” Charles’ eyes had that naughty, defiant spark in them, and
Erik could feel Charles’ foot rubbing against his leg. He was losing himself in the various sensations of Charles touching him, rubbing against him, all a silent plea to get Erik inside him now.

Well, who was Erik to deny Charles?

He slicked his hand with lube, warming it between his fingers before reaching down between Charles’ legs, circling that tight, familiar entrance. Charles locked eyes with him, letting out a slow, relaxed breath. Erik gazed right back at him, feeling something tighten inside his chest. He had never done this with anyone before, laid himself so bare in more ways than one. He leaned down to nudge a kiss against Charles’ cheek, wanting to tell Charles just how much he meant to him. But then, he suspected Charles already knew.

Charles gasped a little as Erik slid his fingers inside, an overly familiar routine for them by now, but one that Erik would never get tired of. In the beginning he often had to go slow with just one finger first, for Charles had been so tight. Now, he knew Charles could take two, sometimes three immediately. Judging from the pleased sound Charles just made, he was relaxed enough to take more, so Erik kissed him again, this time on the lips as he added another finger. God, Charles was so sinfully tight around him, no matter how many times they had already done it.

Charles was now attacking his mouth eagerly, and when Erik hooked his fingers at that particular angle he had memorised by now, Charles let out a deliciously broken whimper, which Erik swallowed greedily. He loved seeing Charles come apart in his arms like this, just from his touch.

When Charles tightened his grip on Erik’s shoulders, he knew it was code for Charles being ready. He broke off the kiss so he could look for the tube and slick himself up, but the way Charles was now kissing his neck was incredibly distracting, his mouth hot and wet. Erik forced himself to take deep breaths, quickly spreading lube on his aching cock. The lubrication felt cool and tingly, so different from when he had a condom on.

“You ready?” he murmured, catching Charles’ reddened, kiss-bruised lips. Charles nodded eagerly without breaking the kiss.

Erik guided the tip of his cock to Charles’ entrance, then pushed in slowly. He was shocked by the vast difference in not having a condom on, the sheer intimacy of being buried in someone, skin on skin. Judging from the way Charles’ mouth was dropping open, his eyes dazed and wild, it felt different for him too. Maybe it was a psychological thing, maybe it was an emotional one. Whatever it was, Erik didn’t care. He was inside Charles. Bare.

“Oh, my God.” Charles was biting his lip, his eyes so blown, irises darkening to a stormy blue, and the tender way he cupped Erik’s face made Erik’s heart clench. “Erik, I feel you.” Charles whispered out into the ether between them, and Erik knew Charles meant it in so much more than just the physical sense of the word because he felt it too, like the same soul flowed between the both of them, just divided in two. Once Erik sank all the way in, he took Charles’ hand off his face, pressing a reverent kiss to the centre of his palm before twining their fingers together. He had never felt so connected to Charles, and it seemed like everything he felt for the man was thrown into the mix, transcending the experience to a few levels beyond the physical and emotional intimacy they were accustomed to sharing during sex.

“I love you.” Erik squeezed Charles’ hand, and Charles squeezed back, hooking his legs around Erik’s hips in a vice-like grip.

“Love you, too.” Charles let his other free hand tug Erik’s face down and they were kissing once more, imperfect and sloppy and messy, and Erik dragged his cock back out, then thrust in deeply again into Charles’ slick, tight heat. This made Charles groan into Erik’s mouth, and Erik was happy
to swallow all the hot, needy noises Charles was making.

Charles arched up against Erik, and it was Erik’s turn to groan when he felt the hot burning line of Charles’ cock pressed between both their stomachs, the pre-come leaving a wet smear on his skin. Erik was already reaching for Charles’ cock with his free hand when Charles stopped him, twining his fingers with Erik’s as well. Erik was puzzled. “Charles, don’t you--”

“Shhhhh.” Charles was smiling, panting against his cheek. “I want to come like this. Without you touching me.”

The thought of bringing Charles to orgasm just from his cock alone drove Erik almost insane, and he attacked Charles’ mouth with a feverish gusto, his tongue fucking that sweet, beautiful mouth that could go on about genetics or wine or method acting, the mouth that belonged to the man he loved. He was thrusting faster and harder now, locked between Charles’ thighs, the bedsprings creaking from their combined exertions. When Erik broke off the kiss for breath, he could see Charles’ eyes rolling up in delight, completely losing himself to Erik as his grip tightened on Erik’s hands. “Oh fuck, Erik, harder, please fuck me, harder, Erik--”

The broken way Charles was moaning his name sent a surge of lust pooling in the base of Erik’s stomach, and he desperately wanted to come inside Charles and fill him up with his seed. Mine, all mine, Erik thought as he watched Charles completely unravelling beneath him, he wanted this for all eternity, and he thrust in so hard that he could feel Charles’ toes curling against his back, his cock twitching against Erik’s stomach.

“Erik--” Charles was meeting his thrusts now, their fingers still locked together, cheeks so red that he looked like he’d just run a mile. Erik bent down to claim a kiss, thinking, This is what you look like when you’re being fucked, this is what I’ve been imagining ever since I shook hands with you at the first meeting, you in my bed, you in my sheets, moaning my name with my cock deep inside you, you in my life, forever and always--

Erik’s eyes snapped open when he felt the telltale pressure building at the base of his spine, knowing he was right on the edge. He wanted to come with Charles, and thank God that Charles was close too, eyes almost black, mouth open and slack with pleasure, skin flushed pink from head to toe. “I’m going to--” Erik warned him with a gasp, and thankfully Charles understood, nodding urgently and pulling Erik even closer.

“I want to feel you,” Charles pleaded, and Erik’s hips drove in one last time so hard that the bed creaked, and at the exact same time Erik was spilling everything inside Charles with a shout, he could vaguely feel Charles spurting between them, his mouth a wide open ‘O’ of pleasure as he coated both their stomachs, their fingers locked tight. Erik bent down so their foreheads were touching, thrusting again as if to push his seed even deeper inside Charles, and this caused a corresponding moan from Charles, as though he wanted to be completely filled up by Erik.

Charles’ eyes, though, his eyes. Erik was completely bewitched by them, the same blue after a sommersturm in Düsseldorf, and he held onto that gaze even as his hips did one last thrust of their own volition, deep inside Charles. In return Charles let out a soft, stuttered laugh, his head tilted to the side as he fought to catch his breath. “This was so different, so amazing,” he panted wondrously.

“I know.” Erik leaned down, nuzzling a kiss against his mouth. His grip on Charles’ hands had loosened, but he could feel his fingers trembling from where they rested against Charles’, belatedly noticing that Charles was shaking, too. It felt like a whole new level of making love, something so intense that Erik had never experienced before, not even when he had lost his virginity. He was surprised when Charles frowned up at him, then brushed his thumbs against Erik’s cheeks, and he was stunned to realise they were wet.
“Oh Erik, I love you so much.” Charles’ lashes were starting to look moist as well, and Erik was close enough to watch them slowly peel apart as Charles blinked in the soft lamplight. Then Charles was wrapping his arms around Erik’s neck and dragging him down for a proper kiss, and Erik let himself get lost in it, feeling like an utterly new man.

* * * * *

* * * * *
My Dearest Raven,

Everything has been so wonderful! Edie and I have been so lonely and kind and I feel like we are all a family now. (Edie is a little jealous that Edie calls me her new son, but don't tell him, I told you that.)

We're about to do a little exploring of Neuschwanstein. I wish you could be here to see this, Raven, it's enormous and beautiful and so very enchanting - the postcard really doesn't do it justice - and it's like stepping right into a Disney movie. It has turrets and watchtowers and even a waterfall around the back! But Edie said we can't walk across Marienbrücke bridge over the canyon because it's too dangerous with all the snow and ice. You should have seen his face when I suggested we climb over the barricades.

Oh, and we took a horse-drawn carriage up. I can see you stop rolling your eyes, it's very unbecoming of a young lady!

We have a big surprise for you!

I hope the rest of your holiday is just as perfect as mine has been so far and we'll see you in New York! (We'll try our best to behave in the area.)

Love, Charles

Raven Darkholme
Moira showed up at Madeo at a quarter to 8, wearing her favourite red peasant top and black capris. At first she had been unsure of what to wear; it seemed like a date, but at the same time, she wanted to keep it light and informal with Sean. Levene had laughed when she had told him about it, gently teasing her about robbing the cradle, but there was something mellow and quirky about Sean that she liked. The men she dated were all usually older and rather jaded, and Sean seemed like a fresh burst of sunshine in comparison.

He showed up exactly at 8, wearing a grey blazer over jeans and a Ramones T-shirt. He also had on a straw fedora, and it made Moira wonder briefly if he was a hipster.

Sean seemed beyond delighted when he finally spotted her, grinning from ear to ear. “Hey, you made it!” he said, leaning in to kiss her on the cheek.

“Of course, I wouldn’t turn down the offer of free food,” Moira said with a wink, making Sean chuckle. They headed to the entrance, but before Moira could even give her name for the reservation, the head waiter was already fawning over her, immediately showing the two of them to the best table in the house. By now Moira should have been immune to intense public scrutiny, but the addition of Sean’s presence made her all the more aware of the curious eyes following them. Sean seemed oblivious though, taking off his fedora and ordering a bottle of wine from the waiter.

“Everyone’s looking at you,” he said once the waiter had gone, but he said it in a very amused way, as though he were encouraging her to vent about it. “Do you ever get used to it?”

She offered him a listless shrug. “It becomes like background noise after a while,” she said honestly, observing the way he was leaning in, listening to her. “I don’t notice it, except when I’m dating someone and then the paps are shoving cameras in my face.”

Sean took a mischievous look around them. “Like now?”

Moira couldn’t help grinning at him. “If this is a date, then sure.”

He blinked at her earnestly. “Of course it is. Should I have brought along a baseball bat to keep the paps away?”

Laughing, Moira crossed her legs under the table. “You could always do it the old-fashioned way like Russell Crowe and knock someone unconscious with your phone.”

Sean chuckled, running a hand through his red curls. “Cool, I didn’t know a phone can double as a weapon to bludgeon someone with.”

“Of course,” Moira said with a wink. “It’s been a while since I had the opportunity to sock a pap in the eye.” She belatedly realised what she had indirectly said, and of course Sean was sharp enough to pick up on it. To his credit, he kept his voice casual as he played with the salt and pepper shakers.

“It’s been a while since your last date?” His voice was soft, a little husky with disbelief. “I find it hard to believe, you’re amazing. I bet men are beating down your door, but you just don’t give them the time of day.”

Moira didn’t know what to say, and luckily she was saved by the server, who brought them their angel hair vongole appetisers. She was deep in thought as she picked up her fork, twining the pasta around it. Sean was still watching her, eyes bright and attentive, completely ignoring his food. Of
course he’d be waiting for an answer.

“Well, maybe it’s been a while,” she conceded with another shrug. “I don’t know, sometimes I get tired of trying.”

“Of dating?” Sean prodded.

Nodding, Moira continued to wind the pasta around her fork. “It’s just that it always seems to be the same old thing. Go out with some guy, hang out for a while, and either my work will get in the way, or he’ll lose interest.” She didn’t know why she was telling Sean this. Maybe it was part of how he made her feel at ease, in general, and he seemed genuinely attentive to her. “I mean, for the large part of it, men sometimes stay away from me because they think I’m dating Charles. Well, not anymore, obviously.”

Sean laughed, curling back in his seat. “Yup, I’d put a huge, giant ‘NO’ for that one.”

Moira rolled her eyes. “Trust me, even Erik thought we were dating at first. And the way he stared at me! Good God, if looks could kill, I’d be dead of multiple stab wounds.”

Sean raised an eyebrow at her. “Want me to smack Erik around a bit for you?”

Moira gave him a look, which made Sean dissolve in laughter.

“Oh, okay fine, I admit he can kick my ass,” Sean said with a grin. “I could always grind something up and put it in his coffee. He’ll be too busy making eyes at Charles to notice, I promise you.”

Moira waved him away with a laugh. “No, it’s fine, I get it. I’m glad Charles is happy. He waited for the right person, and I’m glad it paid off for him. Which is why I’m doing the same.”

Sean had begun to dig into his food, swallowing before he asked, “Why do you think you haven’t found the right person yet?”

“I don’t know,” Moira said with a sigh. “I think most men just have this expectation of me from the movies I’ve been in, you know? Like I’m some illusion that they dreamed up, and they get disappointed when they realise the real girl is some jeans and T-shirt-wearing tomboy who likes eating Doritos and crying at sad movies.”

Sean didn’t say anything, but he nodded for her to go on.

Encouraged, Moira calmly continued: “It’s like what Rita Hayworth used to say, ‘They go to bed with Gilda; they wake up with me.’”

“Who’s Gilda?” Sean asked.

“Gilda was her most famous role,” Moira explained, before eating a forkful of the pasta. It was really delicious, as usual, yet she had lost her enthusiasm for the food. “I think most men just have this expectation of me from the movies I’ve been in, you know? Like I’m some illusion that they dreamed up, and they get disappointed when they realise the real girl is some jeans and T-shirt-wearing tomboy who likes eating Doritos and crying at sad movies.”

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Sean was now eating quietly, deep in thought, and Moira concentrated on her plate as well. Great, now I’ve gone and scared him off as well, she thought wistfully, not that she could blame him. This date was supposed to have been fun and informal after all, and she had no idea why it had spiralled into melodrama so quickly.
To her surprise, Sean spoke, once more quoting a line that was very familiar to her: “All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players.”

Her smile softened. “That’s my favourite Shakespearean play.”

Sean nodded happily. “I thought it was the best way of saying that the roles you play don’t define who you are,” he said a little sheepishly. “But the Bard said it much better than I ever could.”

Moira tilted her head at him, grinning even wider. “That’s a beautiful sentiment,” she said. “And do you know I played Rosalind in my high school play?”

To her surprise, Sean nodded a little shyly. “Trust me, you don’t want to know just how much I know about you,” he muttered into his pasta.

Ordinarily Moira would have been a little creeped out by this, but Sean was so open and unassuming with her that she couldn’t help but find him harmless. It reminded her of her own crush on River Phoenix when she was growing up, and how she had always imagined meeting him one day and finding out what he was really like. It was a little strange, to be on the other side of the equation, but Sean really was cute. And oh so harmless.

“At least you don’t have some deluded illusion of me,” she said with a little smile, before quirking an eyebrow at him. “Right?”

“No.” Sean was now looking at her directly, the food forgotten as the smile on his face grew wider and wider. “I want you to be nobody but yourself.”

They were interrupted by the server setting down the main courses at their table, and Moira let out a small scoff. “You must think us actors are such a whiny bunch of divas, complaining about our lives when we have it so good.”

Sean lifted an angular shoulder in a shrug. “I think the loss of privacy is more detrimental than people might realise.” His voice now seemed softer, huskier. “It must be terrible, when you get your heart broken and you have to read about it in the papers and news.”

Moira’s fork paused on its way to her mouth, then she set it down again before reaching over and squeezing a surprised Sean’s hand.

“I’m glad you understand I’m not trying to be a diva. It’s just that sometimes I feel as if we’re like animals in cages at the zoo, on display for the world to see,” she said with a sigh, her thumb brushing over his knuckles as she offered him a smile. “You seem to understand actors really well.”

Sean, who was now turning a very nice shade of red, gave her a goofy grin. “First I grew up worshipping actors, and now I work with them for a living. Of course I’d understand.” He pretended to narrow his eyes speculatively. “Maybe I should write a manual for people who date actors. ‘The Proper Care of Actors’, or something like that. What do you think?”

Moira chuckled, letting go of his hand so she could tuck her hair behind her ear. “I think people continually underestimate your brilliance, Sean,” she said a little teasingly, even if she meant it. “I sure won’t make that mistake again.”

Sean’s brilliant grin stretched from ear to ear. “You know what, you can do whatever you want with me.”

* * * *
December 25th

It was difficult to miss the way Charles’ footsteps began to lag as they trudged up the path towards the London home of the Xavier family. Even a casual passerby would have been able to read the hitch of reluctance in every movement Charles made. The polite blankness of his expression was, in its own way, far more worrying to Erik than heartfelt ranting.

Charles was a man who wore his heart on his sleeve and displayed every emotion on his face for the world to see. This new look - or old look - was just wrong. Like a twisted facsimile of Erik’s cool indifference, at least from his pre-Charles self, and it sat unnaturally on Charles.

The door opened just as they reached it. Sharon Xavier looked nothing at all like Charles - the color of their eyes matched, but Erik was only able to tell because he would recognise that remarkable shade anywhere. She was sleek and sharp and neat, where Charles was all warmth and a little unruly around the edges. Her form-fitting red dress might have fit the palette of the holiday, but the way she wore it made Erik remember, suddenly, the cloaks he’d worn for ‘Sparta’. He felt like he should be carrying some kind of weapon.

“Mother,” Charles greeted her. Erik remembered, now, the care Charles had taken in selecting his shirt and coat for today, the way he’d compulsively checked over his appearance the whole ride here from the train station.

“Charles,” she replied. This seemed to be a sort of cue: Charles took the remaining steps to her and lightly air-kissed over both cheeks. She barely moved for it, only getting the half-filled wine glass in her hand out of the way.

Charles stepped back. “And this is Erik Lehnsherr.”

 Barely a minute after seeing her in person for the first time, and Erik was already braced for the calculating look she cast over him. He’d been prepared to fake warmth and happiness to be here - he was an actor, after all - because this was Charles’ family, but he quickly realized that it would have been a bad idea, anyway. He settled for holding out his hand. “I am glad to finally meet you, Mrs. Xavier.”

Sharon let out a dismissive “hmm”, but conceded to briefly touch her hand to his. She turned back to Charles. “Your usual room has been prepared. Dinner will be in an hour.”

Charles nodded. “Father?”

“He just called. He won’t be joining us tonight.” She drank a big mouthful of wine. “Still at CERN, or so he says. Some issues with the Large Hadron Collider.”

Sharon disappeared back into the house. A man in uniform came out and offered to take their bags. Erik politely declined. Charles blinked, and suddenly looked so tired that Erik wanted to wrap his arms around him. Charles must have read his concern on his face, because he gave Erik a small smile, switched his bags to one hand, and took Erik’s hand with his freed one.

At any other time, Erik would have stared at the opulence of the house. Everything screamed expensive in that understated way that only old money could achieve. But his eyes were all on Charles, and he only peripherally registered the slick marble flooring, the polished dark wood of the banisters, the art lining the hallways. One of the reasons Erik was glad for his profession was in how the money had allowed him to move his parents out of the serviceable home of his childhood into a much bigger, much sturdier house, with cheerful staff to help them. The Xaviers lived on an entirely different level, though.
Charles’ bedroom was not particularly extravagant, but it was still large enough to have made for a studio flat for a couple of starving students in London. Charles didn’t speak until they were inside, the bags stowed away next to the wide bed.

“I’m sorry,” was the first thing Charles said. He pinched the bridge of his nose. “For my mother. She’s not the warmest person in the world. I’d hoped that my father would be here. He could at least have warned me.”

“Hey,” Erik interrupted him gently. “It’s all right.”

“We just have to survive through dinner,” Charles said, a touch desperately. “I’m sorry. I can’t promise it will be pleasant, or even civil, not after Father has stood her up again.”

Erik decided to ratchet up his counter-offensive by kissing Charles firmly. “Stop apologising - you have nothing to be sorry for. What, do you think I’ll leave you if your mother is less than polite over the Christmas turkey?”

Charles, to his credit, hesitated only a little bit before he let out a breath and a timorous, “No?”

“You’re ridiculous,” Erik said fondly, kissing him again. “You know, I was very nervous about this part of the trip.”

Charles’ eyebrows settled into a complicated configuration on his forehead. “Why on Earth for?”

“I’m not exactly the best at ‘meeting the parents’, ” Erik confessed. “Or meeting new people in general, as you know well.”

After a moment, Charles leaned in close, relaxing slowly against Erik. “I guess we really are perfectly suited to one another, then.”

“Besides,” Erik said, “this dinner cannot possibly be worse than some of the meals I had with executives and agents when I was first starting out.”

Charles laughed. Erik felt more than a little proud of himself for coaxing some of the tension out from Charles’ body. ‘Oh, God, don’t remind me of those. You’re probably underestimating just how horrible this dinner is going to be, but, fine, fair point.”

Erik changed his mind halfway through the meal. It was almost exactly like those lunches and dinners with bored rich Hollywood producer types and sharp-eyed individuals with purported connections, all looking at him like he was only slightly more interesting than the usual cattle line outside auditions. He couldn’t remember the last time he wanted to drink so badly, but couldn’t, because Charles had decided he was not going to survive the evening sober, and Sharon Xavier was already tipsy when she joined them at the elegantly-set dining table.

They exchanged a few pleasantries - Charles complimented Sharon on her dress, Erik made admiring comments about the house and the dining room.

“It’s been in the Xavier family for generations,” Sharon said to the latter. “I thought about redecorating a little bit, but Brian is terribly attached to it.”

After all the main courses had been brought out and placed on the table, Erik noticed that Charles was staring at the food, tenser than Erik had ever seen him before.

“Mother, I told you that Erik is Jewish,” Charles said. A muscle on his jaw jumped.
“Did you? That’s interesting,” Sharon said distractedly. “Thomas, uncork another one of the Chateau Mouton Rothschild Pauillac, will you?”

“Mother.” The sharpness in Charles’ tone was uncharacteristic enough that Sharon actually looked directly at him. “He is Jewish, and some of these dishes are not kosher.”

Sharon blinked for a long moment, then let out a disdainful sniff. “Really, Charles, you can’t expect me to remember every little thing you natter at me. And Christmas is a Christian holiday. I’m sure your friend doesn’t mind.”

Erik could only send Charles a conflicted look. Truthfully, he was so used to having to figure out which of his food options would be kosher that he wouldn’t have really noticed if Charles hadn’t said anything. Sharon went on as if Erik had given some sort of satisfactory answer. “There, I do wish you’d stop trying to embarrass me, Charles. You’re a grown man, now, despite your choice of profession. I have been incredibly patient with you, and I expect you to accord me with some respect.”

They tucked into their meal in silence. Erik did his best to act like he was comfortable, even though every clink of his silver utensils against the the fine china plates sounded disproportionately loud.

From what he could observe of Sharon and Charles, this seemed to be the usual atmosphere for Xavier dinners. Sharon did not seem to notice that anything was amiss, and Charles was eating with careful precision, taking small servings and small bites despite the deliciousness of the fare.

“Charles tells me you are German?” Sharon said to Erik after a while.

“Yes,” Erik answered. “My parents are currently living in Munich.”

“We saw them over Hanukkah, as a matter of fact,” Charles added. Erik didn’t miss the flash of wistfulness on Charles’ face, nor the bitterness in his tone.

Sharon didn’t look as if she even heard Charles. She leaned towards Erik and partly lowered her lashes in a manner that she probably thought was artful. "I have always found German men to be refreshingly direct.”

Erik fought to swallow his water properly. Oh good God, was the woman flirting with him? Across the table, Charles’ eyes had widened in horror and mortification.

Erik knew that he could take anything, could suffer through any embarrassment or insult flung at him. But he realised, right then, that watching Charles take hurt, seeing Charles endure the casual negligence of his own mother in silence, was affecting him far more than anything anyone could do to his own person. He heard a rattle, and looked down to where his fingers had curled tight around the handle of his fork.

"Then allow me to be direct, Mrs. Xavier," he said.

"Sharon, please," she breathed at him.

"Mrs. Xavier," he repeated firmly. "I think you should be asking your son about his work, instead of propositioning his boyfriend in front of him at the dinner table.”

He tensed, not knowing how she would react. Confusion lined her face for a brief moment, then she downed the rest of her wine in one go and held it out for a refill. The alcohol was clearly affecting her by now, but her gaze still conveyed an icy sort of consideration.

"I expect Charles has been telling you all sorts of things about me,” she said. "He's very good at that,
you know. I'm not surprised he became an actor. His grandfather must be rolling in his grave." She took a drink from her fresh glass of wine and peered at Erik over it. "You're an actor, too, aren't you? I've seen your face somewhere."

Erik cast a worried glance over at Charles. He thought he'd made things worse, but for some reason Charles had relaxed, though he bit his lip when his mother addressed Erik again.

"Yes, I'm an actor as well," he answered Sharon.

She let a dismissive huff, likely not realising in her drunken state that it was louder than she intended. "New money, too, I bet." She set the wine glass down on the table hard enough that its contents would have sloshed out, if she hadn't already drunk most of it. "I don't know what expectations you had in coming here, but I've made it clear to Charles that his father and I will not give him a single pound as long as he persists in this ridiculous sham of a profession. If you've got hopes for the family fortune, then I'm sorry to disappoint." She hiccuped. "Never, you're not getting it, not as long as Brian or I are alive. You'll have to make do with just Charles."

Charles was staring at him, concern and alarm clear on his face. If the table wasn't so wide, Erik would have reached over and taken his hand. He hoped his expression conveyed to Charles how little he cared about what Sharon thought of him. And he could feel no insult in being called 'new money', when said money was providing a better life for his own parents, and one product of 'old money' was in front of him listing dangerously to one side of her chair and giggling at some unknown joke. And to imply that he was only with Charles for his family’s money!

"I assure you," he said, once he could speak again past the sheer rage, "Charles and I are managing perfectly well on our own. And I don't give a fuck about your money. You can take it to your grave and be buried with it."

There was a kind of pudding for dessert. Erik barely tasted it - which was a pity because he was sure it was excellent. The worst part, he decided, was how little his anger and Charles’ hurt mattered to Sharon. She was already waiting for a new bottle of wine to be uncorked. Her eyes, too bright and glazed over, floated over Charles and Erik with as little awareness as a butterfly had for worms in the damp earth; they’d clearly been dismissed, and no longer existed.

* * * * *

By the time they made it to bed, Charles looked like he’d gone through a week’s worth of action-heavy scenes and night shoots. He’d perfunctorily brushed his teeth, then shrugged off his expensive evening wear and flopped face-down on the large bed.

Erik took a little more care, though he couldn’t stop casting worried glances at the motionless figure on top of the covers. Charles’ body radiated tension so strongly that Erik’s back began to ache in sympathy.

Charles didn’t say anything when Erik climbed into bed and gently gathered him up, arranging them both so that Charles was resting on his side, cradled by Erik’s long limbs. There was a certain tightness around the edges of Charles’ face, not quite pain but not far from it. Erik rubbed a soothing hand up and down Charles’ side; he was reminded of Charles’ injury, and had to wonder if the effort of maintaining a civil demeanor and a perfect posture through dinner was taking its toll on Charles’ freshly healed back.

“I always tell myself that she cares, in her own way,” Charles’ voice broke the quiet, distinctly raspy. “She’s just - it doesn’t come naturally, to some people. I don’t think she ever wanted to be a mother. But it was the done thing.”
Erik tightened his hold around Charles. “Doesn’t change the fact that it hurts you.”

He had no idea how long they lay like that. When Charles began to shake, mild tremors that he tried to disguise or hold off by tensing up, Erik caught Charles’ hands, one in each of his own, and pressed their interlocked fingers down over Charles’ chest. This pulled Erik’s arms around Charles’ upper body, solidly folding him into Erik’s slightly larger form.

“Let it out, Charles, if you need to,” he whispered into Charles’ hair. “I love you. I’m here.”

Charles resisted for a little while longer. And then he slumped, letting out a defeated sigh that broke Erik’s heart. Erik held him even tighter, even though he was practically squeezing Charles at this point. Charles didn’t complain; the fingers locked with Erik’s were gripping down just as hard.

Charles shook in earnest, great wracking sobs that were eerily silent, as if even now he was trying not to be heard, not to draw attention to his hurt.

Erik held him through it. Charles slipped out a soft, hitching gasp and immediately tried to curl in on himself, like he was mortified by that more than anything else; Erik had to blink back angry, helpless tears and remind himself that there wasn’t anything he could do about the past. Charles had saved himself long before Erik ever came into the picture.

He expected that they would just fall asleep like that, and so was surprised when Charles, after his breathing had steadied down some, suddenly twisted around and up and literally shoved his mouth against Erik’s to take a hard, salty kiss.

"Please, Erik," whispered Charles. "Touch me. Give me something else to think about."

Erik hesitated. Charles, impatient, moved their joined hands down to his stomach. Erik groaned low in his throat and took over. He reluctantly untangled their fingers and rubbed Charles' arms, swept his hands over pale shoulders and down Charles' front, fingers ghosting over his nipples and his navel but not stopping. Charles whined, pushing his ass back against Erik in an unmistakable message.

"Let me, love," Erik said soothingly. He was relishing the feel of Charles’ skin beneath his fingertips. The two of them were always raring to get right to the sweaty bits; it was nice to just feel Charles, to let everything Erik felt about this man rise briefly, simmering, to the surface.

Charles was the one who impatiently slid off both their sleeping pants and pushed the lube into Erik's hand. Erik refused to be hurried. He took his time preparing Charles; especially when, for all his apparent eagerness, Charles' body was tense. Erik patiently worked his fingers in, gently coaxing Charles' muscles to relax. He thought he could get off like this, just from feeling the heat and pressure around his fingers, and Charles didn't sound too far from it, either.

"Please, Erik," Charles whispered again, sounding a little broken, a little lost.

Thanks to his extended ministrations, the first slide in felt easy as breathing. Erik gasped quietly. He was self-conscious of being in a strange house, of not knowing just how thick the walls were. The thought of Charles' mother overhearing them horrified him. But he didn't want to hold back all noise, as they were signs of Charles' effect on him.

Charles had lived too long in silence.

"Can you feel me, Liebling?" he groaned straight into Charles' ear. "I'm here. I'm inside you. Fuck, you feel so good. I'd be inside you always, if I could."

"I want you to be," Charles moaned back. "Oh God, Erik, please, move, I need you, need you to..."
It took a great deal of self-control for Erik to resist rolling Charles onto his front, pulling his hips up, and fucking him into the mattress like Charles wanted him to. Instead, he wrapped his arms around Charles' upper body, like before, keeping them both on their sides, and rolled his hips in a steady rhythm. His thrusts were slow, but deep, and Erik kept Charles locked in place.

Charles gasped approvingly, though he also tried to wiggle out of Erik's hold. Erik suspected he wasn't trying to escape so much as trying to goad Erik into doing more. He tensed his arms, and hovered his mouth over Charles' ear, "Always so stubborn, Charles. But you won't get your way this time. I have you, I'm having you right now," he punctuated his words with a particularly sharp snap of his hips, "and you'll take my cock the way I want you to."

A noticeable shiver ran down Charles' body, and Charles moaned, loud, his body going pliant in Erik's arms. Erik just held him tighter, making it clear to Charles that he was locked in place.

This was for Charles, all he could think about was Charles, and so Erik was surprised to hear that his own breathing had become short, stuttering; there was a tightness in his throat and a heaviness on his chest that wasn’t all due to the press of Charles’ body. The rolling motion of his hips took on a regular rhythm that was not too far from his heartbeat. Each thrust into Charles’ body, his cock piercing that clenching tightness, seemed echoed by the pounding under his ribs.

A particularly hard thrust had Charles gasping out a strangled, “Er-ik,” his fingers interlocking with Erik’s over his chest. Erik moaned, licked along the back of Charles' neck.

His muscles were starting to ache, because of the angle, but he fucked Charles even harder, not speeding up but putting more power into his thrusts, until he was pounding into Charles with punishing force.

The sounds coming out of Charles made him fervently hope that the walls were very thick in this house. Preferably lined with sound-dampeners.

Charles let out a strangled shout when he climaxed and Erik tried to muffle it by shoving his tongue into Charles’ mouth. Charles greedily kissed him back, and drank in Erik's loud moan in turn. Erik still felt a heady rush from being able to come inside Charles, feeling the slickness around his cock as he rocked out their aftershocks.

It was too dark to see properly, but Erik could hear the watery quality of Charles' voice, and imagined Charles' eyes wide and shining a touch too bright. "God, I love you," Charles said fervently.

Erik could only kiss him again, slow and gentle. He realised, with a jolt, that he couldn't regret coming here with Charles. Most of the time, Charles would be the happy and friendly and energetic one between them. But now they both knew that Erik could be the solid, steady calmness when Charles needed him to be. Erik was willing to be that, and more, for Charles. "I love you, too," he replied softly.

* * * * *

December 26th

Erik had wavered on his plan, wondering if pulling an act that could, at the very least, be construed as rude and likely also stank a bit of intervention would only make matters worse. But the easing of Charles’ features, the loss of the tension that had crept into all his lines and joints until he seemed fit
to turn into a figurine or a toy, like the sad Nutcracker, convinced Erik that he’d made the right decision.

The day after the most excruciating holiday dinner Erik had ever experienced in his life, Erik calmly asked one of the house staff to flag down a cab, bundled up their still-packed bags, then bundled up Charles, and walked bags and half-asleep Charles down the grand staircase and out the front door, where one of the ubiquitous London black cabs was waiting. The one whom he thought might be the butler, Thomas, loaded the bags while Erik loaded Charles into the car. Erik thanked Thomas and instructed the driver to head for St. Pancras.

Erik only looked back once, to see the place where Charles’ mother lived disappear from view as they turned a corner. At this point, Charles’ head was lolling on his shoulders, as if he was exhausted despite it still being morning and he’d only left bed an hour ago. Charles never looked back.

“Why don’t you take a nap, Liebling?” Erik suggested quietly. “I’ll wake you once we reach the station.”

Charles made a tired little noise that constricted something painful in Erik’s chest. “I should be more concerned that you’re kidnapping me to places unknown,” mumbled Charles. He shuffled closer, claiming a comfortable spot on Erik’s shoulder for his head. “But, really, anywhere is better than...” He made a vague backwards gesture.

Erik briefly buried his face in Charles’ hair, pressing a kiss. Home will mean something better, he wanted to promise. Make a home with me, and I will show you how. It helped to know that his own parents would be more than willing to help him.

“I’ll let you know when we get there,” he whispered, securing an arm around Charles’ relaxed, dozing form.

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Despite the early hour, St. Pancras station was already fairly crowded by the time they got there. Erik muttered several uncomplimentary comments under his breath.

“It’s the holiday rush, I suspect,” Charles said. He still looked a little wan, but he was sitting up and his eyes were alert. He agreed to look after the bags while Erik picked up the tickets he’d ordered online. Erik was initially concerned by this uncharacteristic acquiescence, but when he came back, he saw Charles casually trying to get a better look at the set of tickets in his hand.

Erik wordlessly handed Charles his own set. He felt a touch nervous; the idea of kidnapping Charles was fun and carried a number of interesting possibilities, but he didn’t actually want to take Charles anywhere against his will.

Charles’ eyebrows arched up when he read the destination printed on the last ticket. He blinked at Erik.

“My Mama always said that if I ever found myself not knowing where to go next,” Erik said quietly, “going home would help me find out.” After a moment, he added, “She loved your latkes, you know. I’m sure she has a million other recipes she wants to teach you.”

Charles looked away then, and Erik could see him blinking hard. “She’s just a good teacher. And she probably wants to make sure I’m able to feed you when she’s not around.”

Erik reached out and took his hand. He could no longer remember a time when this small action hadn’t felt easy and natural. Charles smiled, first at the floor and then looking up at Erik, letting Erik
see the wet glimmer of his eyes. Words failed Erik, as they were wont to do. But now he knew there were other ways of communication that Charles would understand perfectly.

So he kissed him, letting himself sink into the warmth of the moment, while all around them people surged to wherever they were going next, and the trains pulled sweetly into the station.

* * * * *

Raven had planned to visit her parents over Christmas, but her father had whisked her mother away on a last-minute cruise to Florida, so she had ended up spending the holidays with Hank instead. It wasn’t exactly a hardship, given that they were still in the honeymoon period and unable to keep their hands off each other. Now she knew why Charles and Erik were seemingly insatiable, and felt a little bad about every snarky remark she had thrown their way now that she was in the same boat.

Hank had come over for Boxing Day lunch, bringing a stack of Star Wars DVDs with him that they intended to spend the day watching together, cuddling on the couch. She greeted him at the door with a kiss, which was getting handsy until he hitched her up onto the nearby table where she put her keys and her mail, and she accidentally knocked the stack of letters off the table. “Dammit,” she murmured as she broke off the kiss.

“I’ll get them,” Hank said gallantly, and Raven tried not to laugh when she saw how fogged up his glasses were. She watched as he picked up her mail, before he paused as he squinted at one small FedEx package. “Hey, did you see this? It’s from Charles, it’s marked ‘Urgent Delivery’.”

“Oh?” She held her hand out for it, then ripped it open. She was surprised to find only a name card for a limo driver and a messy, handwritten note from Charles: “Dear Raven, please call this number and take Hank with you, the driver will bring you to a place where you will receive your present. Happy Christmas!” Charles then signed off with a row of X’s, making her smile.

“What is that?” Hank asked curiously as he read over her shoulder.

“Only God - and Erik Lehnsherr - knows the mysterious ways Charles’ mind works,” Raven said as she gave him a kiss. “Come on, let’s find out what the talented Mr. Xavier is up to.”

The car arrived very quickly, and Raven got into the backseat with Hank. The driver was polite but tight-lipped, refusing to divulge where they were going. Raven became even more and more curious as they left the city behind, taking the freeway towards the San Fernando Valley.

Although Hank still seemed mystified, Raven was starting to get an inkling of what Charles was up to when the driver deposited the both of them at the Van Nuys Airport with nothing more than a mysterious smile and another letter. Taking Hank’s hand, she read the letter as they ventured further inside the airport. Being Boxing Day, it was not that busy, but there were quite a number of passengers about.

Charles was just as vague in this letter: “Head towards the information counter and look for Irene. Tell her your name, and she’ll do the rest.”

“Really, Charles?” Raven said with a sigh, but Hank squeezed her shoulders gamely.

“Come on, it sounds fun,” he said, tugging her towards the customer service counter.

They found Irene, who promptly led them to Hangar 2 while chattering about what a great actor Charles was and how much she liked his movies. Raven was glad when they finally reached the massive hangar, lined with rows and rows of private planes. Irene brought them to a cute Cessna Skycatcher, handing over a piece of paper to Raven. “This set of co-ordinates is from Mr. Xavier,”
Irene said with a smile. “You know how to fly this, right?”

“Yes,” Raven said, as Hank turned and gaped at her. “But I don’t have my license with me.”

“It’s all right, Mr. Xavier faxed it over when he booked the plane, so you’re all set to go,” Irene said, as she walked away. “Have fun! If you need anything, just call my personal cell.”

“Wow.” Hank was astounded, his tone full of admiration. “You have a pilot’s license?”

“Only for small planes.” She closed his jaw with a finger before leaning up to kiss him. “Do you think you’ll be able to figure out the co-ordinates? I’m just afraid Charles will send us on a wild goose chase to Morocco or something.”

Hank blinked down at the piece of paper. “Oh don’t worry, it’s not too far from LA.” He whipped out his phone and keyed in the numbers, before bursting into laughter. “Raven, are you up for a quick trip to Big Sur?”

“Oh, my God. He remembered!” Raven was shaking her head in amazement, before explaining to a puzzled Hank, “We were there once to shoot a scene from one of his movies, and it looked so beautiful there that I mentioned it would be a great place for a really romantic date.”

“Well.” Hank smiled down at her, his lips quirking up in a way that made him look both amused and happy. “Shall we proceed to this date then, since Charles has gone to all this trouble?”

She held out her hand to him, grinning. “I may not be able to fly you to the moon, but Big Sur sounds doable.”

* * * * *

December 27th

If it wasn’t for the fact that Scott lived in New York, Alex would never come here of his own volition. Compared to the breezy, laid back wide sprawl of the Californian landscape, Manhattan was a chaotic, crowded mess, and Alex had no desire whatsoever to visit the other four boroughs. Now that it was the holidays, there were more tourists than ever in the city, and Alex had to squeeze past several gawking idiots who were clogging up the sidewalk outside Rockefeller Center.

Seriously, what was everyone’s eternal fascination with New York? What was so alluring about a city that left its garbage openly on the sidewalks to be collected?

Grumbling under his breath, Alex checked his watch. Scott had to entertain a few Korean clients who were in town, and would only be free to meet up at 9. Alex wondered if he had enough time to pop down to St. Mark’s. Although he actively disliked New York, the East Village wasn’t that bad and had a lot of interesting little shops. If anything, he could at least get an interesting T-shirt from ‘Trash and Vaudeville’ for Sean.

Alex was not in the mood to take the subway, which added to his never-ending list of reasons to hate New York. It was so confusing, and he often got lost when switching train lines (unless Scott was with him). It looked like he’d have to splurge on a cab, then.

Trying to get a cab to stop for him proved to be another Herculean effort, and Alex was almost ready to give up and brave the subway when a gleaming yellow cab pulled up to the curb right in front of him. “Oh, thank God,” he muttered as he opened the door and got in, about to thank the driver when he saw the confusion on the driver’s face.

Alex turned to his left, and saw a stunned Darwin in the backseat staring right back at him. “You’ve
got to be kidding me,” Alex said, his mouth dropping open.

“Hey man, what are the odds?” Darwin was now smiling, clapping Alex on the back.

“Where to, fellas?” the driver interrupted brusquely. “I don’t have all day.”

Alex looked to Darwin, who shrugged. “I’m headed to St. Mark’s,” Alex offered.

Darwin shot him a pleased grin. “Oh, I’m going to Union Square. You could drop me at St. Mark’s then, it’s just a couple of blocks away.”

“Cool.” Alex gave the driver the address, receiving only a curt grunt in response. Well, it wasn’t as though NYC cab drivers were known for their world class customer service.

“So what are you doing in the Big Apple?” Darwin asked, shifting a little closer to Alex. Normally Alex would have frowned at this, but he really did like Darwin, who was a genuinely nice guy just like Charles.

“Oh, I’m in town visiting my brother Scott, the one I told you about.” Alex slowly relaxed as he leaned back in the seat, feeling more at ease now that he was with someone familiar. “What about you?”

Darwin’s grin widened. “I live here. Brooklyn born and raised, that’s me all over.”

Alex’s eyebrows shot up. “You’re a native? But...you’re such a nice guy!”

Darwin laughed long and loud at this, his teeth gleaming in the dark gloom of the cab. “So are you saying us New Yorkers are not a nice bunch?”

“Um, well, not exactly--” Alex began, but he was cut off when the cab jerked to a stop, and he felt Darwin’s hand clap over his chest protectively, as if to protect him from some oncoming impact. The driver was now swearing colourfully at a cyclist who was blocking the road, and both Alex and Darwin let out a sigh of relief that an accident had been narrowly avoided. “Whoa man, what the fuck?”

“I know.” Darwin frowned, his hand still on Alex’s chest, warm and reassuring. He didn’t seem to notice it though, and Alex felt his face turn warm as Darwin’s hand slid down to his stomach. “You okay, man?”

“Yeah, yeah, I am.” Alex was trying not to move too much, not wanting to dislodge the nice hand on his stomach. When the hell did this happen? he thought in dismay, giving Darwin a nervous side glance.

The cab started moving again, and to Alex’s disappointment, Darwin slowly took his hand away. “Anyway, don’t be scared of New Yorkers. We really are nice,” he said with a laugh. “We don’t bite. Much.”

Now Alex wanted to disappear into the seats as he imagined Darwin doing precisely that, his teeth pressing down gently on Alex’s collarbone or shoulder. He kept quiet instead, hoping Darwin wouldn’t be able to read the steamy thoughts in his head.

“We’re here,” Darwin announced as the driver came to a stop in front of a corner bookshop with a red sign that Alex found vaguely familiar. “Come on, I’ll show you around the place.”

“I thought you were headed to Union Square?” Alex said, then wanted to kick himself for making it
sound like he was chasing Darwin away, which was the last thing he wanted.

“Oh I’m not in a hurry, I’ll show you around first.” Darwin paid the cab driver first, refusing to accept Alex’s share, then hopped out of the cab. Alex followed him, more than looking forward to Darwin bringing him around the East Village, willing himself to forget the warm press of Darwin’s hand on his stomach only moments ago, firm and proprietary.

* * * * *

Charles let out a pleased moan as the cold beer hit the back of his throat, closing his eyes to savour the sweet overtones of banana that lingered on his palate. “Oh, Erik. You were right, weißbier is so good.”

Erik grinned as he took a large gulp of his own. “I told you German beer is das beste.”

It had gotten dark outside and they were now seated in a booth in the enormous Hofbräuahaus beer hall in the heart of Munich after spending the day walking around Marienplatz. They had stood beneath the Rathaus-Glockenspiel at 11 A.M. when its bells chimed, and Charles had set his watch to it as the life-sized figures danced around the two levels of its facade. The rest of the day had been mostly spent strolling through the Viktualienmarkt, trying the local produce and buying all sorts of souvenirs for their friends, and Charles had later dragged Erik up the bell tower of Peterskirche at sunset to take in the views of the city centre. It was lovely to finally rest their legs, and Erik had brought him here to Hofbräuahaus saying he would like it because it was Oktoberfest all year round. Charles exerted some effort as he lifted his large 1-litre mug, still amazed that it was the standard size they served, and swallowed a third of it happily at one go, grinning as he wiped the slight trace of foam off his lips with the back of his hand. “And it’s so big.”

“Careful, Charles. If you keep this up, I’m going to hate myself for being jealous of a mug of beer.” Erik cautioned as he suppressed a laugh.

“Oh, come now. It’s not just this beer that’s huge, even the pretzel is monstrous. It’s almost twice as big as my head!” Charles reached over and picked it up from the basket, breaking off a piece and leaning towards Erik on the opposite side of the table to pop it into his mouth, trailing his fingertips over Erik’s lower lip and tugging it down. He pitched his voice low, lips curving into a seductive smile as he tilted Erik’s chin up, “They really do make everything bigger here.” Charles flicked his eyes down to Erik’s crotch pointedly from where he was hovering, giggling as he fell back into his seat when Erik had trouble swallowing the pretzel.

The brass band had switched from playing traditional Bavarian music to pop numbers, and Charles smiled when he recognised his favourite Elton John song. Erik took another swig of his weißbier, shaking his head incredulously. “I really can’t bring you anywhere, so I’m just going to sit here and pretend I don’t know you.”

“Oh, is that so?” Charles raised an eyebrow with a smirk. Erik shot him a puzzled look when Charles got up and brought his beer with him, sliding into the seat next to Erik and placing the mug down on the table as he leaned in. “I would have been a gentleman and offered to buy you a drink first, but I see you already have one.”

Erik seemed to be trying to hide a smile behind his mug, but when he set it down, his face was serious again. “I’m flattered, but no thank you,” he said casually. “I’m waiting for my boyfriend to come back.”

“Well, my friend. I don’t see him anywhere, so I guess it’s just you and me,” Charles replied as he brushed a stray lock of Erik’s hair back, tucking it behind his ear.
“Oh?” Erik was now pretending to look around, before he turned back to Charles, now leaning in closer. Charles swallowed as he caught a whiff of Erik’s woody cologne, fighting the temptation not to lean in and bury his nose in the crook of Erik’s neck. From the way Erik was slowly licking his bottom lip, it was clear he was fighting temptation too. “My boyfriend is the most beautiful person I’ve ever seen,” Erik murmured, brushing the tip of his nose against Charles’ cheek, but only just a breath away from a kiss. “If he walked in the front door right now, you could tell his eyes are blue, even from this distance.”

Charles felt a shiver run down his spine and knew he was blushing, trying his best to hide a smile as he turned to face Erik, “And you have a mutated EYCL1 gene. That’s in reference to your eyes, which I have to say are stunning.” He pressed the hand that was closer to Erik onto the seat, leaning into Erik so he was crowded up against the wall, deepening his voice to a low purr, “You see I can’t tell if they’re green or they’re blue.”

This seemed to have quite an effect on Erik, who was now shifting in his seat, which Charles knew meant that his trousers were getting tight. His gaze was flitting between Charles’ eyes and mouth, as though he couldn’t decide which deserved his attention more. “I guess in a certain light, they’re green, and in others, they’re blue.” Erik let his thumb trace the corner of Charles’ right eye, gently brushing against his lashes. It tickled a little, but Charles arched into his hand like a cat, crowding him even more against the wall. Erik didn’t seem fazed, though. In fact, his breathing seemed to get deeper and harsher. “Yours are the sweetest eyes I’ve ever seen.” Erik’s mouth crooked up in a grin. “But don’t tell my boyfriend that.”

Charles placed a palm up against the wall and grabbed Erik’s shoulder with his other hand as he crawled into his lap, running the bridge of his nose against the shell of Erik’s ear before he whispered against his temple, “All your secrets are safe with me.”

He could feel Erik trembling with sheer effort not to jump him in the middle of the beer hall, in front of all these people. Charles knew he was playing dirty, because he was openly exploiting one of Erik’s main weaknesses: Charles sitting on his lap. He heard Erik take in a shaky breath, then exhaling against his cheek. “Charles,” he was pleading in a hushed voice, and his breath noticeably hitched as Charles adjusted himself on Erik’s lap. “I can’t think straight now, not with you on my lap like this, smelling so good.” Still, it seemed Erik couldn’t resist running a warm hand up the inside of Charles’ thigh, stopping just at the crease where it met his leg and rubbing slow circles there, inches away from Charles’ now very interested cock, which was starting to fill out.

“Well, you’re not exactly playing fair, either,” Charles replied, gasping when Erik stroked a thumb along the length of his cock. “Oh God, Erik, your fingers.” Charles shifted so that they were pressed against each other and began kissing Erik, chasing the lingering taste of the wheat beer with his tongue, Erik’s hands instinctively sliding around to cup his arse. Charles greedily swallowed the sounds Erik was making and was mentally weighing out the pros and cons of dragging Erik into a stall in the gents and sucking him off when he felt something vibrate against the inside of his left thigh. Charles let out a moan, tightening his hold on Erik’s shoulders and around his hips as the muscles on the inside of his thighs began to tremble. However, his brain eventually caught up with the rest of his body and he reluctantly released Erik’s lips, panting into the crook of his neck as Erik stroked his back soothingly. “You should probably answer that.”

Erik groaned pitifully as Charles climbed off him, wrapping a warm arm around Charles’ shoulders as he fished his phone out from his pocket. Erik took one glance at the screen and whimpered. “It’s my mother,” he stated, sounding horrified. Erik exhaled a deep breath and momentarily rested his forehead against the heel of the hand holding the phone before he took the call, “Hello, Mama.”

Charles covered his mouth and laughed, suddenly feeling like a teenager caught with his hand down
his pants. He leaned his head on Erik’s shoulder, smiling as he tried to listen in. “We’re leaving
soon,” he heard Erik say breathlessly, followed by a short pause and a strangled ‘Mama!’ before Erik
hastily said goodbye.

“She wanted to know what time we’d be back,” Erik explained after he ended the call. He ran a
hand over his face and let out a cry of dismay, “I can’t believe I just talked to my mother with a hard-on.”

That was it, and Charles broke out in hysterics, laughing so hard that he started wheezing. “I’m
sorry, darling. I suppose this is largely my fault,” Charles choked out between fits of laughter.

Erik sighed exaggeratedly, his stern expression lasting all of two seconds before he quit the charade
and chuckled along with Charles. Charles let out a startled yelp when Erik messed up his hair in
revenge before sliding Charles’ mug over and picking up his phone, shaking his head the whole
time, “Just finish your beer. I’m going to call for the car.”

* * * * *

December 31st

Ordinarily, traffic in New York was never easy to navigate, no matter how many times Erik had
visited the city. However, on New Year’s Eve, traffic was an utter nightmare, thanks to the millions
of tourists flooding the three main airports and streaming into Manhattan just to watch the ball drop at
Times Square. Sitting in the hired car, Erik wistfully glanced up at the paparazzi helicopters roaring
through the sky, wishing he could somehow control metal and bring one down so he could fly
Charles straight to the hotel.

He glanced back down at the dark head resting on his shoulder, Charles chuckling as he watched
some video on his iPad. It was lovely to see him smiling and laughing again, after the whole fiasco
with his frosty mother in London. Erik pressed a soft kiss to the crown of Charles’ head, breathing in
the smell of his shampoo.

From this angle, Erik could see the corners of Charles’ eyes crinkling, which meant he was smiling.
“Erik, you have to watch this,” he said, taking out a earbud and putting it in Erik’s ear.

Erik tugged him closer, watching over his shoulder, and he groaned when he realised it was a very
old Guinness commercial he did when he was much younger. “Oh Charles, come on--”

“But you look so cute here!” Charles argued, pushing away Erik’s hand as he tried to tap the ‘Close’
button on the window. “I used to love watching this over and over again.”

Erik’s eyebrows jumped up. “Really?” Erik tilted his head at Charles, who suddenly looked a little
wide-eyed and panicked, as though he had made a disastrous slip of the tongue. “But this came out a
long time ago.”

“Is that so?” Charles’ feigned surprise didn’t fool Erik one bit. “I had no idea. Anyway, let’s watch
the next--”

It suddenly dawned on Erik why Charles was so nervous. “Liebling, do you mean to tell me that
you’ve had a thing for me long before we met?” he asked slowly.

Charles was now biting his lip, his cheeks flushing an endearing pink. “Uh, maybe just a little
 crush?” he offered, avoiding Erik’s gaze.

Erik was both very amused and touched, wondering if he could tease an answer out of Charles.
Casting a quick sideways glance at the driver, who seemed to be busy stabbing at buttons on the GPS navigator, Erik turned his attention back to Charles, who was worrying that luscious red bottom lip with his teeth. “Just a little crush?” Erik murmured, nuzzling against the warm, pink shell of Charles’ ear. He smiled when he heard Charles’ sharp intake of breath.

“Oh, [58x772]Okay fine,” Charles hissed out, eyes fluttering shut as he nuzzled back against Erik, who was greedily taking in the contrast of Charles’ dark lashes against his smooth, pale skin.

“Maybe I might have been in love [58x772]with you for a long time—”

“Wait, wait, what was that?” Erik asked, not quite sure if he heard correctly. “A long time? Really?”

Charles only nodded, and Erik brushed a thumb over his cheekbone before leaning in, kissing him soundly. He could feel Charles’ fingers curling around his wrist, rubbing against his pulse point and drawing him closer. As tempted as Erik was, he kept the kiss chaste, no matter how sweet the taste of Charles’ mouth. They were in midtown traffic, after all, and their driver wasn’t blind.

“You should have told me earlier,” Erik said quietly, but his smile was so huge that his cheek muscles were starting to hurt. His fingers curled around Charles’, who was grinning just as broadly.

“You never fail to surprise me,” he said fondly, leaning in for another kiss which Charles gladly gave him.

“We’re here, Mr. [58x764]Lehnsherr and Mr. Xavier,” the driver said, sounding a little exasperated, although Erik didn’t know if it was from battling the traffic or watching them make out in the back seat. Still, a few kisses were very tame, compared to the wild night they had in their limo after their Halloween party.

Erik just stared at him, his heart feeling a few sizes too big for his chest. “You never fail to surprise me,” he said fondly, leaning in for another kiss which Charles gladly gave him.

“I know New York has always been crowded, but that was rather chaotic,” Charles said, blinking a little. Even the lobby was packed with New Year’s revellers on their way out to Times Square, and there were some people in glittery costumes whom Erik suspected were performers for tonight’s countdown.

“It was, Liebling. Aren’t you glad we have our own private party tonight, after seeing the madness outside?” Erik grinned down at Charles, who chuckled as he slid his arm around Erik’s waist.

It was a good thing that the trappings of fame allowed them to skip the long check-in lines, and the
concierge promised that he would take care of everything else for them. Thanking the staff, Charles happily dragged Erik over to the elevator, pressing the button and checking his watch. “I can’t wait for a shower, I always need one after long flights,” he said with a sigh, rotating his shoulders.

“We should save water and take one together,” Erik said in mock seriousness as he massaged Charles’ shoulders, feeling them shake with laughter under his grip. Chuckling, Charles was about to reach up for a kiss when they heard a very familiar voice behind them.

“Charles? Erik?”

Charles’ eyes lit up with surprise as he stared over Erik’s shoulder. “Ryan!” As Erik turned, he wasn’t exactly surprised to see that the Ryan in question was Ryan Seacrest; they were in Times Square on New Year’s eve, after all, and this was Ryan’s territory. He walked over, still in casual clothes and jeans, although his hair was as impeccable as always. Erik guessed that he was probably on his way to rehearsal.

“Hey guys, you came out for New Year’s Eve?” Ryan unwittingly asked, before he spotted Erik’s wince. “Whoops, poor choice of words, huh?”

Charles was laughing. “We came out much earlier before that, Ryan,” he said with a grin. “I’m sure you covered it on E! News in excruciating detail.”

Ryan rolled his eyes. “Okay, fine, you’re right. So was I right in guessing that your honeymoon will be in Barbados? Or was Giuliana right when she guessed Italy?”

Before Erik could reply, Charles was already looking speculative. “Italy does sound enticing. I mean, we just came back from Europe and had a fantastic time there, so maybe we’ll do a European road trip of sorts.” He turned to look at Erik. “What do you think?”

Erik was far too happy to answer, just staring at Charles in delight. So he was open to marriage, then. “As you wish,” Erik managed to say, grinning from ear to ear. “If you’re happy, I’m happy.”

“Whoa, whoa.” Ryan was laughing as he held his hands up in surrender. “Downey warned me during the ‘Sherlock Holmes’ press tour that you guys were sappy, but I thought he was just pulling my leg.”

“What exactly did he say?” Erik asked as Charles wrapped his arms around him, but Ryan held up a hand to pause him, whipping out his phone.

“Hello? Yes, yup...I’m in the lobby. I’ll be right there.” Ryan grimaced apologetically. “Okay guys, I got to run, but I’ll see you later at the countdown? You’re welcome backstage anytime.”

“We’ll see, we’re probably just having a private party,” Charles replied, resting his head on Erik’s chest. “But thank you for the offer, Ryan.”

“Hey, no problem. How about a group photo?” Ryan held up his phone. “Let’s give the denizens of Twitter a nice send-off for 2011.”

“Sounds good,” Charles said, and they posed for a photo in front of the elevator that a passing hotel staff helped them take.

“Thanks guys, Happy New Year!” Ryan waved cheerfully to them before he had to run off, and Erik shook his head in amusement.

“An ominous start for our party tonight,” Charles said mysteriously, while Erik laughed and
squeezed him closer, the two of them heading into the elevator together as Erik pressed the button for the penthouse suite.

The party was already well under way when Erik entered the function room with a sated and freshly showered Charles on his arm. It was an intimate affair, with only their close friends in attendance. Erik had never been one to socialise much, and having this many new faces in his life still took a little getting used to, but people seemed naturally drawn to Charles - not that he could blame them - and Charles’ friends automatically became his by extension. Erik grabbed a couple of hors d’oeuvres
from a passing server, feeding a beef *canapé* to Charles as they made their way through the room.

“*Mon ami!*” Erik turned when he heard the unmistakable voice, just in time to see Remy sashaying over to them, a glass of champagne in his hand. He had to admit that he had missed the pretty-boy moron, just a little bit.

“What do you want, Remy?” Erik asked, unable to stop the corner of his lip from twitching up into a half-smile.

“*Non*, I am not here to talk to you,” Remy replied, laughing when Erik rolled his eyes, “I am here to see how Charles is doing. Is your back all better, *cher*?”

Charles grinned brightly beside him, releasing Erik’s arm to give Remy a warm hug, “I am doing very well, thank you for asking. How was home?”

“Ah, I had too much *galette des Rois*. Does it show?” Remy took a step back, twirling with a flourish so Charles could inspect him while Erik rolled his eyes heavenward yet again.

“Nonsense, you look as dashing as ever,” Charles replied, repositioning himself under Erik’s arm and sliding his own around Erik’s waist.

Remy grinned, straightening his dinner jacket, “Charles always knows the nice thing to say.” He paused, spreading out his arms with flair, “I must make sure I look my best. American girls are very beautiful, *oui*? I have been in New York only since yesterday and already I have seen more beautiful girls than all week back home in Toulouse. And they are also very friendly.”

“You have your accent to thank for that. Just make sure you don’t chase so many skirts that you forget to collect my pants from the dry cleaners,” Erik quipped, smiling when it earned him a playful swat on the chest from Charles.

Charles lifted his head then, something over Remy’s shoulder having caught his eye, “Speaking of beautiful women... Hello, Emma. You look stunning this evening, I love your makeup.”

Emma floated over, all poise and elegance in her shimmering white gown and frosted eye shadow.

“Thank you, Charles. It’s to go with the lovely pair of snowflake earrings you and Erik bought me. I’m assuming you picked it, since Erik is terrible at choosing jewellery. I must say, I never thought the day would come when Erik would get me diamonds from Van Cleef & Arpels.”

“I beg your pardon? What’s that supposed to mean?” Erik asked, unsure if he should feel insulted, though unfortunately what she had said was in fact true. He found himself calming down instantly when Charles started rubbing soothing circles down his back, all but forgetting everything when Charles smiled into the soft kiss he placed at the back of his ear.

“Mademoiselle Frost, it is such a pleasure to finally meet you,” Remy cut in before she could answer the question, bowing as he kissed the back of Emma’s hand.

Erik tried to hold back a laugh when Emma flicked her wrist and grabbed Remy by the jaw, and he ended up letting out a snort instead. It seemed not even the great sweet-talking Remy LeBeau could break through Emma’s defences when they were up. Emma tilted Remy’s face from side to side before finally releasing it, “Hmm... You look better than in the pictures.”

Erik was starting to wonder if she really had just picked Remy out of a modelling catalogue. Remy, to his credit, remained unperturbed, simply holding out his hand and bowing again charmingly, “Shall we go somewhere more private? I will tell you all about the terrible things Erik did while I was babysitting him.”
Emma laughed at that, much to Erik’s surprise. Her smile was dazzling as she took Remy’s hand, “Sugar, I think I like you already.”

Erik blinked as he watched Emma and Remy make their way over to the couches, feeling like he had been royally had. Charles cuddled up to him then, pliant and affectionate as he wrapped his arms around Erik’s neck. “Don’t mind them, we could always get back at them later,” Charles raised an eyebrow and smiled, and Erik bent down to kiss him, soft and sweet.

“Wow, I don’t see you for almost two weeks and it’s like the face-sucking somehow got even worse. I should never have sent you guys that video.” Erik opened his eyes to find Raven staring at them, grinning. Hank was by her side and waved tentatively at him, which Erik acknowledged with a nod.

“Raven, my dear,” Charles greeted as he went over and kissed her cheek.

She hugged him tightly in return, “How was the honeymoon?”

“Wha- ...what?” Charles sputtered as he stepped back. “I have no idea what you’re talking about.” He wiggled his eyebrows when he noticed her arm hooking around Hank’s, looking back and forth between the two of them and grinning expectantly, “But more importantly, is there something you’d like to tell me?”

Raven burst out laughing, shoving Charles lightly, “What the hell, Charles? Did you think you were hosting ‘The Bachelor’? And for your information, Hank and I had already gotten together on our own, without any of your silly meddling.”

Poor Charles’ jaw dropped at that and Erik slid over to pull him to his side, kissing the shell of Charles’ ear as he remembered how many phone calls they had made between the two of them to arrange everything. Charles slumped against him and groaned, “All my grand romantic gestures down the drain.”

“Oh don’t be such a drama queen,” Raven teased as she came over and kissed Charles’ cheek, “Thank you, anyway.” Raven stepped to the side, tugging Hank along, “I’m starving, so Hank and I are going to head over there and get some food.”

“All right, we’ll catch up with you later,” Charles replied, waving them off. He grabbed Erik’s hand when they’d gone, leading the way to the bar, “Come on, Erik. I think the both of us need a drink.”

* * * * *

If there was one thing Charles loved almost as fervently as he loved Erik, it was champagne. He had tried them all, savouring each glass like a connoisseur, but in the end he would always, always be partial to an elegant bottle of Dom soaking in a bucket of ice. Bless Erik, who generously kept the Dom coming in an endless stream, and Charles was quite sure he was solely responsible for at least two of the empty bottles that had been carried out.

At one point, he felt someone catching him by the waist, warm breath huffing against his ear.

“Enjoying yourself, I see.”

Charles smiled blissfully, nuzzling against the familiar crook of Erik’s neck. “I just want to ring in 2012 in style,” he murmured, wrapping his arms around Erik’s narrow waist. “2011 has been good to me, so I’d like to see it go out with a bang.”

“2011 has been good to us,” Erik admitted. "We found love in a hopeless place..."

Charles chuckled against his throat. “I remember that song! From the night we first got together, at
that club. With Perez,” he clarified.

“Of course,” Erik said with a smirk. “And love, we’ve been together since the minute we shook hands. We just didn’t know it yet.”

Charles grinned, his tongue sliding out to lick at the pulse point on Erik’s neck, feeling it jump under his ministrations. “You’re soooo good to me, Erik.”

“Now now, Charles, save some Dom for the rest of New York,” Raven cheerfully shouted over the music, tapping her empty glass. “Really, you’re worse than a camel.”

Erik was blinking blearily at her, and Charles realised that he must be quite tipsy as well if he didn’t have a ready comeback for her. “Charles likes champagne,” he finally said, sounding indignant. “And I like Charles.”

They were both not prepared for the loud exasperated chorus of “WE KNOW!” from the people around them, and it just sent Charles into a further fit of giggles. He really shouldn’t be laughing this hard, but he felt nice and light-headed, and Erik was firmly supporting him, preventing him from faceplanting on the floor. What a perfect New Year’s, really.

“Mon Dieu,” he heard Remy’s amused voice saying from somewhere behind him. “Do I need to tag you two out? Should I get coffee? A lifetime membership to AA?”

“Get lost,” Erik said serenely. “We’re allowed to get sloshed, it’s New Year’s.”

“Oui, and I don’t want to spend New Year’s searching for a new liver,” Remy said, guiding both of them to the couch. Charles slumped on top of Erik, who felt nice and warm, if a little bony. “Wait while I get coffee--”

“Kahlúa!” Charles said with a cheer, while Erik kissed his cheek. “I love Kahlúa!”

“No, I mean ‘coffee’,” Remy said sternly, before holding up a finger. “I will be right back.”

While waiting for the Kahlúa, Charles started making out with Erik on the couch, clutching fistfuls of his shirt, too drunk to take it off properly. Erik tasted like Dom and mint and Erik, and they were only a few seconds away from dry-humping on the couch when Charles felt a cool hand on his shoulder, the aroma of coffee wafting to his nostrils. “Charles, come on, drink this,” he heard Remy say gently.

Charles reluctantly dragged his mouth away from Erik’s, who made a soft sound of protest. Stroking Erik’s hair back in consolation, Charles turned and blinked dazedly at a hazy figure he assumed was Remy, parting his lips when he felt the press of hot ceramic against his mouth. The coffee was sharp and bitter, making him recoil with a shudder as he struggled to swallow it. “Ugh, that’s terrible.”

He could hear Remy laugh. “It’s doing its job of sobering you up, at least.”

“Hmph.” But Charles obediently guzzled the rest of the disgusting coffee, because it really was helping him think straight (metaphorically speaking, of course). He smacked his lips when he was done, and he felt Remy taking away the cup. “More?”

“Hang on, Charles, I’ll go get some more,” Remy told him gently, easing the cup out of his grip. Charles watched him go, then turned back to Erik who was watching him with a very fond and lazy smile. Now his hand was cupping Charles’ cheek, his thumb brushing against Charles’ lips.

“We shouldn’t have drunk all that Dom,” Charles said with a slight slur, leaning into Erik’s touch.
“Why did we drink all that Dom, Erik?”

“You like champagne,” Erik reminded him, his smile growing. “In fact, earlier you announced that you wish Moët made champagne-flavoured lube so you could combine your two favourite things.”

Charles collapsed in laughter against Erik’s chest, the two of them giggling like stoned teenagers. Although the coffee did help to sober him up a little, Erik’s chuckles were very infectious. Charles grabbed his wrists, linking them around his waist so that Erik was holding him tightly again. “Mmmm, my human seatbelt.”

Erik’s laughter was now subsiding, and he kissed Charles sloppily on the mouth. “I’m your human everything,” he said, sounding amused. “Especially your human sex toy.”

“Merde!” Remy complained as he appeared at their booth again, this time with two cups of coffee. “I was hoping the sex talk would have stopped by the time I got back, but non! Please give a man a break, s’il vous plaît?”

“I’m sorry,” Charles said, not at all contrite. He took the second cup of coffee while Remy passed the other one to Erik. The second cup wasn’t as effective as the first, but at least it made Charles thirsty for more Dom. He got up off Erik’s lap, squeezing his hand when Erik made a soft murmur of protest. “Remy, I’m sober enough for more champagne now.”

Remy laughed, taking away the cup from him. Erik was still guzzling his own. “Non, you need to sit down and sober up.”

Charles did what he instinctively resorted to whenever Erik was withholding something from him: he tilted his head at Remy, lips pursing as he stepped closer. “Just one more?” he said, placing a hand on Remy’s chest like he would with Erik. He was really only half-joking, but when he saw how wide and alarmed Remy’s eyes were, he decided to keep going with the joke.

“Come on, Charles, sit down.” Remy was casting a nervous glance at Erik, who must have been glaring daggers at him. Sure enough, when Charles turned to take a peek, Erik was staring very intently at an increasingly uncomfortable Remy. However, when Remy wasn’t looking, Erik winked at Charles.

Oh. This should be interesting. Charles hid his smile before turning back to Remy, making a show of blinking drunkenly.

“Oh Remy, you don’t have to be so uptight,” Charles drawled, running a hand over the buttons of Remy’s shirt. “Erik doesn’t mind if I have fun elsewhere from time to time. And you look like you’d be a lot of fun.”

“Jesus.” Remy was now outright panicking, trying to get Charles’ hands off him while he looked around desperately for help. “Charles, mon cher, while I am very flattered, I’m sure that Erik--”

“Oh, I don’t mind,” Erik interrupted, a corner of his lips lifting up in a handsome smirk. “I think you and Charles would be beautiful to watch together.”

Charles turned back to Remy with a broad smile. “See? Erik doesn’t mind. He’s probably been thinking about it since you were hired.”

There was a snort from Erik’s direction, but when Charles glanced at him, Erik was keeping a perfectly innocent expression. Poor Remy, however, was flustered and babbling. This was the most unsettled Charles had ever seen the poor chap. Usually, Remy was always so calm and cool, always in control. A large part of Charles pitied him and wanted to give up the ghost, but an even larger part
- the drunk part - wanted to have fun with this, especially when Erik was playing along.

“I have to go,” Remy said, trying to take Charles’ hands off his chest. “Uh, Alex is waving to me.”

“Don’t be silly, he’s with Darwin,” Erik said, stretching back against the couch. Even now, Charles’ mouth watered as he ogled Erik’s long, lithe body, completely forgetting about Remy until Erik said, “Come on Remy, take off your shirt and kiss Charles.”

Remy made a sound like a squeak, shaking his head fervently. Charles looked away so Remy couldn’t see he was desperately trying not to laugh, and judging from the way Erik’s lips were pursed in amusement, so was he. “Uh, I, uh, I think--”

“You know what?” Charles whispered in his ear. “I’ll let you off the hook if you go and get us another bottle of Dom.”

Remy didn’t even question it; he scampered off quickly, leaving Charles to collapse in laughter on Erik’s lap, both of them laughing until their stomachs were weak. “My God, Erik, we’re horrible people,” Charles gasped out, wiping the tears of laughter from his eyes. Erik’s body was still shaking with mirth, holding Charles tight against him.

“How do I get a feeling I’ll be receiving his resignation letter tomorrow?” Erik mumbled, which made Charles chuckle all over again.

“Would you really have wanted to watch me and Remy make out?” Charles asked innocently, although he got his answer when he felt Erik’s arms tighten around him possessively.

“Even though you were acting just now, it was hard enough watching that,” Erik said, his smile just this side of tipsy. “So what do you think my answer is?”

Charles kissed him soundly, twining his tongue around Erik’s as his hand slipped down, caressing the inside of Erik’s thigh. “I’m sorry it was hard for you.”

“You’re a very devious man.” Erik chuckled against Charles’ mouth, his thumb rubbing gently across Charles’ jawline. “I can’t wait to spend all of New Year’s day with you in bed.”

Charles hummed in agreement. “That sounds like the best plan ever. Not just for New Year’s Day, but for the rest of the year as well.”

“That sounds like the most brilliant idea I’ve ever heard, Liebling.”

They were still kissing when Charles heard a loud ‘clunk’ on the table, and he turned in time to see Remy trying to sneak away after leaving a fresh bottle of Dom on their table. “Wait, Remy, come here,” Charles called out, trying not to laugh when Remy looked absolutely petrified at the prospect.

“If you don’t do as Charles says, I’m going to tell every girl you hit on in the future how tiny your peen is,” Erik threatened, and that was when Remy finally sidled over by the barest of inches with a sigh.

“Remy, I apologise, my friend. We were just messing around with you,” Charles said, reaching out for Erik’s shoulder and almost poking him in the eye instead. “Oops, sorry. But yes, Erik and I were just teasing you. We didn’t mean to scare you.”

“I sure did,” Erik grumbled, but let out an “oof” when Charles elbowed him, his aim much better this time.
“Anyway,” Charles continued, shooting Erik a pointed look, “maybe you could get us more coffee and take away the bottle of Dom so Erik and I aren’t faceplanted on the floor by midnight?”

Looking extremely relieved, Remy nodded happily as he nicked the bottle of Dom off their table again. “Coffee and aspirin coming right up,” he announced, before toeing his way over to the bathroom to forage for the medicine cabinet.

“Good idea,” Erik said, blinking a little blearily at him. “I do want to be sober for the countdown.”

“Me too.” Charles smiled at him, raking his fingers through Erik’s soft, fine hair. “It’s officially your job to keep me off the sauce till midnight.”

Erik shot him a crooked grin. “I’m sure I can think of something else to keep your mouth occupied, so you can’t drink,” he whispered against Charles’ lips, before kissing him soundly.

* * * * *

“Erik, look. It’s Lady Gaga!” Charles tugged on Erik’s arm as he pointed at the huge TV that was mounted on the wall. Lady Gaga was wearing a sparkling silver hat that doubled as a mask with a large circular design on the front that looked very similar to the giant ball suspended over Times Square, her hair done up in curls and dressed in a skin-tight silver outfit with diamante accents. By all accounts it seemed very tame, according to her usual standards.

Erik tilted his head and smirked. “How can you tell it’s her? You can’t even see her face.”

They were standing against the full glass windows that were facing the New York Times Building that the ball was being dropped from, and Charles turned back towards Erik, draping his arms over his neck. “You never did tell me how you managed to get her for Halloween.”

Erik slid his hands around Charles’ waist and onto the curve of his hips, hooking his thumbs over the waistline of his pants. “She owed me one after borrowing my helmet from ‘Cyborg Cop’ for one of her showcases and returning it all covered in glitter.”

Charles laughed, shifting his hands to hold Erik’s shoulders as he whispered into his ear, “I’m sure you wore it better.”

They were distracted by an announcement from the TV, watching as Lady Gaga and Mayor Bloomberg pressed down on the lighted miniature of the Times Square ball together and the countdown for the final 60 seconds of 2011 began on the billboard below the actual illuminated structure while it descended, accompanied by small bursts of pyrotechnics in an array of colours.

Charles turned his gaze back to Erik and wrapped his hands around the nape of Erik’s neck, the ticking of each passing second booming from the speakers and echoing in his ears. He could feel the cool metal of his watch pressed against the underside of his wrist, trapped between him and the heated skin of Erik’s throat. He liked to think that he was carrying a piece of Erik with him always, the steady rhythm of the second hand as constant as the love Charles felt for him. Charles had never really fixated on the passage of time, seasons could come and go and he would barely bat an eye, yet he could remember moments with Erik in the past months better than he could entire years. He was struck then with the realisation, while watching the last seconds of the year flash across the billboards all over Times Square, that time travels far too fast, and had to fight back the sudden inexplicable urge to cling on to however long they had left. Who knew how much time they had here, and all it really takes is just one blink to miss the moment that could have changed everything. And yet, regardless of the uncertainty the future held, the one thing he knew for sure was that Erik would eternally define the person he was.
Charles shifted closer, locking eyes with him as he spoke, “Erik, before we run out of time on the clock, I want you to know that I will always be yours.”

Something softened in Erik’s eyes, his gaze boring into Charles as he palmed the side of Charles’ face, his thumb brushing against the apple of Charles’ cheek. He seemed too touched to speak, but that was all right. Charles had become an expert in reading the minutest change of expression on Erik’s face, and it was easy to communicate without words as well. “Me too,” Erik said, his voice a little hoarse, his eyes half-lidded. “Sorry, I’m just at a loss for words. I don’t know how to tell you that you’re everything to me. Forever doesn’t feel like enough time.”

Charles canted his head, leaning into Erik’s tender touch. “Then we’ll make every second count,” he murmured, only just barely aware of the millions of people in the streets below them, all counting down the end of the year.

“Ten!”

They were interrupted when the room began shouting out loud along with the timer, and Charles took a cursory glance around with Erik still wrapped up in his arms while the rest continued on with the countdown, grinning when he spotted Raven and Hank holding hands nearby. They all had so much to be thankful for this year, and if Charles could wish for anything at all, it would be for everyone he loved to feel as deliriously happy as he did right now. He looked out the window, the short sparks of fireworks growing more intense with each passing second. Charles sensed it then, that telltale clench in his chest whenever Erik entered the room, and turned his gaze back up to find that Erik was staring at him instead of the dazzling display of pyrotechnics just beyond the glass, exactly like how it was on that stage at Halloween. *He’s really always been doing this,* Charles realised in dismay, wondering how he had missed it all this time.

Charles smiled softly, thinking the lights from the explosions outside looked more beautiful reflected in Erik’s eyes, his own feeling a little too moist. He stroked the back of Erik’s neck with his thumb before speaking, barely above a whisper, “Four.”

“Three,” Erik replied as he leaned in, until their foreheads were almost touching.

The rest of the world faded away then, when all he could see was Erik, and all he could feel was the warm press of Erik’s body against his, every line and curve fitting perfectly against each other. He breathed out, inches from Erik’s lips, “Two.”

Erik closed in, holding him a little tighter, their lips just brushing together lightly, “One.”

Charles parted his lips, the tip of his tongue sliding into Erik’s mouth and meeting his, licking at it tenderly until Erik took over the kiss. Charles let out a soft moan as Erik thrust his tongue into him, allowing himself to be claimed and kissing back with all the love he felt for Erik, until they were both breathless and the cheers from the rest of the room had long quietened down, replaced by the sound of baritone horns playing the first bars of ‘Auld Lang Syne’.

“Happy New Year, darling.”

Notes:
1. The title of this chapter is a quote from ‘Love Actually’.
2. Latkes are a Jewish potato pancake, and they are typically eaten during Hanukkah.
3. The scene where Raven finds all the videos of herself is based on this scene in ‘Love Actually’.
4. On the first night of Hanukkah, the menorah is lit. The entire process is detailed here.
5. This is the watch that Erik gave Charles.
6. Hohenschwangau is the village where the castle that Erik and Charles are visiting is located, and this is the hotel they stayed at: Villa Jägerhaus. Room 62 is in the attic and has views of both Hohenschwangau Castle and Neuschwanstein Castle.
7. The restaurant beside the castle is called Schlossrestaurant Neuschwanstein and the mulled wine that Erik and Charles drink is called Glühwein.
8. This is the interior of the Neuschwanstein Castle and the music that plays when they kiss is from the Wagner opera 'Tristan und Isolde'.
9. 'Facetime' is an app on the iPad that you can use for face-to-face video calls.
10. The restaurant that Sean and Moira dine in is 'Madeo', one of the top restaurants in LA.
11. “It’s like what Rita Hayworth used to say, ‘They go to bed with Gilda; they wake up with me.’” - the quote that Moira references regarding Rita Hayworth is from ‘Notting Hill’ and the Shakespearean quote that Sean references is from the play ‘As You Like It’.
12. Raven being able to fly a plane is a reference to how Mystique is seen piloting a helicopter in the X-Men movies. The place they visit, Big Sur, is a beautiful place on the Californian coast between LA and San Francisco.
13. Darwin and Alex sharing a cab is a reference to Darwin’s profession in the XMFC movie. St. Mark’s is a street in the East Village, and Union Square is also in Manhattan, not too far away.
14. The beer house that Erik and Charles visit when they are back in Munich is Hofbräuhaus and this is an example of the HUGE beer pints and pretzels they serve.
15. You can watch a video of the Rathaus-Glockenspiel here.
16. The pop song that the polka band plays is 'Your Song', Charles’ favourite Elton John song.
17. The Guinness commercial that a younger Erik starred in is based on the real Guinness ad that Michael Fassbender did some time ago.
18. The video of Lady Gaga and New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg counting down at Times Square and watching the ball drop is here.
Chapter Summary

Charles helps Erik to harness his abilities and find the point between rage and serenity, and the movie culminates in a scene that cuts a little too close to the bone for Erik. After a boisterous wrap party, Charles and Erik decide they have earned a little downtime, and Charles sweeps Erik off to his own little slice of hidden paradise.

Chapter Notes

We’re sorry this chapter took a month, real-life got us all. We thank everyone who has been supportive from the start, especially the amazingly talented xsilverdreamsx who made the wonderful, wonderful JustJared manip below.

WARNING: There’s a major movie character death in this chapter.

Soundtrack: James Morrison - ‘I Won’t Let You Go’

Throughout his career so far, Charles had rarely come across difficult scenes that greatly challenged his abilities as an actor. Romantic comedies didn’t tend to veer into the territory of serious drama, except for that one scene where the father of Moira’s character in ‘The Blind Date’ had died, and Charles’ character had to fly out to New York to comfort her. That had been quite a taxing scene to shoot, and Charles did feel rather emotionally wrought in its aftermath, thinking about his own father and their distant, tepid relationship.

So now he completely understood why Erik was having problems with this major upcoming scene where Michael was grappling with the fear of losing James just like he had lost his previous partner. Charles studied Erik quietly, sipping his scotch and watching the faint furrow of Erik’s brow, the way his lips moved silently as he practised his lines. They were in the hotel room, an hour away from meeting Raven and Hank for dinner, and Erik had wanted to look over the scene again. It was amazing, how focused and dedicated Erik could be, reading the script over and over until it was imprinted in his brain. Charles had a more fluid approach to this, but then again different things worked for different people.

“Everything all right?” Charles put down his scotch and sat on the bed, resting his chin on Erik’s shoulder and peering at the script on Erik’s lap. All of Erik’s lines were neatly highlighted, and he had studiously scribbled notes in the margins. Erik turned to press a kiss to Charles’ hair, then sighed deeply.

“I just can’t get the hang of this scene,” he said, sounding both tired and perplexed. “Bryan keeps saying I’m so wooden in it when I’m supposed to be emotionally conflicted.”

“What are you having a problem with exactly?” Charles said gently, combing through Erik’s hair
with his fingers and thinking that he needed a haircut.

“T’m not sure.” Erik’s frown deepened. “I think I just can’t seem to make myself convincing. I can’t quite get fully immersed in the scene.”

Charles thought for a while, letting a hand rub at the nape of Erik’s neck in an effort to soothe him. It seemed to work, as Erik’s features relaxed and he burrowed against Charles like a cat, the tension in Erik's shoulders melting away. "Let's go through our lines together, and maybe we can see where you think you’re having trouble," Charles suggested.

"All right." Erik scooted over to make space for Charles to sit beside him, so they could both share the script. Charles frowned down at the parts which Erik had circled and underlined repeatedly. This was a difficult scene for both their characters, so it was also a good chance for Charles to get in a read-through.

"Where do you want to start?" Charles asked, shifting his position so he was nestled against Erik, who instinctively wrapped an arm around his waist.

"How about here?" Erik pointed at somewhere halfway down the scene, and Charles nodded, closing his eyes as he immersed himself in James' mindset. When he spoke, it was in the flat and Americanised tones of the accent he used for James.

**JAMES:** I know what you're thinking, Michael. You're thinking about your old partner.

When Erik looked up at him, the set of his jaw was tight and his voice sounded strained, somewhat off.

**MICHAEL:** Today is the six-month anniversary of his death.

**JAMES:** Oh Michael, I'm so sorry. [Here, Charles placed his hand on top of Erik's, squeezing it with feeling.] Were the two of you...close?

**MICHAEL:** We were great buddies. Nothing like...[Erik gestured between himself and Charles, who gave him a small smile.] But we were still very close. Once when I was on assignment overseas, he looked after my mother for a month. None of my other friends came to even see her.

**JAMES:** He was a wonderful man. And now you're bringing his killer to justice.

**MICHAEL:** That's precisely it, James. What if Cobb gets away scot-free? Or even worse, what if I lose...

Here, Erik turned to stare at Charles, but his eyes were vacant and distracted, even a little glassy. Suddenly, Charles had an idea why Erik was having trouble with the scene, and why Bryan kept saying he was so 'wooden'.

Charles broke character here. "Erik, I think I know what's wrong."

Erik’s chest deflated as he let out a sigh of relief. "Please, tell me."

"You're shutting your emotions away because this is hitting too close to home for you, isn't it?" Charles kept his tone gentle and sympathetic. Erik opened his mouth as if to say something, then closed it, looking away. He didn't say anything for a long time.

"I can't go through that again." Erik's voice had an odd tremor. "Seeing you in the hospital like that...losing you is not an option, Charles."
Charles took in a deep breath, then exhaled slowly. “I’m sorry Erik, I know it’s difficult, but if you really want to get into it, you have to immerse yourself in everything you’re feeling now and not lock it away.”

Erik’s nostrils flared as his eyebrows drew together, clearly unhappy. “You mean the rage I felt at Hank, seeing you fall off that pier? You want me to channel that?”

Charles studied him for a long moment, taking Erik’s hand between his and rubbing it. “You know, I believe true focus lies between rage and serenity,” he said thoughtfully. “Do you mind if I...” he trailed off, eyebrows raised at Erik for permission.

Erik shook his head a little hesitantly, probably wondering what Charles was up to. Charles took his time, palming Erik’s cheek and searching his eyes. Erik seemed a little uncertain, but his ever-present trust in Charles made him stay still. Smiling, Charles leaned up to press a chaste, lingering kiss on Erik’s lips. He could feel the clench of Erik’s jaw loosening, melting into Charles’ light touch. Unlike their other kisses, which either one or both of them would try to deepen or prolong, this felt different, pure. Charles shut his eyes, putting everything he felt for Erik into the soft press of his lips, hoping Erik could sense it somehow.

When Charles finally pulled away, Erik was blinking slowly, as though coming out of a daze. “What did you just do to me?” he whispered.

For some reason, Charles found it difficult to speak, but he cleared his throat and brushed Erik’s hair back. “How do you feel now?”

Erik took a shaky breath, but his smile was wider this time, reaching his eyes. “At peace.”

Something in Charles’ chest did a somersault of joy. “There’s so much more to you than you know. You’re a good actor, Erik,” he said softly, glad that Erik nodded instead of flinching as he always did with compliments. “Trust me, I’ve watched all your movies at least twice, I know. I saw the anguish in your eyes in that movie where your daughter was kidnapped. All I wanted to do was reach into the screen and give you a hug.”

Erik let out a subdued huff of laughter. “I’m glad that was convincing for you, at least.” His smile was slowly fading. “For that scene, I kept imagining what would have happened if someone took my parents from me.” The flash of anger returned to Erik’s now reddened eyes. “The pain was almost too much.”

Charles nodded understandingly. “Remember the serenity,” he said quietly, leaning up to kiss Erik again. “If you need to, think of me.”

Erik blinked, ignoring the tear that was tracking down his cheek. “I am always thinking of you.”

Charles tried to swallow around the lump in his throat, caressing Erik’s cheek as his thumb brushed away the moisture. “So come on, let’s try again,” he managed to say, and Erik nodded against his hand. They both looked down at the script again, and it didn’t escape Charles’ notice that Erik’s hands were trembling slightly. He picked up from where they had left off.

MICHAEL: That's precisely it, James. What if Cobb gets away scot-free? Or even worse, what if I lose you? I can’t keep losing the important people in my life.

The words flowed so much smoother this time, and Erik’s earlier hesitance was gone. Charles could see the distress in Erik’s eyes and the tight lines around his mouth, and for a second Charles felt like they really were in the Sixties, fighting for social justice and civil rights, and falling for the one
JAMES: You won’t lose me. I will not leave your side.

The script now called for an emotional kiss, but neither Erik nor Charles had to fake anything about this, Erik dropping the script onto the floor as he palmed Charles’ face, claiming Charles’ mouth before Charles tugged Erik down onto the bed for a scene that was most definitely not part of the script.

Still, it wasn’t as if Erik was complaining.

* * * * *

The mood on the set today was a lot more sombre than most days, and Charles had a pretty good idea why. Bryan was sitting with him and Erik in a little circle, hands steepled in front of his chin as all three of them frowned down at the script. They were shooting the pivotal Big Emotional Scene today, the one that Erik had dubbed the ‘Rage and Serenity’ scene. After lots of rehearsal (followed by just as many rewards) Charles was quite confident that Erik would nail the scene. However, the doubt on Bryan’s face was still there as he quietly observed Erik.

“Don’t forget, this is the breaking point for Michael,” Bryan reminded Erik, who was running his hands through his hair and leaving it standing up in little tufts. Charles absently smoothed them down again.

“I know, I know,” Erik said gruffly, eyeing Bryan. “I can do this, okay? Charles has been helping me.”

The frown on Bryan’s face cleared. “Okay, good. I’ll take it that we’re ready to do this?” he asked as he got up, backing towards the director’s chair.

Erik let out a long breath, then nodded. Charles smiled at him, rubbing up and down his back in long, slow strokes. The corner of Erik’s mouth lifted in the tiniest smile, right before he leaned in and gave Charles a slow kiss. “Wish me luck,” he whispered.

Charles cradled Erik’s head in his hands. “Remember, the point between rage and serenity,” he said quietly to Erik, who nodded before both of them stood up, walking over to the hotel room set to take their places. Bryan curled up in his chair, discussing the close-up camera angle with Hank and the DP. Charles stayed still as Angel swanned over and ran her brush over his face, dabbing powder in the right places. She hesitated with the lip balm though, her mouth pursed.

“Nah, I don’t think you’ll ever need lip balm, hon,” she said with a wink, making Charles laugh.

“It doesn’t matter, because Erik will kiss it off in a short while,” he retorted as Angel rolled her heavily made-up eyes. He watched as she ran her brush over Erik’s face as well, but the distant look in his eyes gave Charles the impression that Erik was already trying to transit into Michael’s headspace. Charles remained quiet, reaching over to squeeze Erik’s knee in support.

“Are we good?” The DP called out to them, and Erik nodded. Charles raised his hand in a thumbs-up gesture, and when the DP saw this, he nodded back and yelled, “Set!”

“Roll sound!” Bryan instructed, and Charles heard the sound mixer’s distant reply of ‘Rolling!’

“Roll camera!” was next, and Hank squinted through the lens before yelling out, “Speeding!”

The slate operator stepped forward and announced the scene number, followed by the loud ‘clack’ of
the clapper board.

“Action!” Bryan called out, watching the scene keenly.

Charles closed his eyes, getting under James’ skin and recalling his fears, his hopes and dreams. When he opened them again, Erik was as tense as a taut guitar string, tension lines bracketing both sides of his mouth. Charles rested a tentative hand on top of Erik’s, keeping his voice low. “I know what you’re thinking, Michael. You're thinking about your old partner.”

The rest of the scene went exactly as they had rehearsed, but Erik was so amazingly convincing, his eyes welling up at one point, and Charles was so caught up in the scene that he didn’t even realise it was the end of the take until Erik kissed him soundly, like the script called for, before Bryan yelled, “Cut!” Blinking into the kiss, Charles’ eyes fluttered open in a daze as the crew started applauding around them, Alex and Sean letting out loud whoops and exchanging a high five.

“You guys, that was great,” Bryan said warmly, adding in a few claps as well. “Especially you, Erik, you improved by leaps and bounds. I mean, wow. I don’t know what you did Charles, but keep it up and an Oscar is as good as yours.”

Charles simply had to swallow around the proud lump in his throat, kissing Erik’s temple before tugging him into his arms for a tight hug. “You were amazing,” he whispered in Erik’s ear amidst all the cheers and applause. “Well done.”

Erik’s grip around him tightened, and although his voice was muffled against Charles’ shoulder, he could hear Erik’s every word. “It’s because of you.” A pause, then, “I’m nothing without you.”

Charles couldn’t stop smiling, even as he hastily wiped a tear away. “It’s all you, Erik. When you put your mind to it, you have an acting ability that no one can match.” As Erik pulled away to stare at him, Charles couldn’t resist adding as a joke, “Not even me.”

“Um, guys?”

Charles tore his gaze away from Erik’s to face Hank, who was dithering nearby and slowly turning a nice shade of red. “I apologise,” Hank mumbled, “but I feel it is my duty to inform you that the boom is picking up everything you’re saying and Bobby the sound guy is slowly losing his lunch.”

Charles let out a shaky huff of laughter, while Erik rolled his eyes, regaining some of his composure at least. “Please send him my genuine apologies,” Charles told Hank, who was eyeing Erik nervously. Surprisingly, Erik didn’t snap at Hank, although he did look a little shaken as he ran a hand through his hair, mussing it up a little more.

“Makeup,” Bryan called out, settling down in his director’s chair once more. “Okay, although the first one was really solid, let’s get a few more takes.”

They redid the scene again a few more times, changing up a few minor details but Bryan didn’t seem as satisfied as he had been with the very first take. Charles was relieved when Bryan finally called for a break, and he wasn’t exactly surprised when Erik’s first action was to stand up and literally drag Charles over to the trailer they shared.

“Erik?” Charles knew he was smirking, because it had really been a good day for both of them. Erik’s successes counted as his own too, after all. “Why are we in such a hurry?”

Erik was grinning at him as though he had just won the lottery. “Because I have to properly thank you for coaching me and giving such great advice,” Erik said, his lip curled in a wicked smile as they reached their trailer, right before he slowly backed Charles up against the trailer wall, pinning him
against it with his body.

“Mmmm.” Not to be outdone, Charles wriggled under Erik’s weight, watching his eyes go dark. “I can think of many ways for you to thank me, you know.”

Erik chuckled throatily before pressing forward and claiming Charles’ mouth in a filthy kiss. “Come on then, I hope it’s one that involves me on my knees,” he said with a wink before he moved away, opening the door and disappearing into their trailer.

“Oh God, I love you,” Charles said with a laugh as he followed that wonderful arse into the trailer, kicking the door closed behind him.

* * * * *

There were quite a number of good clubs in Chelsea, so when Charles mentioned that he wanted to hit a gay club, Erik had to think for a while. His favourite was Boxers, a sports bar that had really good pizza and excellent beers on tap, but he wasn’t sure if Charles’ idea of entertainment was kicking back with a pint and taking in a soccer game. There was also another club that Alex had recommended called the ‘g Lounge’, but it was a little too campy and glam for Erik’s tastes.

“Then just take me to Boxers first,” Charles suggested as they hopped into the waiting car. “We can hang out there for a while and see how it goes.”

“What if you don’t like it?” Erik asked, stroking his hair back. “I wouldn’t want you to be bored.”

Charles waved away his concern. “We could always walk around and see what’s what since we’re in the area.”

The driver let them out somewhere near the Flatiron district, and Erik happily held hands with Charles as they walked down the street towards the bar. From this distance, Erik already spotted the prominent ‘Boxers NYC’ signboard, the trademark cartoon bulldog clearly visible. Groups of men were streaming into the entrance slowly, laughing and chatting and slapping each other on the back.

“What do you think?” Erik asked, turning to Charles who seemed more curious than anything else.

“Looks like quite a down to earth place, let’s take a look,” he said gamely, and Erik pressed a kiss to his temple before they stepped into the warm interior of the bar. There was a football game being broadcast on the main screens, and the various patrons were all yelling at the screen, cursing the referee for some ridiculous call. Erik felt a tugging on his sleeve and turned to Charles, who was staring with a raised eyebrow at the topless bartenders behind the long wooden counter, serving up drinks in the blink of an eye.

“Are they all normally shirtless?” Charles sounded more puzzled than anything, which made Erik laugh and squeeze him tighter. Now he could sense quite a number of the men starting to stare at them, giving each other discreet nudges and look-who-just-walked-in nods.

“Holy shit, it’s them,” he heard someone hiss at his friend, and Erik decided now was a very good time to go find a table and get Charles and himself a nice cold drink.

They managed to snap a booth somewhere in the corner, where there was a screen showing a secondary game, and Erik was pleased to discover it was a Bayern Munich match against Barcelona. “Hang on, Liebling, I’ll go get us some drinks,” he said as he gave Charles a quick peck on the lips.

“What would you like?”

“See if they make an Adios Motherfucker,” Charles said with a wide grin, making Erik laugh. “You
know, for old times’ sake.”

“Fair enough.” Erik couldn’t resist leaning in and giving him another kiss. “And if they don’t have that?”

“Then get me a Jack and coke.” Another short kiss before Charles finally released him, giving him a parting pat on the ass as Erik headed for the bar with a chuckle.

Since most of the other men were still distracted by the Giants game, Erik found it easy enough to attract the attention of one of the bartenders, a muscled, blonde giant who was even taller than Erik and reminded him of Chris Hemsworth as Thor. The bartender smiled at Erik, nodding at him. “Hey, welcome to Boxers. What can I get you?”

“Can I get a Sam Adams?” Erik had to lean in further over the counter to shout his order over the noise. “And I don’t know if you make this drink, but do you know what an Adios Motherfucker is?”

Not-Thor nodded a little dubiously. “I think so, the drink sounds familiar. But we don’t serve it here, though.”

“Oh.” Erik didn’t want to disappoint Charles. “That’s too bad.”

However, Not-Thor seemed to think for a while before giving him a smile. “But tell you what, I’ll make one just for you, special. Just don’t tell my boss, okay?”

Erik grinned at him, looking forward to watching Charles’ eyes light up as he brought over the drink later on. “Thanks so much,” he said, and as Not-Thor went about mixing the drinks, Erik turned to look back at Charles, who waved at him from his booth. Erik shot him a grin, then turned back to watch the soccer game on the small screen above the bar.

Not-Thor placed the two drinks in front of him, then followed Erik’s gaze. “Oh, you support Bayern too?” he said, beaming.

Erik was surprised. “Yeah, they’re my father’s favourite team. I grew up watching them play. You like soccer?”

Not-Thor nodded enthusiastically. “Oh yes, I played soccer in college. Franz Beckenbauer was my hero.”

Erik would have liked to stay and chat about soccer with this guy, but the need to get back to Charles outweighed everything else - as usual - so he pulled out his wallet instead. “Anyway, how much do I owe you for the drinks?”

Not-Thor waved away his offered cash. “Forget it, it’s on the house for a fellow soccer fan.”

Erik’s eyebrows jumped. “Won’t you get into trouble?”

“It’s fine.” However, Not-Thor was leaning in rather close, a little too close for Erik’s comfort and he instinctively backed away. The bartender didn’t seem at all deterred, though. “Instead of paying me in cash, why don’t you give me your number instead?” He grinned knowingly at Erik. “Then we can talk more about... balls.”

Oh. Erik was disappointed that his new friend had an ulterior motive for being so nice. Drawing back, Erik shook his head firmly. “Sorry, I have a boyfriend.”

Not-Thor dropped him a wink. “He doesn’t have to know.”
Recoiling, Erik was seriously contemplating hopping over the bar and punching the guy in the face when he felt a possessive grip on his arm, and he turned to find Charles staring at the bartender, eyes like blue steel. “Excuse me, he said he wasn’t interested.” Charles may have sounded polite, but anyone who knew him could see how his lips had thinned and how tight his fists were, his knuckles almost white.

The bartender gave him a lazy shrug. “Sorry, I was just talking to my new friend so it’s none of your business—”

“I’m not your friend,” Erik said sharply, “and this is my boyfriend, so it’s very much his business.”

One of the other bartenders, a tall Jamaican man with light eyes, nudged Not-Thor with a frown. “You idiot, don’t you know that is Erik Lehnsherr and Charles Xavier?”

Not-Thor’s jaw dropped. “What?”

Charles suddenly surged forward towards the startled bartender, and even Erik was taken aback by this new, possessive side of Charles. “I’ve been watching you hitting on Erik for the past ten minutes and Erik was too nice to figure out what you were doing,” he said evenly to the man, “So I’m asking you - very nicely - to back off before you have to find out in a hurry where the nearest emergency ward is.”

Not-Thor was just staring at Charles with an open mouth, while his Jamaican colleague was laughing and shaking his head. Some of the patrons around the bar were grinning openly as well, but Charles seemed oblivious to all of them. His dark, grim stare was focused only on the blonde bartender, who was mumbling to himself as he finally backed away. Erik was still too amazed by what he had just witnessed, staring at Charles as though he were the world’s eighth wonder.

“Come on, Erik,” Charles said, casting an irritated glance at the bar. “Let’s head to another place.”

Still a little shell-shocked, Erik left their drinks on the bar and meekly followed him out of the bar, and the two of them continued walking down the street, Charles still fuming while Erik watched him closely. After a while, Erik wrapped an arm around Charles’ shoulders, and it was only then that Charles finally relaxed a little, the deep frown on his face easing a bit. Erik decided now was a good time to finally ask. “Are you all right, Liebling?”

Charles took in a deep breath, then released it. His features were still tight and drawn, and he was blinking rapidly. “It’s just...seeing that guy, trying to get his hands on you--”

“I know, I know.” Erik stopped, tugging Charles into his arms and holding him close, feeling the tension slowly ease out of Charles’ body as he melted into Erik’s embrace. They stood like that for a while, Erik running a calming hand up and down the curve of Charles’ spine. “I’d hate watching someone else hitting on you in front of me, too,” Erik admitted.

Charles’ arms tightened around Erik. “They should know you’re mine.”

Erik smiled into his hair, massaging the back of Charles’ warm neck. “I would have thought the whole world can tell just from the way I look at you.” He pulled away just to press a kiss to Charles’ forehead. “That guy was a fucking moron,” he added, glad to see that at least Charles didn’t look quite so furious anymore.

“I’m sorry,” Charles said with a sigh, nestling his cheek against Erik’s chest. “I shouldn’t have caused a scene back at the bar.”

“What?” Erik pulled back with a frown. “Liebling, trust me, I understand. If it were me in your place
and some skeezy bartender started hitting on you, I would have turned that guy into a human pretzel. You handled it really well, actually.”

Charles arched an eyebrow at him, but the corners of his mouth were trying not to tug up into a smile. “Really? You don’t mind I got jealous?”

Erik leaned down, brushing his lips against the pink shell of Charles’ ear before whispering, “If I’m going to be honest, you’re really hot when you’re angry.” He felt Charles shiver in his arms, and Erik artfully slid a knee between Charles’ thighs, making his breath hitch. “So commanding, your eyes blazing with anger...you didn’t even care that the bartender was twice your size, you just demanded to protect what is yours.”

“Erik,” Charles whispered, nuzzling back against Erik’s mouth. “You’re bloody right you’re mine, no one else can have you or even touch you.”

Erik could barely hold back a low moan, his hands roaming all over Charles’ chest and sliding under his shirt. “Damn right, no one else makes me feel like I want to get on my knees in front of you right now and take you into my mouth.” Erik grinned triumphantly when he heard Charles’ low gasp. “You like my mouth, don’t you, Charles?”

Nodding shakily, Erik could feel Charles’ grip tightening on the folds of his shirt. “I like your mouth very much,” Charles said, running his fingers over Erik’s moistened lips. Here, Erik kissed his fingers before tilting his head down and claiming Charles’ mouth slowly but intently, still unable to get the image of a possessive, angry Charles out of his head. Erik usually disliked the feeling of being fenced in when he was in a relationship, but with Charles, it was something he craved. He wanted to be owned by Charles very desperately.

Erik broke off the kiss, which was getting intense. “Do you want to go to another gay club?” he asked, his voice a little husky as he couldn’t resist nipping at Charles’ bottom lip. “Or do you want to go back to the hotel?”

Charles stared at him, eyes half-lidded as he licked his abused lips. “What’s the point of going to another club when I know I’ll be leaving with you at the end of the night?” His smile was a little on the sly side as his fingers traced a slow path down Erik’s chest, his touch warm even through the fabric. “Of course, I have every intent on proving that you are indeed well and truly mine.”

Erik swallowed around the sudden dryness in his throat. “And just how do you intend to prove that?” he asked, the challenge clear in his voice despite the fact that he would have carried Charles off all the way back to the hotel in his arms if Charles commanded him to.

The smile on Charles’ face grew wicked. “I intend to take the whole night doing just that,” he said calmly, stroking the back of Erik’s neck. “Maybe I’ll tie you up and have my way with you, make you beg for it.”

Erik was unable to hold back the low, stuttered moan at the image of Charles bending him over the edge of the bed and doing exactly what he wanted to Erik. “Fuck, yes,” he managed to murmur before Charles yanked him down and took his mouth forcefully, and Erik let him lead this kiss, his knees almost buckling at the way Charles was cleverly manipulating Erik’s tongue with his own.

“Jesus, man, get a room,” Erik heard someone say as they walked past, and when he broke away from Charles, he saw two skateboarders who were passing by and snickering, but their faces froze when they realised who they had interrupted.

“Wait a sec, aren’t you--” one of the skateboarders began, but Erik shook his head.
“You’ve got the wrong person,” he said as he wrapped an arm protectively around Charles, shielding him from view as they started back in the direction of the hotel. Charles slid an arm firmly around Erik’s waist, his grip possessive and strong, and Erik felt a sharp thrill running down his spine. Charles being jealous definitely had its benefits.

It was quite a long walk back to the hotel, and they caused their fair share of double takes and outright stares, not to mention a number of people whipping out their mobile phones to snap a discreet picture of them. Erik ignored them all, caring only about the man half-tucked under his coat, his arm still hooked around Erik’s waist until they were back in the hotel lobby.

The concierge looked surprised when she saw them. “Back so soon?” she asked pleasantly.

“Something urgent came up,” Charles told her, and from the way Erik was staring hungrily at Charles, the concierge nodded with an ‘ah’ of realisation. To her credit, she kept her smile professional, and Erik nodded at her before tugging Charles to the elevator, pressing a kiss against his temple.

“I’m such an idiot,” Erik lamented, dropping his arm to drape it around Charles’ waist. “How did I not see that the bartender was hitting on me?”

Charles snorted. “I’m not surprised. You didn’t realise it either when I kept throwing myself at you in the beginning, right from the start.”

Erik’s mouth was open to protest, but he realised Charles was right. “Really? Right from the start?”

Charles shot Erik an incredulous sideways look as the elevator arrived with a ‘ding!’ and they stepped in together. “Raven kept saying I couldn’t be any more obvious if I ripped off my clothes right in front of you and handed you a barrel of lube.” Charles leaned up to kiss Erik’s jaw. "And trust me, I was ready to do just that, I was at my wits' end."

Erik couldn’t help chuckling. "I thought being a rom-com actor meant they’d teach you a hundred different ways to get the girl."

Charles rolled his eyes. "Sure, but they didn’t teach me how to get a grouchy, surly, aloof German action hero in my bed."

Erik turned Charles around by the shoulders so they were facing each other. "Well, now he's in your bed all the time. I'd say your methods were successful." He couldn’t resist another kiss, his lips making their way now to tug down Charles’ shirt collar so Erik could suck on that sweet spot on his neck that never failed to make Charles gasp.

“Fuck, Erik,” Charles hissed, fists tightening on Erik’s turtleneck, and Erik could feel Charles sliding a knee between his thighs, a hand reaching down to grip Erik’s ass firmly, possessively. Erik groaned against the curve of Charles’ neck, not caring that they were probably being videotaped by the security camera right now, and he hitched Charles up onto the railing, lavishing kisses on the long, pale line of his throat. Charles was frantically pulling at the button of Erik’s jeans, and he was so forceful that the button flew off, hitting the door of the elevator. Unfortunately, there was another ‘ding!’ and they hadn’t reached their floor yet, so it had to be someone else.

“Erik!” Charles whispered in warning, and Erik quickly let him back down onto his feet, the two of them smoothing over their clothes before the door slid open. To their surprise, it was a smiling Hank and Raven, who walked in holding hands. “Hey, you guys!” Raven beamed at them as she pressed the floor for her suite. “I thought you were going out to Chelsea tonight?”
“Hello, my dear.” Charles was remarkably composed, even though his cheeks were a little flushed. “We just remembered something urgent we had to take care of, that’s all.”

“Rrrrright,” Raven said with a laugh, while Erik just stood there wishing the elevator would turn into a TARDIS and transport him and Charles far away. To make things worse, Hank was openly staring at the open button of Erik’s jeans, a sceptical eyebrow raised. “So,” Raven continued, looking extremely innocent, “does this ‘urgent matter’ take place in your hotel room, by any chance?”

Charles simply rolled his eyes, while Erik tried to move and stand behind him, just to get away from Hank’s goggling. Understanding, Charles bravely stood in front of Erik and clasped his hand, but Hank was already bending down with a frown, picking up a round object. “Is this yours?” he said to Erik, holding it up.

“What are you talking about?” Erik huffed, although he could see Charles’ shoulders shaking with barely contained laughter.

“It’s yours, it’s from your jeans,” Hank insisted, still holding out the button to Erik, but thankfully Raven, God bless her, was pulling him back and frowning ‘not now’ at him.

“Anyway, this is our floor,” Raven said cheerfully as the elevator door opened, tugging a puzzled Hank out with her. “Have fun with your ‘urgent matter’, guys!”

The moment the door slid closed, Charles burst out laughing while Erik groaned, burying his face in Charles’ shoulder, completely mortified. “That was so embarrassing. Stupid Hank.”

Charles reached back to stroke his hair. “You’re right, it was. Sorry, I’m not being a very good boyfriend, am I?”

The last statement made Erik look up, turning Charles around in his arms so they were facing each other. “You’re das beste.” Erik smiled, bending down and kissing his forehead. “I’m very lucky to have you.”

Charles’ ensuing smile was radiant, and when the doors opened again, he happily yanked Erik out to their suite, sliding his card and shoving the door open. Erik didn’t even get a chance to turn on the lights before Charles pulled him down and started kissing him in the dark, the room filled with slick noises and gasped breaths. Erik fell headlong into the kiss, threading his fingers through the soft silk of Charles’ wavy hair, feeling something tightening in his chest that had nothing to do with lust, and everything to do with the way Charles kissed him, all-encompassing and tender and purposeful, as though Erik was the only person in the world who mattered. No one had ever made him feel this way before.

“Erik.” The need in Charles’ voice was raw and husky, and Erik found himself slammed up against the wall, Charles scrabbling at his torn jeans and yanking it down, not wasting a minute in wrapping his hand around Erik’s aching erection. Erik made a high, keening noise as he thrust up instinctively into the tunnel of Charles’ fist, desperate for his touch.

“Mine,” Charles said determinedly before using his other hand to fully tug down Erik’s useless jeans so they were now pooling on the floor, and Erik clumsily stepped out of them, tumbling into Charles’ arms. Charles chuckled a little, his free hand steadying Erik while the other was still stroking him long and hard, just the way Erik liked.

“All right?” Charles whispered in his ear, and Erik shivered at the hot breath kissing his skin. He nodded shakily, swallowing a moan when Charles let out a pleased sound, murmuring “Take off my clothes,” into Erik’s ear.
Erik almost fumbled with the buttons of Charles’ shirt, far too eager to see more of this dominant side of Charles. When Erik started undoing his pants, he couldn’t resist running a finger along the length of Charles’ straining cloth-covered erection, making Charles do that delicious open-mouthed gasp he always did during sex, especially when he liked something Erik was doing.

However, his words contradicted his obvious pleasure. “Did I say you could touch me?”

Wordless and dizzy with want, Erik shook his head and whispered, “No.” He just couldn’t stop staring at Charles’ cherry-red mouth, moist and abused from Erik’s kisses.

Now that mouth was quirking up into a wicked smile. “I’ll say it again. Take off my clothes, but no groping.” Erik’s breath hitched as Charles leaned in, a hand sliding around to grip his ass tightly. “Because I intend on having you my way tonight, darling.”

Truth be told, Erik was really dying to kiss Charles now, but it warred with his even bigger desire to see Charles take charge and manhandle him, for once. Forcing down his ever-present need to fuck Charles into the nearest mattress, Erik swallowed around the dryness in his throat and began undoing Charles’ shirt. The buttons were still warm from his body heat, and Erik deliberately let a stray thumb graze Charles’ left nipple, making him shiver just a little. Subduing the triumphant smirk bubbling to the surface, Erik slid the shirt off Charles’ shoulders, then brought it to his nose, inhaling the scent as he locked his eyes with Charles’ stormy blue ones. A mixture of cologne, the bergamot shampoo Charles liked to use, and his own indefinable, intricate scent that never failed to make Erik hard. And sure enough, he was hard now, burying his nose in the warm fabric. “Mmmm, Charles.”

Erik felt himself being tugged down and Charles was kissing him deeply, grinding his hips against Erik’s pelvic bone and he groaned when he felt the hard stiffness of Charles’ cock rubbing against him needily. Fuck, he desperately wanted Charles inside him right now, wanted Charles fucking him into incoherence. It seemed Charles wanted that too, because the kiss was turning rough, Charles biting and nipping at Erik’s lips and just taking his mouth as though it were Charles’ property.

Which, technically, it was.

When Charles pulled away, Erik was panting and more turned on than he had ever been in his life. “Thought you said...no touching,” he said breathlessly, as Charles stroked the back of his neck, studying Erik’s lips with an intent gaze.

“I’ll do whatever I want with what’s mine.” Charles was now whipping off Erik’s turtleneck, and once Erik was done tugging off Charles’ pants, they kissed again, finally naked and skin to skin, and Erik rubbed his thumb over the familiar warmth of Charles’ skin just above his hip. Charles had a curve there that seemed perfect for Erik to rest his hand on, just before the swell of his backside.

Charles was now nuzzling against Erik’s lips. “Come to bed, Erik.”

Erik was using every ounce of his strength not to bend Charles over the nearest flat surface, and instead he obediently followed Charles to the bedroom, staring at that pale, firm ass that still had a set of Erik’s hand prints from this morning.

Once they got to the bed, Erik tamped down the familiar urges to push Charles down onto the bed and crawl on top of him, and he shot Charles a half-lidded glance, licking his lips. “Where do you want me?”

Charles was running an appreciative hand down Erik’s flank. “On your hands and knees on the bed, please.” The last word was spoken as a breathy purr, dripping with sex. Balling up his fists, Erik summoned all his self-control and took the few steps to the bed, getting on all fours on the wide,
smooth posturepaedic mattress. It was strange and alien, being on this end of such a familiar and oft-practised act, and he shivered when he felt Charles’ fingers tracing the knobs of his spine.

He waited, willing himself to be patient even as his cock ached between his legs, demanding Charles’ familiar touch. There was the sound of a drawer sliding open, then a ‘click’ of one of their many tubes of Glide opening. Erik braced himself for the first touch, which was why he was surprised by the feel of Charles’ mouth travelling down his back, leaving a trail of kisses.

“Liebling?”

“Shhh.” Charles was now mouthing the small of his back, leaving a trail of warm kisses and humming against Erik’s skin. It was strange, how the small little vibration heightened Erik’s pleasure even more. However, nothing could prepare Erik for the first few exploratory licks of Charles’ tongue, so wet as it teased him open and Erik was only faintly aware that he was shouting, fists balling in the sheets and half-ripping them off the bed.

“Oh fuck, oh God, Charles, fuck--”

Charles’ only response was to let his tongue burrow deeper, leaving Erik slick and wide open and panting and sweaty and practically wailing as he scrabbled at the rumpled bedsheets. He could soon feel his orgasm building at the base of his spine while Charles fucked him with his tongue and he let out a shaky, muffled warning. “Charles, going to--”

Mercifully, Charles pulled his mouth away, holding Erik’s trembling hips steady with his hands. “Are you all right, my love?”

“Ngggh.” Erik was still trying to gather his wits about him, not bothering to raise an eyebrow at Charles for his smug tone. “Are you trying to make me beg you to fuck me until I can’t remember my name?” he said over his shoulder.

He yelped in a most undignified manner when Charles grabbed him and flipped him over onto his back, staring at his boyfriend with completely new, besotted eyes. Here was sweet, gentle, trusting Charles manhandling him in bed, deceptively strong, his eyes shining with dominance and possessiveness as he crawled on top of Erik now, his hair hanging down as he ran a hand up Erik’s sweaty body.

“As long as you remember mine, we’re good,” Charles said with a wicked smile, and Erik just wanted to kiss it right off his face. “But I won’t say I’m adverse to hearing you beg me.”

Erik let his gaze drop down to Charles’ full, flush-red erection, and already he wanted so much to wrap his lips around it, to let Charles take his mouth. When he looked up at Charles again, he was staring at Erik intently, running his tongue over his plush bottom lip as he slicked his right hand with lube.

“Darling, you want this, yes?” Charles’ smile this time was more familiar, the one he flashed at Erik whenever he thought Erik wasn’t looking, all soft at the edges.

Erik returned the smile, running his foot up Charles’ leg. “Yes.”

Charles bent down and kissed him, and Erik gently sucked on the tip of his tongue, his cheek muscles straining to smile. He spread his thighs when he felt Charles’ hand resting on his pelvis, and his eyes widened at the unfamiliar sensation as Charles slowly slid a finger into him, breaking off the kiss. “Tell me if it gets too much,” he whispered to Erik, who nodded, trying to mask his eagerness.

Erik didn’t quite feel the stretch until Charles slid in the second finger, and he writhed a little, trying
to adjust to the feeling. He felt a little full, but there was no pain. He was glad that he had always made sure to go slow when prepping Charles, because he suspected it would be a lot different - and far more painful - if Charles wasn’t taking the same care now.

Erik focused on Charles’ face instead, his features taut with concentration, eyebrows drawn together in a slight furrow. Charles was really the most physically beautiful person Erik had ever seen, and he couldn’t help running his fingers over the plush red bow of Charles’ mouth. Charles smiled at him, and Erik should have known what was coming when that smile turned wicked and Charles began sucking on his fingers, his mouth soft and warm. “Oh God, Charles...”

Charles only sucked harder, and in response Erik rolled his hips against Charles’ questing hand in a silent bid for more. Charles smiled around Erik’s fingers, then slowly slid in the third. Now Erik could feel the slight burn, wriggling his hips in an effort to adjust.

Slipping Erik’s fingers out of his mouth, Charles bent down and pressed a kiss to his forehead. “Tell me if it’s too--”

Charles let out a startled yelp when Erik yanked him down and stuck his tongue down Charles’ throat, but he quickly got with the programme as he melted into the kiss, Erik fucking his mouth with his tongue until they were both breathless and panting. “Fuck me now, please,” Erik mouthed against his lips, his cock hard and leaking, nudging against Charles’ smooth pale stomach.

Nodding quickly, Charles hurriedly slicked himself with the lube, and Erik enjoyed the free show for a moment; the sight of Charles stroking himself was always one he enjoyed. Sadly, it was over too soon as Charles leaned over Erik, guiding the tip of his cock into Erik very, very slowly. Erik’s breath hitched as he felt Charles pushing in, and he could feel Charles trembling in his hands, fighting to go slow and give Erik time to adjust. “God, Erik, you’re so tight--”

”Liebling.” Erik pressed kisses under his ear, nuzzling against him lovingly before sucking on Charles’ earlobe, and Charles emitted a muffled, strangled groan before his hips surged forward, and he was finally buried deep inside Erik.

“Oh.” Erik was wide-eyed, panting, his breath huffing against Charles’ ear. He had never trusted anyone enough to surrender himself completely to them, always maintaining his defences, but everything was different with Charles. There was never any point hiding anything from Charles, who already knew Erik inside and out, sometimes even better than Erik understood himself, and Erik would give Charles his entire being, even hand him the world on a platter if he would let him. Erik was his to do whatever he pleased, and right now he felt stretched and full and, most of all, intimately connected with Charles in a way he hadn’t even anticipated. “Oh, Charles.”

“Are you hurting?” Charles asked, worrying his bottom lip with his teeth, and Erik could only shake his head, letting one hand card through Charles’ sweat-damp hair while the other skated up and down his back, tracing the curve of his spine before squeezing the plush swell of his ass.

“You feel fucking amazing,” Erik said in between kisses against Charles’ skin. “Now move.”

However, it was an entirely different matter when Charles finally started to thrust. Now Erik did feel a slight flare of pain, and he fought back his grimace, not wanting Charles to get worried and stop. Instead he forced himself to relax like he would during a particularly difficult scene to shoot, taking deep breaths and calming his mind the only way he knew how: focusing of Charles. Erik concentrated on the soft lines of Charles’ face, willing away the initial pain and discomfort by leaning up and claiming Charles’ mouth in slow, languid kisses.

“Erik.” Charles’ eyes were so dark, ringed only with a thin line of blue, and he looked as though he
had just run a mile, panting and wild. “God, Erik, I love you.”

“Love you, too.” Erik kissed up his jaw, rubbing his thumbs against the jut of Charles’ hipbones. Charles’ resulting moan was low and dirty before he started kissing his favourite spot on Erik’s neck, his mouth hot and wet. This made Erik surge up, meeting Charles thrust for thrust as he slammed into Erik. He lifted his hips a little, and this changed the angle so that when Charles slid home again and hit a particular spot, Erik felt a sharp spark of white hot pleasure spreading through his body.

“Fuck,” Erik gasped, and now Charles was starting to pick up the pace, gripping Erik by the thighs and fucking into him slow and hard, making him feel every inch of his cock and Erik was finally getting what drove Charles so wild in bed all the time, the slight edge from feeling too full giving way to bursts of unbelievable, toe-curling pleasure, and this same pleasure only intensified when Charles wrapped a still-slick hand around Erik’s cock, stroking him just the way Erik liked it.

”Mine, you’re mine,” Charles mouthed against his jaw, but he squeezed his eyes shut when Erik’s thumbs brushed against his pert pink nipples, and Erik wished he was flexible enough to bend down and suck on them at the same time. He settled for running his nails down Charles’ back, making sure to leave marks the two of them could see come morning. Charles was almost entirely flushed now, and they locked eyes, Erik jerking up into the tight tunnel of Charles’ fist, Charles fucking him in long, fluid thrusts. “Oh fuck, Erik, so tight--”

Erik wanted to respond, but when Charles’ hand tightened on his cock during a particularly hard thrust, Erik was stunned to find himself coming all over both their stomachs and Charles’ hand, voice hoarse from shouting Charles’ name as his eyes squeezed shut. Charles managed a few more thrusts, then stillled as he moaned Erik’s name into the crook of his neck, and Erik stroked his back gently, wondrous at the feeling of Charles coming inside him and filling Erik with his seed.

Once they had managed to get their breath - and their brains - back, Erik maneuvered Charles into a better kissing position, refusing to let him pull out yet. “You’re inside me,” he whispered, before resuming the slow, languid kiss. “No one’s even done that before.”

There was a strange light in Charles’ eyes. “I’m your first?”

Erik nodded, smiling at Charles’ delighted grin. “And the last,” he said with a chuckle, before tugging the covers up over both of them, Charles resting his cheek on Erik’s chest, and Erik knew Charles could hear the rapid pounding of his heartbeat.

* * * * *

It had been their mistake, letting Cobb slip through their fingers in the confrontation at Rockaway Beach, but at least now they had a clearer lead and knew exactly who they were looking for. Their colleagues back in HQ were now working around the clock to track down Dominic Cobb, and the Bureau was sill keeping 24-hour surveillance on Cobb’s residence. Charles could only hope that a major lead would come in any day now. Still, it wasn’t quite a hardship, holing himself up in a Manhattan hotel room with Erik and sharing a rickety queen bed every night.

It was five days until they finally received a call from Oliver, who sounded rushed and harried on the phone. “We got a tipoff that Cobb will be at La Guardia today and he’s ready to strike,” their boss said. “We also have it on good faith who his next two targets will be: Arthur Reyes and George Eames, who will be on Oceanic Airlines flight 815 this afternoon. You guys got that?”

Charles quickly gestured to Erik for a pen and notepad. Erik quickly passed him the hotel stationery, and they scribbled down the necessary information.
An official car was waiting for them downstairs, and they remained silent in the car. But Charles was gratified to feel Erik’s hand searching out for his own, and he grasped it tightly until they reached the airport.

They headed for the gate number that Oliver had given them, and the flight attendants were just about to close the boarding door. “I’m sorry, sirs—” one of them began, but they looked stunned when Erik and Charles flashed their FBI badges at them.

“We need to check if a Jack Titanic has boarded the plane,” Erik said briskly, giving the alias that Oliver suspected Cobb would be using. Checking the flight manifesto, the attendants confirmed that a man of Cobb’s description had indeed boarded, but the more senior flight attendant informed Charles and Erik that the plane was already going to take off, and that they would have to go down to the tarmac.

“That’s fine,” Erik said quickly, gesturing for Charles to follow him. “Come on James, let’s get this son of a bitch.”

Charles didn’t know why he had a really bad feeling about this.

* * * * *

“And action!”

Erik took off from his mark, only a few seconds ahead of Charles. The enormous windfan blew his hair away from his face, causing his suit to flap around him, simulating the air coming from the plane’s enormous engines if they were actually on. He could hear Charles’ shoes pounding over the tarmac right behind him, and if he looked up, he could see the extras inside the plane peering anxiously down at them through the round windows.

“Michael!” Charles called after him. The edge of urgency and breathlessness in that familiar voice was... not putting Erik in the right mindset. Well, not the right mindset for the film. “Backup’s on the way! They’ll be here in fifteen minutes.”

Erik slowed and changed direction once they cut across in front of the plane. He gesticulated wildly at the ‘pilot’. Thankfully the scowl on his face fitted his character and this scene; even the mild exertion on his legs and lower back muscles was drawing his attention to a pleasant soreness in certain areas.

“We don’t have time to wait for backup,” he said. In the cockpit, the ‘pilot’ appeared to be conferring with his ‘co-pilot’ and, presumably, air traffic control. Off the side, the ramp stairs were waiting to be trundled towards the plane.

“This is a really bad idea,” Charles said but he followed when Erik ran towards the stairs in a heroically determined fashion, and Bryan yelled “Cut!”

They took a several more takes of the scene, including a few times where Charles called him “Fassbender” instead. Opinions were divided on how familiar McAvoy would be towards his partner in public at this point. Alex pointed out that McAvoy would be more diligent about maintaining appearances now that they actually had something to hide. However, Sean argued that this was a special circumstance, what with the case ending and the two investigators nearing their quarry; McAvoy using Fassbender’s given name would heighten the tension by revealing how anxious the man was about the whole situation. Alex persisted that McAvoy could not know how the confrontation would end and Shaw reminded them that this was a movie and skipping out a chance to add a bit of foreshadowing was practically a crime.
Eventually everyone seemed to decide that this can be left to post-production to sort out. The crew brought the ramp stairs over to the side of the plane and locked it in place. Cameras were switched out, the crane brought closer for the exterior shots, cameramen squeezed in with the extras playing the passengers. Angel and her makeup minions fluttered in to touch up Erik and Charles, and gave them both a very disappointed look for deigning to sweat from their dramatic dashing about on the tarmac.

“And - ACTION!”

“Evacuate the aircraft,” Erik ordered the flight crew hovering just inside the door.

Hurrying in behind him, Charles said, “We’re here with the FBI. Please begin evacuating all the passengers from the plane.”

The crew jumped into action. Most of the passengers went obediently enough, though a couple of them were visibly escorted out. Charles stayed by the door and visually scanned each and every face carefully before letting them out, while Erik dove into the stream of people going the other way and used his height to seek out the two would-be victims: Eames and Arthur.

The crush of people made it hard to see anything, however, and Erik practically collided with the two men. But the scene was still rolling, so he grabbed them both by an arm each and none-too-gently marched them over to where Charles was nearly vibrating in anxiety. Arthur peppered him with questions the whole way, which Eames backed up with smart remarks, the two of them holding onto each other’s hands the whole time.

“Get them out of here,” he said to Charles, shoving the two men at him. Both of them were distinctly taller than Charles. Well, if they’d really wanted to escape, Eames alone could have taken on Erik. “Make sure they don’t leave your sight. Our backup should have arrived by now.”

Erik turned to go back into the plane. “Michael,” Charles called after him. The distress in his voice was obvious. Erik turned around, and the look on Charles’ face blindsided him, like a punch in the gut. Fuck, he hoped Charles never looked at him like that for real. “Please, be careful. And - be the better man.”

Erik nodded just the once, swallowing thickly. “Keep everyone out of the plane, James. That means you, too.”

He went to hunt down Cobb.

* * * * *

It had been a rough day for everyone, especially poor Charles. Erik could tell that this particular shoot where Charles had to run all over the tarmac and later rush Arthur and Eames to safety was taking its toll on him, his eyes wandering over the tight set of Charles’ shoulders and the tired lines around his eyes. Erik longed to bundle Charles into his arms and sweep him away for a relaxing day at the spa, but the shoot was already way behind schedule and Bryan wore the perpetually harassed, worried look of a man who knew this. Erik knew that above all else, Charles hated to look unprofessional and would stay as late as he needed to just to finish his scenes, so he had no choice but to wait until the day’s shoot was over.

As per Erik’s instructions, Remy had found a renowned, exclusive spa on Fifth Avenue, and Erik told him to make a booking for a massage at 5:00 P.M. However, the shoot stretched all the way until past 6:00 P.M., and Bryan only called for a wrap because half the crew and cast were tired and caustic from low blood sugar and exhaustion. They had all been shooting since 6:00 in the morning,
after all. Charles immediately headed for his trailer, pausing only when Darwin asked him a question and Charles shook his head before continuing on his way. Erik quickly followed, realizing the spa appointment had to be cancelled, but there was something else he could do instead.

He texted Remy to check if tickets were still available, and his assistant texted back immediately: *Oui, I’m on it.*

Letting himself into the trailer they shared, he found Charles already sprawled on the couch, a folded damp towel across his eyes as he massaged his own temples. He sat up a little when he heard the door open. “Is that you, darling?”

“Sorry, Erik is busy so he called someone from the escort agency to entertain you instead.” Erik smiled as he bent down, brushing back Charles’ dark hair so he could press a kiss to his forehead.

At least Charles gave him a weak smile at that. “I’m so tired,” he said, taking off his makeshift blindfold and Erik never, ever failed to be stunned by those cornflower blue eyes, no matter how many times he had gazed into them. Even now, despite the dark eye bags and tiny lines of stress around them, Erik was completely captivated. He leaned in, pressing a gentle kiss to the sweet moue of that beloved red mouth.

“I can’t describe how much I admire you for being so professional today,” Erik said, carding his fingers through the dark strands. “Well, you’re professional every day, but especially today. If it were me, I would have thrown in the towel and snapped Shaw’s spine in two.”

Charles chuckled, turning into Erik’s hand cupping his cheek and nuzzling his palm. “Violence doesn’t solve everything, Erik,” he murmured, looking better than Erik had seen him all day. “Maiming Shaw will not bring you peace.”

“Only one thing brings me peace,” Erik said, leaning forward so that their foreheads touched. “You.”

Visibly touched, Charles brushed his lips against Erik’s in the lightest and airiest of kisses. It was just Charles, conveying how glad and happy he was that Erik was here, and in turn, Erik was grateful that Charles had given him this privilege to be part of his life. He had a pretty good idea that there were many who would line up for the chance to be with Charles for even just one night, and here was Erik, given the key to a lifetime - hopefully - of nights. And days.

The chiming of Erik’s phone interrupted the moment, and Erik gave him a quick kiss before checking to see if it was Remy. Thankfully it was, and once again he had proved his weight in gold by getting exactly what Erik requested. He tucked away his phone, looking at a curious Charles.

“Are you up for a quick walk down Broadway to the Majestic Theatre?”

“Why?” Charles was sitting up, tugging Erik towards him. “What’s showing there?”

Erik smirked at him. “I thought you might like tickets to a private box while we listen to...the music of the night.”

Charles’ eyes were round with surprise. “Erik, you got us tickets to Phantom?”

Erik nodded happily, taking out his phone again. “Yes, I saw how tired you were earlier and I tried to book a massage for you at a spa. But since the shoot ran late, I thought we could take in a show.”

Charles grabbed Erik’s head with both hands, planting kisses all over his face. “You” - kiss - “are” - kiss - “a wonderful” - kiss - “man.”

Erik felt his face warm, kissing Charles back quickly. “Come on, before we’re late for the show.”
Lunch was a wrapped sandwich and a bottle of Fiji water for everyone on the set, but Charles didn’t really have the heart or appetite to eat. He was sitting beside a trolley loaded with fake suitcases, watching as Bryan instructed the camera crew on how he wanted to get the next shot. Beside him, Erik didn’t seem as though he had much appetite as well, tearing pieces of bread off his sandwich and munching on them despondently. Charles put his food aside and tugged Erik closer to him. “The next scene is going to be so difficult,” Charles said with a sigh, kissing Erik’s cheek and watching the controlled chaos on the set.

Erik only swallowed his bread with difficulty and put the remainder of it aside as well, wrapping his arm around Charles’ waist. “Can we convince Bryan to scrap this scene and let James and Michael get married instead?” he asked, making Charles chuckle.

“You know that would have been impossible in the Sixties,” he chided Erik, who lifted his head with a small smile and pressed a kiss to Charles’ temple.

“I know.” They sat there quietly, and Charles wondered if Erik was thinking the same thing he was. Good thing it’s possible for two men to get married now. But Charles didn’t want to jump the gun and give Erik the impression that he wanted to storm down the aisle with Erik. It wouldn’t be fair if Erik wasn’t ready for the commitment, even though it was something that Charles thought about every day.

They watched Hank discussing something with one of the camera operators, not at all looking forward to the next scene they would have to shoot once lunch was over.

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Erik ran down the plane aisle, eyes scanning over the empty seats for a telltale blonde bump of a head, but Cobb was nowhere to be seen. Slowing down when he came to the galley, Erik’s hand stole inside his jacket, hunting for the familiar shape of his Glock. A sharp spiral of panic rose in his gut when he realised it was missing from its usual hidden compartment, but he knew it was no time to lose his head. He had to find Cobb.

He silently tiptoed past the closed lavatory doors. Both were locked, which meant Cobb could be hidden inside either of them. Taking a deep breath, Erik focused on the lavatory on his left. Then he sharply kicked it open, but there was no one there. Before he even had a moment to turn, he heard the squeak of the other door opening and suddenly there were thick, strong arms grabbing him in a chokehold from behind, cutting off his air. “Thought you were so goddamn smart, huh Fassbender?” Cobb’s smug, breathless voice said in his ear.

Erik hurled himself backwards, and there was a choked-off groan as Cobb’s head bounced off the door, and his tight hold on Erik loosened. Erik grabbed this opportunity to whip around and elbow him deep in the gut, causing Cobb to shout in pain before they both fell to the floor, wrestling violently. Erik had fought bigger men before, but Cobb was especially nimble and wiry, and when he had an arm loose, he almost managed to punch Erik in the face.

“Goddammit!” Erik managed to kick Cobb in the leg, and as Cobb howled in agony, Erik rolled on top of him, pinning him to the ground with an arm braced across his throat. Cobb was struggling under him, one arm flailing about while the other was trapped under Erik’s knee.

“Well, what are you waiting for?” Cobb spat at him, eyes filled with fury. “Go on, take revenge for your stupid partner.”
Anger rose in Erik’s chest, making him bare his teeth and tighten a hand around Cobb’s neck, but he forced himself to remember what Charles had said about being the better man. He loosened his hold on Cobb’s throat, reminding himself to reach for his handcuffs before he did anything stupid.

“Michael?” Erik’s head whipped up when he heard Charles’ tentative voice, and he kept Cobb pinned down when he peeked above the seats to see Charles at the doorway, a gun pointed squarely in Cobb’s direction. “Michael, you all right?”

“Dammit James, I told you to stay off the plane!” Erik shouted, and when he saw Charles’ horrified reaction he instinctively knew Cobb had gotten loose, and his first fear was that Cobb was going to somehow harm Charles. Sure enough, Cobb shoved Erik off him and pulled out a gun, aiming it at Charles.

Erik didn’t even need to think twice; he reached for his second gun which was holstered at his waist and pumped two bullets straight into Cobb’s chest before he could even do the slightest damage to Charles. Slumping down onto the floor with a cry, Cobb was clutching his chest, staring down in horror at the blood gushing from the wound and pooling on the carpet.

“James?” Erik shouted, relieved beyond words when Charles yelled back, “I’m fine!”

“Thank God,” Erik mumbled, keeping a foot planted on the dying Cobb’s chest just to make sure he stayed down, and Charles was standing in the doorway, smiling at him in relief. It had been a really long day for both of them, and Cobb was finally down for the count, unable to ever hurt anyone else again.

“We did it,” Erik said as Charles walked over, running a hand through his hair as he eyed the fallen Cobb splayed on the ground. He was pleasantly surprised when Charles wrapped his arms around him, relaxing into his hold. It was Charles who let go first, clapping Erik on the back and saying, “Good job, Michael, I’m proud of you.”

Erik glanced down at Cobb’s limp body under his foot, feeling vindicated for all the pain and loss he had been through. “We worked well as a team, James,” he admitted, and Charles gave him a smile before it froze, and those blue eyes widened with horror as he stared at something behind Erik.

“Michael, get down!” Charles shouted, and before Erik knew what was going on, Charles was yanking him down, then shielding Erik with his body. A loud shot rang out in the cabin, and then Charles was slumped over Erik with an agonized groan.

“JAMES!” Erik called out in a panic, but he had to think fast. He whipped out his gun and shot in the direction that the bullet had come from, and there was a choked-off female scream from the vicinity of the galley before a body fell to the ground with a thump. Erik frantically bundled Charles into his arms and applied pressure to his chest wound, only sparing a glance at the body of the woman beside Cobb who had blood gurgling from her mouth. Mal.

Now that she was incapacitated, Erik focused all his attention on Charles, who was lying on his lap, and Erik gently cradled Charles’ head in his hand, blinking back tears. “James, oh God, James, try not to move.”

Charles squeezed his eyes shut in pain, and blood was now trickling out of the corner of his mouth, making Erik’s heart constrict. “I’ll be fine,” he whispered, but the trembling, iron-tight grip he had on Erik’s wrist betrayed his words.

“Hang on, I’m going to radio for help,” Erik whispered, yanking out the walkie-talkie strapped to his belt, and it took him a few tries to calm down so his shaking fingers could press the button. He
desperately tried to ignore the fact that the buttons were slippery with blood - Charles’ blood.
“Officer down! I repeat, officer down. Requesting emergency vehicles!” Erik shouted into the
walkie, which only returned a loud buzz. “Hello, is anyone there?”

There was a pause, and thankfully a clear reply, “We’re on our way right now, hang tight.”

“Thank God.” Erik’s hand was now trembling so badly that the walkie dropped to the ground with
a clatter, and the way Charles’ face was rapidly turning white was not at all reassuring. The only
colour now in the deathly pallor of his face was those bright blue eyes, as well as the blood slowly
seeping out of his mouth and down his chin.

“It’s going to be okay, just hang on,” he whispered, pressing down harder on the wound. There was
just so much blood. Despite his rapidly weakening body, Charles let out a soft groan before
dragging himself closer to Erik, his trembling hands pulling Erik down.

“Stay with me,” he pleaded, and the broken hitch in his voice made something in Erik’s chest
shatter. “Don’t leave me, please.”

Erik didn’t care that he was openly crying now, the tears blurring his vision. He rested Charles’
head on his lap and fiercely wiped the tears away with the back of his hand so that he could see
Charles. “This is my fault,” he blurted out, unable to stop the tears even when Charles took his
clean hand, lacing their fingers together before kissing the back of it, the trail of blood from his
mouth smearing across Erik’s pale knuckles.

“I love you.” Charles was shaking now, letting out a cry of pain as he shifted on Erik’s lap.
Erik stroked back the dark hair, his tears landing on Charles’ blood-soaked shirt. “You promised
you’d always be by my side.”

Charles’ mouth twisted into a pained smile. “I promised you a great many things, I’m afraid.”

The distant wail of the ambulance interrupted the moment, and Erik had never been gladder to hear
the sound of its sirens. He clutched Charles tighter, whispering, “Just hang on, help is here, just...”
but he trailed off when he felt Charles’ grip on him loosen, his breathing going shallow.

“James?” Charles’ head was lolling to the side, his eyelids fluttering. Erik shook him in despair, but
it was no use: he was just in time to see the light fade from those bright blue eyes, and Charles’ hand
slipped from his own. “No, please don’t leave me. JAMES!”

Erik was violently shaking his head as he yanked Charles up into his arms so that Charles’ head
rested on his shoulder. Erik was shaking all over, his shoulders heaving with sobs as he clutched
Charles’ lifeless body to himself and wept. It felt like the world was collapsing around him, slipping
away from his grasp along with Charles, and Erik was barely aware of the sounds of the
paramedics clattering up the staircase all too late, choking where he knelt completely soaked
through with blood.

* * * * *

“And cut! That’s a wrap, folks!” Bryan called from his chair, igniting thunderous applause and
cheers from the crew gathered around. Charles blinked himself back to reality, shifting in Erik’s arms
so he could lift his head from his shoulder. However, Erik’s hold on him tightened as he did so, and
Charles felt Erik’s hands tremble where they gripped him, quiet sobs still wrecking Erik’s body.

Charles cocooned Erik in his arms instinctively, soothing his back with broad strokes as he nuzzled
against Erik’s ear, the trail of synthetic blood that ran from his mouth smearing across their cheeks.
“Erik, it’s okay. I’m fine, see? None of that really happened.”

Erik seemed to calm down somewhat, but Charles could still feel the warm trickle of tears along the side of his face, snaking down his neck. Charles brushed his lips against the corner of Erik’s eye, tasting the salt from the moisture there as he slowly kissed his way to Erik’s temple, beads of tears rolling from his own eyes. Erik had gone too deep into his character, and the scene had also been too similar to that day on the beach, one of the many possible “what if’s” that had once kept both of them up at night. Charles had felt it too, had imagined what it would be like to know for sure that that was it, his last chance to say goodbye, and channelled everything into the scene despite how much it pained him. He carded his fingers through Erik’s hair, still pressing kisses to his temple, and whispered gently against his skin, hoping to reach into Erik’s mind and pull him out from the dark recess that he had slipped into, “Come back. Come back to me.”

Charles felt Erik’s shoulders relax as he exhaled deeply, smiling when Erik placed a soft kiss to his neck. He gave Erik a quick squeeze before pulling away to wipe the blood smears off their faces with the back of his hand. “You had me rather worried for a minute there.”

“I’m forbidding you from taking a role where you end up dying ever again.” Erik half-joked and Charles laughed, kissing the tip of his nose. “But in all honesty, Charles. I don’t think I’ll be able to watch this scene in the film. I’ll close my eyes and wait for you to tell me when it’s all over.”

Charles sat up, taking one of Erik’s hands in his and threading their fingers together. He was glad that they were living in the here and now, and not the era when their movie took place. Would they have made it then, in a society that would not accept them for who they were? He would have loved Erik anyway, that much was clear, even had he known his heart would break. “You’re behaving as if it was easy for me to picture never seeing you again.”

Erik frowned, and Charles stroked the side of Erik’s face with his free hand when he saw that his eyes were beginning to well up again. “I can’t imagine a life without you.”

“Then don’t, because that’s never going to happen,” Charles said with resolution, leaning in to kiss Erik tenderly, the hand on Erik’s face finding its way into his hair. Charles pressed his forehead against Erik’s when they parted, breath ghosting against his lips, “And I’ll always be there, darling.”

* * * * *

Although Sebastian Shaw was a rather annoying and condescending man, he was certainly a generous one. He had spared no expense for the wrap party, judging from the lavish spread that awaited the cast and crew of ‘First Class’ in the Marriott ballroom. Charles’ eyes widened when he spotted the tray of various grades of caviar, all accompanied by mother-of-pearl spoons and a haughty waiter on hand to serve them. Right beside the caviar were several other hors d’oeuvres such as lobster canapes and smoked salmon rolls, which Sean was already in the process of wolfing down.

And these were only the appetisers. Charles eyed the main table which boasted an array of entrees like beef wellington and a whole array of red lobsters. Typical food for him at any of the galas his parents were fond of throwing when he was a child, but he much preferred the warmth of Edie’s simple, home-cooked casseroles, or the hearty sandwiches Erik would prepare for him whenever they would stay in to watch a movie.

Of course, anything prepared with love would taste infinitely better than the best, most expensive, ostentatious meal that money can buy.

“Liebling?” He heard Erik coming up to stand beside him. “Why are you looking at the lobsters and
Charles laughed, wrapping his arms around Erik’s waist and tiptoeing up to give him a peck on the lips, which of course turned into a slightly longer kiss. Erik was much calmer now, after they had showered and removed all traces of that synthetic blood from their skin. “Just thinking that food made with love usually tastes so much better than all...this.” He made a vague gesture meant to encompass all the expensive food on display, and thank goodness Erik seemed to understand, smiling as he slid his hands into the pockets of Charles’ jeans, his palms warm even through the fabric.

“Like Mama’s cooking,” Erik whispered against his temple, and Charles nodded immediately, glad that Erik knew what he was talking about.

“Come on, guys.” Darwin was laughing as he walked past, Alex in tow. This was a common sight these days, Alex and Darwin almost joined at the hip while Sean looked perplexed but amused. Darwin clapped Charles on the shoulder as he teased, “Instead of devouring each other in public, why not devour the food?”

Erik was shooting Darwin a wry, unimpressed stare. “Don’t you have something else to do? You seem to have more free time now that you don’t have to top up our supply of cond-”

“Whoa, stop right there!” A horrified Darwin held up his hands in surrender, while Alex merely turned a whiter shade of pale. “Okay, you win this round, Lehnsherr.” Darwin quickly fled, taking Alex with him and leaving Charles to gasp with laughter against Erik’s chest.

“Darling, you’re terrible.” Charles still couldn’t stop chuckling at the twin looks of horror on Darwin’s and Alex’s faces. He shot Erik a fond smile. “You should be nice to them, you’re going to miss them now that the shoot is over. I mean, you’ll see Darwin again, but probably not the rest.”

Now Erik did look a little sad. “As much as I make fun of them, you’re right.”

“See?” Charles patted his chest consolingly, taking this opportunity to molest his boyfriend a bit. “So be nice to them, it’s the last day after all.”

Erik made a noise of agreement as he lifted two flutes of rosé wine from a passing waiter’s tray, handing one to Charles. “So what are we actually going to do, now that filming is over?” he asked, sounding genuinely curious.

Charles paused, thinking it over. “You’re right, we’ve never properly discussed this, have we?”

At that moment, a couple of the crew walked past, clapping Charles on the back and wishing both of them well, and Erik even smiled at them as they walked away. Now he turned back to Charles, brushing back his hair, that intensely focused gaze on Charles again. “Of course I’d want to hear your ideas. What is it?”

Charles smiled, stroking a hand down Erik’s side, “Remember I told you I had a place of my own out in the country?” Erik nodded, pulling him closer by the small of his back as Charles continued, “Well, it’s just upstate, actually. In Westchester, surrounded by acres of empty plains. If it’s anonymity you want, that’s where we could go. No one will bother us out there.”
Erik smiled as he raised his glass to Charles, “Let’s leave tomorrow.”

“Splendid,” Charles grinned and clinked their glasses together, the two of them knocking back their drinks in unison and making plans in hushed whispers as the rest of the party carried on without them.

* * * * *

Erik stirred when he felt the soft brush of Charles’ lips against his eyelid, smiling as he nuzzled into the crook of Charles’ neck.

“Good morning,” Charles murmured, the greeting muffled into Erik’s hair.

“Morning, Schatz,” Erik whispered in reply. He kissed the soft skin at the base of Charles’ throat, curling an arm around Charles’ waist as Charles rolled him over onto his back, legs tangling together in warm sheets.

Erik finally pried his bleary eyes open, blinking as they adjusted to the muted sunshine. He had always been fond of the sunsets on the West Coast, sitting on a pier and watching the sun burn down into cinders on the horizon, but nothing could compare to waking up with a pliant Charles in his arms, the late morning sunlight catching in Charles’ sleep-mussed hair and making the crystal blue of his eyes appear even brighter than usual. Erik leaned up and kissed him, one hand splayed across the nape of Charles’ neck, thinking that, yes, he would very much like to try watching sunrises instead. With Charles.

“Mmm... Darling, we have to check-out,” Charles said after a while when Erik’s hand started venturing south. “Come on, shower and then we really should go.”

Erik willingly let himself get dragged out of bed, going through his morning rituals quickly when he realised it was already almost 11 A.M. To be fair, the party had run late, and the private after-party the two of them had in their room, which had involved far less clothing, had run even later. He took one last cursory look around the room before bringing their bags down to the lobby, looking up Google Maps on his phone while Charles checked them out of the hotel.

“Let’s leave our bags here for a while, I think I should get a car,” Erik suggested when Charles made his way back over to him. “There’s a Mercedes-Benz showroom on Park Avenue.”

“That’s quite close, I’ll ask concierge to arrange for someone to drive us over,” Charles agreed, bouncing off with a smile to make the request.

The efficiency of the Marriott staff was truly commendable and they were out the lobby, into the town car and dropped at the showroom in no time at all. Erik tipped their driver generously as they got out of the vehicle, Charles waving farewell to him when he rolled down the window with a friendly “have a good day, sirs!” before driving off. The dealers sprang to their feet the moment he and Charles stepped through the door, a man in his thirties who appeared to be the sales manager rushing over to tend to them immediately, barely able to contain his excitement. “Good morning, Mr. Lehnsherr and Mr. Xavier. I am such a huge fan of your movies.”

“How nice of you, thank you very much,” Charles replied as he shook the manager’s hand, and it never failed to amaze Erik how Charles always seemed to genuinely believe that everyone who came up to them on the street claiming to love their work was sincere about the words that were coming out of their mouths, rather than assuming that they were nothing but meaningless platitudes.

Erik returned the handshake with much more detachment. “We’d like to see some of your latest two-
"Yes, sir. Right this way." The manager brought them to the showroom with their latest line-up of sports cars, rattling off the specifications of each model in detail. Erik had always appreciated well-engineered automobiles, and there was nothing quite like the feel of being in control of a top performance model, all that metal under his command with just the flick of a finger or a twist of his hand. However, Erik had a feeling Charles paid far less attention to the horsepower of the engine and how many seconds it took the car to go from 0 to 60mph, likely more focused on the exterior design and the feel of the leather of the seats.

"Charles, did any of the models catch your fancy?" Erik asked when they reached the end of their tour. Charles would be spending just as much time in the car as himself, and Erik placed Charles' comfort above all else.

"Oh yes, the SL63 AMG looked beautiful." Charles' eyes were already fixed on that particular model, and Erik was quick to recognise the first signs of falling in love. "What do you think?"

Erik had heard only good things about that particular model, and the most important thing was that Charles was happy with it. "We’ll take it," he told the stunned sales manager.

"That was quick," the man said, but when he saw Erik's expression he hastily added, "But sometimes, you know immediately when it’s the right one, right?"

The slow, beatific smile Charles gave Erik made his skin tingle all over, and Erik would have bought ten more cars just to see it again and again. "I don’t mind, Charles, I can pay--" Erik began, but a determined Charles plucked Erik’s wallet right out of his hands and slid out the AMEX instead, the sales manager watching all this with an amused expression.

"You always pay for everything else, it’s not fair to you," Charles chided him gently, before handing the card over to the cashier. "Besides, what is the joint account for if not for big purchases?"

Well, Charles did have a point. Erik reached over and squeezed his hand while the staff processed the payment, looking forward to driving out of the showroom in the brand new car.

* * * * *

There was something relaxing about grocery shopping that Charles liked, the aimless feeling of browsing the numerous aisles and picking out interesting, quixotic products that happened to catch his fancy. They were in the Whole Foods right smack in the middle of Union Square, shopping for supplies before heading up to Westchester. So far, their grocery cart was already half-filled with an array of sweet desserts (organic chocolate bars, ginger biscuits and gluten-free vanilla pudding) and Charles was idly wondering if Erik would violently object to having pudding licked off his skin.

"...things only. Am I right, Charles?"
Charles blinked, still caught in his pleasant daydream. “Sorry, what was that?”

Now Erik was shooting him this faintly amused look of exasperation. “I said, we can’t live only on sweets, Liebling. We need to get proper food as well.”

Charles looked down at their shopping cart. “Looks like proper food to me,” he said with a grin.

However, he wasn’t prepared for Erik stepping closer, his eyes hot as they raked over Charles’ body from head to toe, making him feel naked. Now he was leaning in, murmuring, “But Charles, we’ll need good food to keep up our stamina.” The dark heat in his eyes made it very clear just what they would need all that stamina for.

Not to be outwitted, Charles proved he was more than Erik’s equal as he slipped his hands under the hem of Erik’s shirt, sliding across his warm, flat stomach, his fingers tracing the narrow trail of dark hair disappearing under Erik’s pants. Charles ran his tongue over his bottom lip as he locked eyes with Erik, the heat between them fizzling like sparks off a grinding wheel. “Then we’d better stock up so we’ll barely need to leave the house,” he murmured back. “Or the bed.”

Erik’s mouth twitched here, and his ears were bright red. Charles didn’t even feel the hand on his waist until Erik used a belt loop to tug him forward, their bodies pressed flush together. “Who said we’ll be leaving the bed?”

Charles was unable to stop the barrage of images in his head of him and Erik tangled up in the sheets together, making love until they both collapsed from sheer, sweaty exhaustion. He was about to lean up and meet Erik’s already parted lips for a kiss when he heard the soft click of a camera phone, and both of them pulled back, a little dazed. In the same aisle was a group of teenage girls watching them eagerly, all of them brandishing their phones to take photos. “Now KISS!” one of them yelled, making her friends giggle.

Charles gamely smiled at them, while Erik rolled his eyes. “Have a good day, my dears,” he called out as he followed Erik, who was already pushing their cart away. The girls were now pouting, but Charles only spared them a wave as he caught up to Erik, who seemed a little irritated. “You can’t blame them, you know, we are rather recognisable,” Charles reminded him, wrapping an arm around Erik’s waist to soften his words.

Erik’s eyebrows drew together in displeasure. “I know, I just wish we had our privacy,” he said a little reluctantly, before coming to a stop in front of the wholewheat pasta section. “We should get some of this, right? It’s easy to cook, and I don’t care what my trainer says, I’m having carbs on my vacation.”

Charles answered this by loading their cart with various pasta shapes and bottles of ready-made sauce. “Life is short, darling. Besides, I have a feeling you’ll be burning all those carbs off in many different ways,” he said, giving Erik a sideways flirtatious smile.

Erik was now grinning again, his head tilted at Charles in what Raven called his ‘lovestruck look’. “I very much look forward to exploring these ways with you.”

They continued shopping for a while more, Charles religiously studying the ingredient labels while Erik read them over his shoulder, his chin a warm, familiar weight. Charles loved how they were always touching, as though they were both conductors of electricity and had to find some way to be connected to each other, by hook or by crook. The firm clasp of hands, the soft weight of Erik’s hand on the small of his back, the way Charles’ thumb would stroke the back of Erik’s knuckles... just non-sexual touches that felt like a different plane of communication, a non-verbal way of saying I’m-glad-you’re-here.
However, Charles practically lit up when they stumbled across the wine section, which was separate from the rest of the supermarket. It was all organic, of course, and Charles happily started loading their cart with various bottles of Californian wine. He pretended not to notice when he saw Erik’s raised eyebrows. “Are we really going to be drinking that much?” Erik said doubtfully. “And I don’t think we have space in the trunk.”

Charles tried to think of a feasible argument. “It’s all organic, and you know how doctors say drinking a glass of red wine every day is good for you.”

Erik eyed the bottles in the cart. “Yes Liebling, a glass, not a carton.”

“Stop exaggerating,” Charles said with a laugh, leaning up to give him a kiss on the lips, and it was easy to point out the exact moment Erik caved, his shoulders sagging with defeat.

“I suppose we could try and fit it in the trunk somehow,” he said with a sigh, as Charles grinned happily at him.

They headed for the cashier, paid and were heading for the exit with their groceries when there was a faint flash that temporarily paled Erik’s face. Now Erik was peering out at the street, his features tight with anger. “How the fuck did the paps know we’re here?”

Charles followed his gaze and saw a few photographers on the street outside, their motorbikes idling on the curb despite the busy traffic. Not this again, he groaned inwardly. He didn’t have that much of a problem with the press, but Erik hated them and it could all become a very unpleasant experience. As a woman walked past, carrying a bag of dog food, an idea popped up in his mind. Maybe Erik could be persuaded to be nice to the media? And Charles had a very pleasant and enjoyable bargaining chip up his sleeve.

You do realise you’re going to try and condition your boyfriend with sex to be nice to people, a voice in his head that sounded like Raven chided him. Charles didn’t feel guilty, though. He wanted people to see the nice, sweet side of Erik that came out whenever he was with Charles and have everyone understand that he was a wonderful man. And so what if this method felt a little like the experiment Pavlov conducted with his dogs?

“Erik?” Charles leaned up to whisper in his ear. “Be nice, all right? They’re just doing their jobs, it’s not like they invaded our home or anything.”

Erik’s mouth was still very tight. “But we can’t even go grocery shopping without them taking pictures all over the place!”

“Oh for God’s sake, Erik.” Charles thought for a while, then used his most sultry, seductive tone, the one he’d employ to get Erik into bed. “If you’re nice, I’ll make sure you’re rewarded later on.”

He could see faint stirrings of curiosity in Erik’s expression. “Reward? What kind of reward?”

Charles traced the lapels of Erik’s jacket with an amused smile, knowing exactly which of Erik’s buttons to push. “You know how I love having you in my mouth,” he whispered, wetting his lips and hearing Erik’s sharp intake of breath. “I know I normally can’t take all of you, but I think I’ve gotten enough practice deep-throating. Later, we can see how good I’ve gotten.”

Erik squeezed his eyes shut, his cheeks flushed with arousal. When he opened his eyes again, they were dark and dilated. “Deal.”

Charles almost wanted to jump for joy at how easy that was, and ultimately, it was a win-win situation for both of them. “Good boy,” he said with a sly smile, patting down Erik’s jacket. They
both nodded at each other, then stepped out into the chaos of camera flashes, and Charles was pleased to see Erik was smiling at the paps, his grip tightening on Charles’ hand.

* * * * *

Charles Xavier and Erik Lehnsherr - Domestic Bliss

Charles Xavier and I spotted at Whole Foc Tuesday (February 7

The couple were the they left with a shopp bags, while fans and pictures of the couple

PHOTOS: Check on Charles Xavier, Erik

Both actors have just on Bryan Singer’s la “First Class”, which i summer’s blockbuste

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Charles trailed the pads of his fingers idly over the back of Erik's hand, enjoying the familiar warm press on his thigh where Erik’s palm was resting. He'd missed going driving in Erik's car, a luxury they hadn't had since they started filming on location, Erik beside him the only constant as the rest of the world went flying by. They were already off the I-87 and making their way through upstate New York, the skyscrapers of Manhattan long gone from their rear-view mirror, replaced by low-lying hills and marshland. The country road was empty for the most part save for them, and Erik was breaking the speed limit a little, fast enough that Charles almost felt drunk whenever the view shifted.
abruptly due to the car drifting on a bend in the road. He listened contentedly to the quiet purr of the engine beneath the song playing on the radio, humming along as it faded out.

“And that was Lady Gaga with her number one smash hit, ‘Marry The Night’,,” the DJ cheerily announced. “And speaking of marrying, LGBT activists and supporters will be pleased to know that in California, the 9th Circuit Court has just ruled that Prop 8 is unconstitutional…”

“Wait,” Charles said sharply, turning up the volume for the radio. He was unsure whether he had misheard the news, but judging from the widening smile on Erik’s face, it seemed to be true. “Erik, did you hear that?”

Erik nodded, squeezing Charles’ knee in affirmation as they both listened to the DJ. “It’s a step in the right direction, at least.”

Charles had expected Erik to be just as ecstatic as him, which was why his lukewarm reaction was confusing. “Don’t you think it’s a triumph for civil rights?”

Erik conceded with a nod. “It is, but there’s still the Supreme Court, Charles, we can’t be too hasty.” He kept his eyes on the road, but his hand was still sprawled on Charles’ lap. “But I agree we’re getting somewhere. Changes in legislation, voters exercising their voice…that’s how it starts.”

Charles beamed at him, taking Erik’s hand and planting a long kiss on the back of it. “Say what you like, darling, it’s still a cause for celebration. So pull over.”


Laughing at Erik’s reluctance to stop the car, Charles wickedly decided to continue with his plan to celebrate. Undoing his seatbelt, he quickly reached over and unbuttoned Erik’s belt before unzipping his trousers, a familiar manoeuvre that took him less than five seconds to perform. “Charles?” Erik sounded confused as Charles eased out Erik’s cock. “What are you--”

The car almost swerved when Charles bent over and placed his mouth over his erection, taking in as much of Erik as he could, and he could hear Erik’s faint curses and shouting. “Fuck, Charles, what the-- oh God, your mouth--”

Charles’ only response was to suck harder, hollowing his cheeks as his tongue swirled around the head of Erik’s cock, and Erik let out a broken moan, his thighs trembling under Charles’ hands. Charles was only barely aware of the car skidding to a stop, and then Erik was unbuttoning his seatbelt, bucking up into Charles’ mouth with a low, desperate groan. “Oh God, Charles. You could have killed us, road safety is important…”

Charles pulled his mouth off, licking his abused lips and staring at Erik, who seemed to have melted into his seat. “The bad thing about the countryside is that no one can hear you if you scream.” Charles traced the wet curve of Erik’s lips. “The good thing about the countryside is that no one can hear you when you scream.”

Erik’s lips were now crooking up in a smile, inviting Charles to lean in for another kiss. “So no one can hear me screaming your name while I come down your throat?”

Charles could feel Erik’s fingers massaging the nape of his neck, making him moan slightly as he
ground down against Erik’s persistent erection. “Instead of coming down my throat, I have another idea,” he said, reaching for his bag and digging in it. He beamed when he pulled out the tube he had stashed there, pushing it into Erik’s hand. “You know, I’ve always enjoyed riding sleek, German things.”

They didn’t move from their impromptu parking spot for the next forty minutes, and there had been a point where Erik had mercilessly thrust up into him in retaliation for all his wriggling and teasing, sending Charles’ ass back into the steering wheel and likely traumatizing all of the local wildlife when the horn blared across the hitherto pristinely quiet landscape. Charles had collapsed in a fit of giggles, until Erik reminded him with his cock that leaving him hanging on the edge of orgasm should really be no laughing matter.

They finally had their clothes back on and were almost at their destination, their car now smelling of sex instead of brand new leather, not that Charles was complaining in the least. Erik slowed the car, frowning at the GPS. "I think the software isn’t updated, it doesn't show the road we're on," Erik muttered at the screen.

"That's because it's not a road," Charles replied, smiling coyly.

Erik raised a puzzled eyebrow at that but did not comment further, continuing up the driveway of the estate. It took them another good five minutes before they pulled up to the front of the mansion, and Charles caught Erik blinking as he quietly gaped at the building from the driver’s seat. Perhaps he should have filled Erik in on the property beforehand, but he had never really thought about it much, after all it was just another piece of land that his family owned. The Xaviers before him had a terrible penchant for flaunting their wealth with real estate, and this place was no exception.

“Come on, love,” Charles called as he climbed out of the car. Erik did as he was told, still staring mutely when Charles took his hand and walked them a few steps closer to the entrance.

“This is yours?” Erik finally asked incredulously, squinting slightly at the sprawling three-storey behemoth in the late afternoon sun.

He tilted his head up towards Erik and smiled fondly, squeezing his hand, “No, it’s ours.” Charles could almost feel the sudden inexplicable angina attacks his attorneys must be having right that moment somewhere in Manhattan, but should the day come and any of them suggest some form of prenuptial agreement, they could jolly well sod off.

Erik leaned down and placed a kiss on his temple before turning his attention back to the mansion, “When you told me that you had a place out in the country, you didn’t say it was Buckingham Palace.”

Charles laughed heartily at that, resting his head on Erik’s shoulder, “My grandfather left it to me, but I hardly ever come here. It’s my little slice of England.”

“Well, you definitely make a fucking sexier Prince Charles.” Erik quipped, smirking as Charles glanced up. Christ, that smirk never failed to make him want Erik, very badly. Charles liked to console himself by saying it wasn’t his fault that Erik was stupidly handsome and downright irresistible.

Charles dropped his voice, employing his most sultry tone as he breathed into Erik’s ear, “You know, I’m not sure how sturdy the furniture is, the place has been largely neglected for years. I think we should thoroughly test the condition of the beds.....and tables, and shelves, and any flat surface, really. In every room, for safety reasons.”
He felt a shudder run through Erik from where he was pressed against him, and Charles grinned triumphantly knowing that Erik very much agreed with his plan. He let out a surprised gasp when Erik lifted him cleanly off the ground in his arms, wrapping his own around Erik’s neck. Charles began mouthing along Erik’s jaw, sucking on his pulse point when he got to his throat. He felt Erik’s hold on him tighten in response as Erik quickened his pace towards the door, and Erik laughed as he bit back a moan, “I honestly don’t know how I’ll survive such hardship.”

**Notes:**
1. The title of this chapter is a quote from 'X-Men: First Class'.
2. The [TARDIS](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/TARDIS) is a Time and Relative Dimensions in Space machine from 'Doctor Who'.
4. Oceanic Airlines flight 815 is the plane that crashed in ‘Lost’.
5. Arthur and Eames are characters from ‘Inception’. Since their full names have never been revealed in canon, Clocks is referencing the names often used by her favourite Inception writer, [eleveninches](https://www.fanfiction.net/u/265074/), as an homage of sorts.
7. “Come back. Come back to me.” is a quote from ‘Atonement’, which starred James McAvoy.
8. Pictures of their baby [new car](https://www.cars.com/)
9. Proposition 8 was ruled unconstitutional on February 7th, 2012.
Chapter Summary

Charles and Erik set up their own little haven in Westchester, attempt to christen every room, and spend Valentine’s Day having an alarming amount of sex.

Chapter Notes

First of all, we would like to apologise for how late this chapter is! It was supposed to be updated just before the Oscars. Anyway, we should probably put a warning for the amount of domestic schmoop, sap and smut in this chapter because this instalment is overloaded with all three. Also, we would really like to thank the wonderful kannibal and xsilverdreamsx for their magnificent contribution to the fanart and fan mail that Erik and Charles receive while they’re in Westchester. Anyway, proceed at your own risk! We are not responsible for your dentist’s bill.

Soundtrack: Ingrid Michaelson - ‘You and I’
If someone had told Erik a few years ago that paradise existed only an hour north of New York City, he would have laughed in their face and told them that they were nuts. However, now he couldn’t imagine himself being anywhere else. Everything about the Westchester compound was beautiful, from the late neoclassical Baroque style foyer to the wide expanse of grassland and hills surrounding the structure. In fact, the sprawling mansion had so many rooms and areas that he hadn’t even seen yet.

Granted, Erik had only been interested in the rooms in the East Wing where Charles spent most of his time: the living room, the study, the kitchen and the master bedroom where Charles used to spend his summers. The study was Erik’s favourite so far; with its massive, antique fireplace, it was the perfect place for many, many rounds of fascinating chess games. Charles did try a few times to give Erik the complete royal tour of the mansion, but they always ended up getting distracted and making love on some stray couch, table or even the floor one cold afternoon.

“It’s all your fault, you know,” Erik told him as they both lay panting on the Persian silk carpet of the library, sweaty and trying to catch his breath. “Can you please try looking less irresistible?”

Charles sounded puzzled. “And how exactly do you want me to do that?”

Erik shrugged, mopping the sweat off his forehead with the back of his hand. “I don’t know, walk around wearing a paper bag over your head or something?”

Laughing, Charles rolled over and gave him an impish grin. “You’re a crazy man.”

Erik had a ready rebuttal, but it was swallowed in Charles’ earnest kiss, and who was he to argue?
He happily returned the kiss, and they forgot about the mock argument.

Now, after almost a week at Westchester, Erik still had not managed to see the entire mansion, but that was okay. He was enjoying their time alone together, and they were seldom disturbed by anyone except their part-time housekeeper (who had learned to stop screaming when finding underwear in strange places) and the gardener, a quiet Mexican man who kept to himself.

“Erik, you’d better teach me how to cook since your parents are coming to visit soon, I want to impress your mother,” Charles said one day after dinner as they lay sprawled on the sofa together, watching ‘The Voice’. Erik was secretly agreeing with Blake Shelton that the current contestant was crap, but Charles’ plaintive request made him tear his eyes away from the screen.

“Of course,” Erik said immediately, kissing the pink curve of Charles’ ear. “What do you want to learn how to cook?”

Charles pursed his mouth consideringly, and Erik couldn’t help but stare. “We’ll start with pasta, since that’s mostly what we bought in Whole Foods? And it’s also easy to start with.”

Erik grinned at him. “What will you give me if I agree to teach you? I don’t teach for free, you know.”

Laughing, Charles squirmed backwards so that his backside was rubbing against Erik, fitting perfectly in the cradle of his hips. “I’m sure I can think of some way to pay you.”

Erik’s breath hitched as he buried his nose in the dark silk of Charles’ hair. “I’m going to take a stand and say you’re not allowed to pay me with sex this time.”

The petulant sideways look Charles shot him was priceless. “Then what do you want from me?”

Erik’s mouth crooked up in a smile. “I want you to wear an apron.”

Charles raised his eyebrows at him. “That’s it? All right, sure.”

Erik’s thumb brushed against the small of his back, where his T-shirt had ridden up and exposed a lovely slice of pale, freckled skin. “And nothing else,” he added artfully.

“Oh.” Now Charles was turning a little more to study Erik’s face, his grin getting wider and wider. “Isn’t that dangerous? What about oil spatters or falling knives?”

Erik thought this over. “Damn, you’re right. All right, let’s forget that.” They both fell silent, watching as a contestant butchered yet another Adele song, and Erik suddenly had an idea, remembering how Charles had remarked earlier that week that Erik’s hair was getting too long. “I know, how about you give me a haircut, Liebling?” he asked.

This seemed to intrigue Charles, judging from the way he had twisted around to run his fingers through Erik’s hair. “You’d trust me with your hair?”

*I’d trust you with my life,* Erik thought, nuzzling against Charles’ hand. “Of course, I’m sure you’ll make me look dashing,” Erik teased him. “And even if I don’t, there’s no one here except you. So you’ll just have to learn to love me despite an ugly haircut.”

Charles pretended to scrunch up his nose. “I don’t know, I might have to leave you for our gardener. His haircut is quite dashing, don’t you agree?”

Erik tried his best to look indignant. “Charles, he’s bald!”
The corners of Charles’ mouth were turning up in a very valiant attempt not to smile. “I like bald men, I think they have a certain allure,” Charles said as seriously as he could, although he burst into laughter when Erik attacked him, wrapping his arms around him like an octopus.

“Okay fine, you win, I’ll teach you how to cook,” Erik said with a grin, before kissing him soundly, then rolling Charles under him and deepening their kiss, ‘The Voice’ forgotten.

* * * * *

Pasta was really one of the easiest things to cook, which was why Erik was confident that it would take only about an hour to show Charles how to make a decent plate of spaghetti. However, he hadn’t counted on Charles coming down to the kitchen wearing Erik’s favourite long-sleeved shirt, the first two buttons left unbuttoned and the sleeves rolled up to his elbows. Erik stared for a while, snapping out of it only when Charles waved a hand in front of his face. “Hello, Erik? Is anyone home?”

“Oh, sorry,” Erik said gruffly. He was tempted to steal a kiss, but he was afraid that the lesson would turn into another make-out session, so he cleared his throat, steeling his resolve. No, Charles did not look ridiculously handsome with his sleeves rolled up like that, smelling of his favourite cologne, his shirt tucked into dark jeans. Fuck, now Erik was thinking about untucking it. “Okay, let’s concentrate,” Erik said with determination, holding up the cast iron pot. “First, of course, you need to boil your water.”

Walking over to the sink, Erik turned on the tap and filled it up, but he almost dropped the pot when Charles’ body pressed him against the sink from behind, so warm and familiar. “How much water, love?” Charles asked, his voice practically dripping with innocence.

“Um, let me see.” Erik quickly turned off the tap before the water started overflowing out of the pot. “Since we’re cooking for two, a handful of spaghetti is enough, so just fill the pot up till here. Make sure it’s more than enough to cover the pasta.”

Charles was now slowly rubbing his cheek against Erik’s bicep as he peeped into the pot. “Okay, I get it. What else do we need?”

“Sex- um, I mean, salt,” Erik blurted out as Charles visibly bit back his laughter. “It definitely needs salt. Put in quite a generous pinch.”

“A generous pinch, I like that,” he heard Charles murmuring, and before he could ask why, he almost jumped when he felt Charles’ pinching his ass. “Oops, sorry.”

Erik closed his eyes and counted to five, willing his eager half-erection to die down so he wouldn’t jump on Charles halfway through the lesson. “If you do that again, I’m drowning you in the pot,” Erik said, trying to sound stern, but with the way Charles was grinning at him, he knew his ineffective threat had fallen on deaf ears.

Thankfully, Charles had decided to be merciful for now, keeping a respectable distance from Erik (if you could call five inches respectable, which Erik of course didn’t) and listening earnestly as Erik explained how to save time and get as much prep done as possible. “So, rather than boil the pasta and make the sauce, you can boil the water first, then do your sauce prep as you wait for the pasta to cook,” Erik told him. “Saves you at least 30 minutes, as long as you can keep your eye on the water.”

Charles eyed the water warily. “How long will all this take to boil?” he asked, a little frown appearing between his eyebrows.
“I’d say around less than ten minutes.” Erik patted him on the ass, forcing himself not to let his hand linger. “Go get the jars of pasta sauce, Liebling.”

Charles only shot him a look before shaking his head with a smile and going to retrieve the jars of organic sauce they had bought from Whole Foods last week. Erik tried not to stare at the cords of muscle in Charles’ bare arms which were flexing as he set the jars down, but the way Charles was smiling told Erik that Charles had definitely noticed his ogling.

“So what’s the next step?” Charles asked innocently, folding his arms deliberately in front of Erik.

“Please chop up the veal sausages so we can cook them in the sauce.” Erik opened a packet of pasta and shook out a handful of spaghetti strands, gauging that it should be enough for the two of them.

Now Charles was giving him a wicked grin. “Handling sausages is my specialty, darling.”

This time Erik did really drop half the spaghetti on the floor, cursing to himself as the yellow strands rolled away to corners unknown. Charles was laughing as he bent down to help Erik pick up the mess, and when he handed the dried spaghetti to Erik, he drew Erik in with his other hand and they kissed in the middle of the kitchen floor. Unfortunately, Charles pulled back before the kiss could deepen, but it didn’t stop Erik from slightly chasing after his mouth, a little drugged from the teasing kiss.

“Better throw those away, darling,” Charles said a little breathlessly, his fingers tracing the curve of Erik’s left ear. “You don’t want to eat food that’s dirty.”

It was a struggle for Erik not to push Charles down onto the floor and have his way with him there and then, and he took a deep breath before he shakily got to his feet, helping Charles up. “There are only certain things I like ‘dirty’, remember that,” he said with a sharky grin, giving Charles’ fantastic ass a squeeze. “Now, back to our lesson.”

Charles’ massive pout would have been funny if Erik hadn’t been so ridiculously horny, but miraculously they were able to get back on track with the lesson, Charles chopping up the veal sausages while Erik watched him, careful not to distract Charles so that he wouldn’t cut himself. But he couldn’t stop himself from looking, admiring the way Charles’ lashes fanned down as he concentrated on the chopping board. Charles really was extraordinarily handsome, and Erik was sure he would have hit on him if they had met at a bar in Los Angeles or something. That was, of course, after Erik had gotten rid of all his competition, because surely hundreds of people would be lining up to flirt with Charles Xavier.

“What are you thinking about?” Charles asked, sounding very amused. “You look like you’re deep in thought about something.”

Erik leaned forward, burying his nose in Charles’ hair. “Nothing, don’t let me distract you. Carry on.”

Charles shot him a knowing look, but he continued chopping anyway. Once they were done, Erik showed him how to drop in the spaghetti like a fistful of pick-up sticks, and then they started heating up the tomato sauce. “See? We’re almost done, easy peasy,” Erik said in triumph. “Think you can make this for my parents?”

“I definitely can,” Charles said confidently, but his eyes suddenly widened. “Um Erik, why is the pasta boiling over?”

Erik hurriedly lowered the temperature. He had been so busy staring at Charles that he hadn’t
realised the bubbling water was starting to foam with all that starch, the level rising higher and higher until he turned it down. “I forgot to tell you to lower the heat,” Erik said, rather embarrassed. “Also, you can put a tiny bit of oil in the water to stop it from boiling.”

Charles’ eyebrows shot up. “Oh, I didn’t know that.” He was biting his lip as he watched Erik drizzle a little olive oil into the water, and Erik was so distracted by Charles that he almost poured in the bottle.

“Oh, I didn’t know that.” He was biting his lip as he watched Erik drizzle a little olive oil into the water, and Erik was so distracted by Charles that he almost poured in the bottle.

“Oops, sorry,” he muttered as he put the cap back on, trying to ignore Charles’ wicked grin.

“I think it’s about done.” Charles leaned over to take a look, and Erik quickly reached for the tongs. “I like it al dente anyway.”

They ladled out the pasta into the waiting colander, and by now the sauce was almost done as well. “We’re nearly there,” Erik said, rather relieved that he hadn’t managed to burn the kitchen down in the process. “When you’re ready to eat, all we have to do is combine the pasta with the sauce. Are you hungry now?”

Charles put down the wooden spoon and stepped closer to Erik, sliding a hand down the front of Erik’s T-shirt. “Oh, I’m very hungry now,” he whispered, before taking Erik’s mouth in a mind-numbing kiss.

* * * * *

Soundtrack: Ella Fitzgerald - ‘Embraceable You’

After months of being surrounded by so many people - other actors, Bryan, Shaw, the crew, the writers, the extras - it was a bit of a relief to have so much peace and quiet. Of course, Erik’s parents visiting them at the mansion had been a nice welcome break, Edie shrieking when she saw Charles and wouldn’t let go of him, taking him around with her like a beloved toy. While Erik had been busy cooking, Charles had taken them on a tour around the mansion. Jakob had been his usual quiet self, although he had surprisingly chatted to Charles at length about the library and conservatory. Charles had been so proud to make them feel welcome in his family home, just like they had made him feel welcome in theirs. Erik of course had been happy to see his parents again, randomly hugging his mother and grabbing his father for one-armed hugs.

They had only been able to stay a few days, having to go further upstate to visit more relatives, but before she had left, Edie had pulled Charles aside and passed him a few of Erik’s childhood belongings: a duvet she had made for Erik, a dog-eared copy of ‘The Once and Future King’, as well as an old Bayern Munich football jersey he used to wear. Charles had sworn up and down that he would take care of these treasured items, and Edie had given him a brilliant trusting smile.

After they had left, Charles took the opportunity to enjoy the silence and solitude once again with Erik. His parents were lovely, but after all, they were here because they wanted some quiet time together. It was a blessed existence, getting to sleep in, watch TV while curled with Erik on the couch and improving his cooking skills, enjoying the look of pride on Erik’s face as he watched Charles in the kitchen. Still, Charles liked the methodical process of cooking, which often gave him time to think. Sometimes he left the radio on in the kitchen, especially when he was alone and Erik was off repairing something or getting groceries. Charles had found a great local station that broadcast oldies from the Fifties and Sixties, and he often sang along to Elvis and Buddy Holly while stirring a pot of pasta and chopping up vegetables.

Erik would sometimes come into the kitchen for a glass of lemonade, all sweaty and dirty from fixing up some part of the house, or refurbishing a piece of antique furniture that had not been properly
cared for by Charles’ predecessors. Whenever Erik came in, Charles always greeted him with a kiss or two, and it would often end up in Erik dropping to his knees or bending Charles over the counter. After a while, it simply made sense to leave a tube of lubricant in the kitchen drawer.

Today, however, Erik caught him off-guard by sneaking into the kitchen while Charles was slicing cherries for dessert, and he jumped a little when he felt Erik’s lips on his neck, his arms wrapping around Charles’ waist from behind. “What are you making?” Erik’s low rumble against the crook of his neck made Charles shiver.

“Well, originally I wanted to make cherry pie,” Charles said earnestly. “But the last time I tried to make a pie with your mother, we almost burned down the kitchen, so I’m playing it safe for now. Are you all right with dessert being just fresh cherries and cream?”

“Mmmm.” Erik nuzzled against his ear, and Charles bit back a moan when he felt Erik’s hips grinding against his own, his erection slowly stirring to life. “To be honest, I’ll always be of the opinion that the best dessert is you.”

Charles chuckled a little breathlessly as Erik began kissing his neck, his hand sliding under Charles’ apron. “You flatterer,” he whispered, although the hitch in his voice betrayed him when Erik’s hand slid under the waistband of his trousers. “Erik, you’re insatiable.”

“That was two hours ago.” Erik sounded so petulant that Charles wanted to laugh. “There’s nothing wrong with having sex a few times a day, it’s healthy.”

Charles turned his head a little so that Erik could kiss him properly, putting down the knife he was holding so that he didn’t accidentally slice his own hand open. “No wonder everyone else calls us perverts,” he said a little breathlessly, and Erik chuckled against his jaw, his kisses trailing down.

However, the familiar strains of a song on the radio caught Charles’ interest, and he perked up. “Wait, I love this song.”

Erik’s mouth and hands stilled as he listened carefully, and Charles could feel him smiling against the back of his neck. “Ah, Ella Fitzgerald,” he said, sounding pleased. “You have good taste, Liebling.”

“Of course I do,” Charles said haughtily, making Erik chuckle. “So come on, dance with me. I believe I owe you lessons.”

Erik moved back slightly, which gave Charles room to turn around and face him. Wiping his hands, Charles tossed the cloth aside and looked up at Erik, who was smiling down at Charles, his fingers carding through Charles’ hair gently. Erik didn’t even need to say ‘I love you’, because Charles could see it in the tender look in his eyes and the soft crooked smile on his face and most of all, the reverent way he held up Charles’ hand and kissed his fingers before pressing it against his own cheek. The slight stubble scraped against Charles’ palm, and Charles grinned like an idiot as Erik nuzzled against his hand.

Charles didn’t even realise they had began to sway slowly from side to side, and he sighed in contentment as he felt Erik’s hand sliding into the curved space of the small of his back, pushing Charles closer to him. Laughing, Charles leaned up and rewarded Erik with a chaste kiss, then pressed his cheek against Erik’s. Erik smelled like wood and sweat and grass, and Charles closed his eyes, recalling an image of Erik working hard in the heated greenhouse outside the conservatory. It was the perfect picture of domesticity, really, and he was reluctant to open his eyes when the song was over, the DJ spouting some facts about Ella Fitzgerald in the background.

He felt a kiss on his cheek, and smiled up at Erik, who was tucking Charles’ hair behind his ear.
“That was quite nice,” Erik admitted.

“I didn’t think a kitchen would be the perfect place for a slow dance, but I guess I was wrong,” Charles said with a chuckle. He looked down at the nearby electric kettle. “Do you want a cup of tea?”

Erik pressed a kiss to his nose. “Sit down, I’ll make some for you,” he insisted, pointing to the nearby kitchen table and chairs. “You’ve been cooking all day, you deserve a break.”

Well, Charles certainly wasn’t going to stop Erik if he wanted to make Charles a cup of tea. Taking a seat, he watched with an amused grin as Erik carefully measured out two scoops of Earl Grey tea leaves, then allowed the tea to steep just as Charles had taught him when they first moved in.

To be honest, back in the day when they hadn’t met yet and Charles had been fantasizing about what Erik was like in person, he would never have imagined Erik to be this quiet, domestic man who would gladly make tea for Charles. He smiled to himself as he continued watching Erik strain the tea leaves, unable to believe just how perfect their lives were now. It almost felt like this was all a reward for his long years of self-imposed abstinence and celibacy.

“What are you thinking about?” Erik sounded amused as he dumped the tea leaves onto a nearby piece of filter paper. “You look like you’re having a very pleasant daydream. I hope it’s about me.”

Charles grinned at him. “Of course it is.” His smile softened as he watched Erik pour the fragrant brown liquid into a cup, then carry it over to him. “I was just thinking that life is pretty fantastic now, compared to all those years I was alone.”

Erik’s eyebrows drew down, making him look a little unhappy. “I don’t like the thought of you being lonely.”

Charles sipped the tea, letting out a soft sigh at how good and strong it was. He set it down again, adding in lashings of milk and sugar. “I wasn’t quite lonely,” he corrected Erik, who raised his head. “I had all your movies in my collection.”

Chuckling, Erik walked over and knelt in between Charles’ legs, his fingers sifting through Charles’ hair. “I really wish I could have been there with you,” he said quietly, his gaze burning into Charles.

“In a way, you were.” Charles smiled before kissing him slowly, pressing their foreheads together. “All this was worth me living like a priest for five years.”

Erik huffed out a little laugh before kissing Charles one last time. “More tea, vicar?” he asked, getting back up again and smoothing down his shirt.

Charles grinned widely at him. “Don’t mind if I do.”

* * * * *

Erik rubbed his thumbs in circles over the dimples just above Charles’ bottom, hands taking the opportunity to squeeze the smooth mounds of flesh from time to time, enjoying the pleased sounds Charles was making as they lay entangled together among the sheets trying to catch their breaths. He had risen before Charles this morning and was more than happy to quietly lie on his side and watch him sleep, eyes lingering on Charles’ lips each time they quirked up while he was dreaming and wanting very much to just kiss him awake.

“Hey,” Charles had said when his eyelids eventually fluttered open, just above a whisper, and Erik had released the hand that had found Charles’ in their sleep to cradle the back of his love’s head as
he leaned forward to brush their lips together lightly.

“Would you be my Valentine?” Erik had asked once he pulled away, his tone laced with mirth, and Charles’ smile had broken into a grin before he laughed, unbridled and exuberant. Erik told himself he would give anything just to hear that sound all the days of his life.

Charles had held his face and kissed him then, punctuating each press of lips with a breathy “yes”, their kisses deepening when Erik rolled them over and pinned Charles into the pillows. Which was how they ended up like that, Erik melting into the bedding while Charles lay sprawled over him, their racing hearts beating in time with each other.

“I should get cleaned up, it seems I have a big date today,” Charles grinned, leaning up to claim Erik’s lips one last time as he eased himself off Erik’s cock. Erik’s eyes trailed from the pink crescent marks on Charles’ shoulders down the curve of his spine as Charles climbed out of their bed, his gaze lingering on the slick smeared down the inside of Charles’ thighs.

“I’m sure he wouldn’t mind at all if you turned up looking like this,” Erik called after him, and Charles threw him a smile over his shoulder before sliding into the en-suite bathroom. Erik heard the water running after a while, closing his eyes as he waited for Charles to go through his morning ablutions. This was going to take a while.

He must have dozed off because the next thing he knew, Charles was sitting beside him with a towel wrapped around his waist, wet hair clinging to the nape of his neck. “I hope you’re not worn out already, darling,” Charles remarked with a laugh.

“I was just conserving my energy for later,” Erik chuckled as he sat up to kiss the marks on Charles’ shoulder, blowing gently on them before making his way to the bathroom. He brushed his teeth and then examined his stubble in the ornate mirror, turning on the tap and rinsing his razor. His own was black and utilitarian, while Charles had one of those fancy new electric shavers. Yet another visible difference of their personalities: Erik preferred things clean and simple, while Charles liked things luxurious and expensive. It wasn’t something that would push them apart, but Erik liked knowing they were both independent individuals who kept their own opinions and preferences. Erik knew some couples who had the tendency to start aping each other in a relationship, and he didn’t like that.

Staring at his reflection in the mirror, he noticed that he was smiling to himself a little, eyes soft and relaxed, and it dawned on him that this was perhaps the look that Charles would mention sometimes, the one that always made Charles smile brightly and proceed to kiss him senseless. The man staring back at him was someone he was still getting acquainted with; this man loved deeper, treated people kinder, was on all accounts better, and would never have existed without Charles Xavier. A thought occurred to him: This was the first Valentine’s Day that Erik would be spending with someone he loved. While he had had previous relationships, none had ever lasted beyond four months, and none of them had been important enough for him to pull out all the stops on Valentine’s Day like he was going to, with Charles.

The widening smile on Erik’s face was making it hard for him to slather on the shaving cream. Charles was really his first love, the first one who mattered. And because of that, this was the first Valentine’s Day that was going to matter as well.

After shaving, Erik hopped into the shower, humming to an Adele song that was stuck in his head as he soaped himself up. The water was hot and pleasant, filling the massive shower stall with steam. It would have been nice to have Charles in here with him; Erik closed his eyes, thinking about pressing Charles up against the shower tiles, watching the water beading on his lashes before leaning in to kiss him. Still, he didn’t need to imagine Charles in here with him, not when he could just step outside and ambush the real article in their bed.
As he turned off the water and towelled himself dry, Erik noticed that the steam had fogged up the giant mirror, and he laughed when he saw the words that had appeared amidst the fog. Charles must have used shower gel or something else to write ‘I love you’ with his finger on the mirror in his messy, cursive script, and the steam had helped to enhance the words in stark contrast. Something deep inside Erik melted, making him smile like a lovesick fool.

Wrapping the towel around himself, he stepped out to find a grinning Charles sitting on the edge of their bed, wearing his favourite cardigan and linen trousers. “Find anything interesting inside there?” Charles asked innocently.

Erik pretended to look confused. “I think the shower fairy came and left me a message,” he said, sounding perplexed even as Charles laughed. “Someone wrote a note to say they loved me, I wonder who it could be.”

Charles grinned, his bottom lip tucked under his teeth. God, he looked so fucking gorgeous like this.

“Whoever it was, it sounds like they’re a genius.”

Erik slowly undid his towel, letting it fall to the floor as he stepped in front of Charles, bending down to claim his mouth in a slow kiss, slow enough that he could feel Charles sinking into it, sucking on the tip of Erik’s tongue. When they broke apart for air, Erik said quietly, “I love you, too. More than my heart can bear, sometimes.”

The soft smile Charles gave him was all he saw before Charles pulled him down into bed and rolled on top of him, resuming their kiss with gusto and tender affection. Erik returned his kisses in equal measure, untucking Charles’ shirt to paint a picture down the curve of Charles’ back with his fingertips as the fog on the looking glass faded away, those three words he saw written across his reflection lingering in a place far more permanent, given life only when graced by the breath from Charles’ lips as it ghosted across his skin.

* * * * *

For a long time, Charles had been pondering over what to get Erik for Valentine’s Day. Erik had insisted that he didn’t want any Valentine’s gifts except for Charles’ time, and although that had been very touching, Charles was still determined to get Erik something. After all, this was their first Valentine’s Day together, and Charles wasn’t going to let it pass without some kind of gesture on his part.

After leaving Erik that message on the bathroom mirror in the morning - which had been highly successful, by the way, if the tender lovemaking that had followed was any indication - Charles went to check on the box he had hidden in the study. The box was sleek and black, tied up with a lovely silver ribbon. He had ordered it online the very day they had moved in, and it hadn’t been easy, distracting Erik with sex so that he wouldn’t accidentally stumble across it in the cupboard.

He picked it up, excited that he could finally show Erik what he had gotten. “Where are you, darling?” Charles called out, sauntering down the corridor and peeping into the few rooms they had taken up residence in.

“Down here!” he heard Erik’s answering call from what sounded like the library. Picking up his pace, Charles headed straight there, grinning when he spotted Erik curled up in an armchair by the fire, reading a book. He looked up as Charles strode in, his smile lighting up his face completely, transforming his stern countenance. “I was wondering where you had run off to.”

Charles promptly perched himself on Erik’s lap, and it was amusing to see the way Erik’s nostrils flared, his breath hitching. There was a soft thump of his book hitting the floor that they both
ignored. “I went to get you this,” Charles said, handing over the sleek box with a kiss. “Happy Valentine’s Day, my love.”

Erik’s eyebrows jumped. “Oh Liebling, I told you that you didn’t need--”

“To be fair,” Charles said coyly, “this is as much a gift for me as it is for you.”

“Oh?” Erik seemed intrigued, tugging at the silver ribbon and pulling it off before he opened the box. At first he was frowning down at the dual rows of matte and glossy black pieces, and Charles couldn’t blame him for not recognising them immediately for what they were. “What are these?”

“It’s a chess set,” Charles said a little too gleefully, picking up a glossy rook. It was curved, black like volcanic glass, fitting nicely in the palm of Charles’ hand. “However, it is also something else.”

Erik raised an eyebrow at him, his warm hand sliding down Charles’ spine and stopping just at the small of his back, as though to both steady him and keep him close. “Oh, really? Maybe you could give me a clue.”

“All right.” Charles now couldn’t keep the smirk off his face anymore. “This chess set requires batteries.”

“Oh?” Erik was frowning in confusion until Charles ran the tip of the ‘rook’ down the length of his thigh, and then suddenly his jaw dropped. “Oh! Is this a chess set consisting of... sex toys?”

Erik’s reaction was both incredibly amused and stunned, but Charles could also see that the way that Erik’s breathing was getting heavier also meant this all turned him on. “Since we both enjoy playing chess together...” Charles paused here, biting his lip while locking eyes with Erik as he ran the chess piece up Erik’s chest. “...and other activities, I thought it would be fun to combine our hobbies into one gift.”

The corner of Erik’s mouth lifted in a crooked smile. “Kinky,” he breathed out, his breath warming Charles’ lips. “Care to give me a live demonstration?”

Charles was struggling not to forget his well-laid plans, letting the piece trace the curve of Erik’s lips. “I’d be more than happy to,” he murmured against Erik’s lips before they slowly kissed, the kinky chess set momentarily forgotten. Charles only remembered it when the box rattled on his own lap, and he pulled away before Erik started unbuckling his belt. “Come on, I owe you a live demo.”

“Wait a second.” Erik tugged him back and stole another kiss, his tongue sliding against Charles’ and curling a little around his, sending a wicked thrill down Charles’ spine. Erik’s breathing was getting heavier, his eyelids fluttering as he seduced Charles into letting out a low, keening moan. Charles could feel Erik’s thighs shifting apart and he gasped into the bruising kiss when he felt Erik’s heavy erection rubbing against his hip.

“Oh God, Eri--” Charles wasn’t even given the chance to finish his words as Erik took his mouth again, thrusting up against Charles’ hip and they were honest-to-goodness dry humping, grinding against each other through their clothes like a pair of teenagers in the backseat of a car discovering sex for the first time. Strangely enough, for Charles, it always felt like the first time with Erik, discovering something new and exciting and thrilling every time Erik laid his hands on him.

The box joined the book on the floor with a soft thump as Erik rocked up against Charles’ hips, the two of them just kissing, and Erik was getting sloppy because he was working on undoing Charles’ belt and his trousers. Charles remembered the ‘rook’ in his grip, warmed by his palm, and he smiled as he pressed the hidden button, feeling it buzz in his hand.
Erik broke off the kiss in a daze, staring down at Charles’ hand. “Is that—” he began, but his words were swallowed by Charles as he gripped Erik’s hair tightly with his other hand, yanking his head back and sucking on the bump of his Adam’s apple. Erik let out an agonised groan, clutching helplessly at the folds of Charles’ shirt, and when Charles was sure that Erik was properly distracted, he quietly undid the buttons of Erik’s jeans, then dragged down his zip.

When Charles slid in the vibrating chess piece into Erik’s underwear and pressed it against his rigid cock, Erik moaned so loudly that Charles was sure the windowpanes rattled, even if it was just his imagination. “Oh fucking-- Charles, oh my God--”

“Chess will never be the same again,” Charles mouthed against the lean muscle of Erik’s neck, and he began to move the vibrator up and down, grinning when he heard Erik’s helpless choked groans, as well as Erik’s hands sliding into his hair, his nails raking against Charles’ scalp and turning him on even more.

“Charles,” Erik moaned, and suddenly his breath hitched as his hips bucked up, and Charles felt a burst of warmth against his hand. Erik was gasping for breath, his entire face reddened as he slowly relaxed into the armchair, still panting. Aware of how sensitive Erik’s cock would be after coming, Charles quickly removed his hand and tossed the vibrator aside, wiping his hand off on his own shirt.

Blinking in a daze, Erik recovered enough to fully undo Charles’ trousers and slide his hand in, his long elegant fingers wrapping around Charles’ rock hard erection and gripping him firmly with a smirk. Charles grabbed him for a messy kiss, rocking up into Erik’s grip before spurting into his hand, moaning Erik’s name into his mouth.

“Oh, God...” Charles slumped into Erik’s arms, both of them still trying to recover, their chests heaving. “Chess set...worth its weight in gold...”

“I know.” Erik sounded too entirely smug for his own good as he stroked Charles’ hair with his free hand. “Can’t wait to try the other pieces.”

“Me too, darling.”

* * * * *

Erik was proving to be quite the handyman during their days in Westchester, fixing little bits and bobs that had been neglected for years. Charles employed a local caretaker to pop in and take a look at the mansion a few times a week, and once a month she brought along an army of cleaners with her. They always did a fantastic job, but it was inevitable that a few things had fallen into disrepair during Charles’ long absence. For example, the hot water tap in the west kitchen didn’t work, and the top drawer of the ancient wooden desk in his father’s study had been jammed for years.

The satellite dish had also conked out a long time ago, robbing them of cable access. That morning on Valentine’s Day, while huddled together on the sofa and watching a terrible Mexican soap, Charles made an offhand remark that he missed watching the Food Network. Erik nodded, looking especially contemplative. Charles hadn’t thought any more of it, which was why it had been a huge surprise to find Erik later in the afternoon on the roof with his tools. Charles climbed up as well, squinting in the sun as he shielded his eyes. The entire roof was humongous and divided into sections, and Erik was near the TV antenna, turning the satellite dish back and forth with his hands. “Erik? What are you up to?”

Erik simply grinned at him as he picked up a screwdriver and started tightening one of the screws in the base. “You were complaining about missing your favourite shows, so I thought I’d take a look at this before you miss another episode of Top Chef.”
Charles returned his smirk as he folded his arms, watching Erik. “You’re so good to me.”

Erik’s smirk widened. “You do know I’m only doing this for sex, right?”

Letting out a laugh, Charles just grinned flirtatiously at Erik. “And you do know just telling me that ruined all chances of you getting any, right?”

Erik sighed dramatically as he put aside the screwdriver. “Damn, why did I open my big mouth?”

Charles smiled to himself, thinking over what they had done last night. “You do indeed have a big mouth, I can vouch for that.”

Erik grinned even wider as he mopped his forehead with the back of his hand, his gaze slowly roving down the length of Charles’ body. “Anyway, I think the dish should be working now, why don’t you try and take a look?”

“Definitely.” However, before Charles left, he closed the distance between them and tugged Erik down by the folds of his old T-shirt, capturing his mouth for a slow, thorough kiss. When they broke apart, Erik was blinking, as though he had completely forgotten why they were on the roof. Charles brushed his thumbs against Erik’s cheekbones, nuzzling his lips. “Thank you for fixing this for me,” he murmured.

“You’re very welcome.” Erik stole one last kiss before patting Charles on the ass. “Now go check and tell me if it’s still on the fritz.”

Charles obediently went downstairs to the living room, turning on the telly and flipping to the satellite channels. He let out a whoop of joy when he saw that they were all functioning, and he quickly whipped out his phone to call Erik. “They’re all working, you brilliant genius,” he said with a grin.

“What? Without me?” Charles teased him, enjoying the rich, low sound of Erik’s laughter on the phone. “Erik, I’m hurt.”

“Mmmm.” Erik’s voice dropped an octave. “Well, that’s my cue to come down and kiss you all better.”

Charles looked around for the nearest flat surface, which was an ancient cream chaise lounge that had belonged to his grandparents. “Then I’m looking forward to it,” Charles purred, sprawling himself on the chaise lounge and waiting for Erik to come down from the roof, intending to repay him for all his hard work. Of course, when Erik finally came down, all sweaty and dirty, it was perfectly understandable that Charles couldn’t keep his hands off him, and he made sure Erik was thoroughly and truly rewarded.

Besides, stains on chaise lounges could always be removed later on.

* * * * *

Soundtrack: Etta James - ‘At Last’

Erik had all sorts of grand plans for Valentine’s Day dinner, even considering the possibility of hiring a helicopter to fly Charles somewhere special in the country, but Charles had pleaded that he would rather stay in Westchester with Erik and have a simple meal together instead of eating in some fancy
They cooked together, Charles rolling the kosher meatballs while Erik prepared the spaghetti and pasta sauce. It took longer than usual, because they kept stopping to laugh and trade kisses, and Erik almost burnt the sauce because he couldn’t take his eyes off Charles. Then they sat on the indoor balcony (which was thankfully heated) talking and occasionally feeding each other. “We should do the Lady and the Tramp spaghetti thing,” Charles said with a grin picking up a strand of spaghetti with his fingers. “Come on, darling. Open your mouth.”

Erik obeyed of course, as he always did whenever Charles told him to do something or other with his mouth. Laughing, Charles placed one end of the spaghetti strand in Erik’s mouth, then started chewing on the other end. They both started chuckling as they started drawing closer and closer together, their lips finally meeting once the pasta was gone. “Mmm, you taste much better than the food,” Charles whispered, and Erik grinned widely.

After eating and sharing a bottle of excellent merlot, Erik excused himself to go to the bathroom. As Charles relaxed in his chair, Erik quickly took a detour and headed to the library, where he had hidden Charles’ present. It was quite bulky and heavy, and Erik had invested a lot of time in it, but it would be well worth it just to see Charles’ reaction.

Erik carefully shifted out the antique record player, making sure that everything was in perfect condition as he had left it. The record player hadn’t been in working order when Charles had spotted it a week ago at an antique store in the village, both of them walking arm in arm and just window shopping. “Oh Erik, isn’t that a beautiful antique model? They don’t make them that way anymore,” Charles had told him, and Erik had noted the wistful look in his eyes, and the longing in his voice had been hard to miss as well.

That had resulted in Erik sneaking back to the store the next afternoon and buying the record player, even though the owner had warned him that it wasn’t working anymore. Determined to make Charles happy, Erik had spent the rest of the week fiddling with the device and trying to fix it so it could play records again. That had been very hard because both of them never kept any secrets from each other, and it had been quite difficult - but not impossible - to hide his endeavour from Charles.

Thankfully, Erik was able to get it working by the time Valentine’s Day rolled around, and he couldn’t think of a more perfect present. Lifting it with a huff, he carried the player to the conservatory, where Charles still lolled around on the balcony, looking up at the stars through the window. His eyes widened with surprise when he saw the player in Erik’s arms. “What is that, darling?”

“Find this familiar?” Erik was ridiculously pleased when he saw the way Charles’ jaw dropped open, his hand reverently reaching out to touch the edges of the record player.

“Wasn’t this the one we saw in the village last week?” Charles asked in wonder. “How did you-- I didn’t even notice...”

“I have my ways, of course,” Erik said smugly, right before the wind was knocked out of him by Charles flinging his arms around Erik’s neck for a deep, intensely grateful kiss. Erik was grinning like a madman when Charles pulled away, beaming at Erik in gratitude.

“Happy Valentine’s Day, Liebling,” Erik said, brushing his fingers through Charles’ soft dark hair, pressing their foreheads together. He could feel Charles’ hand seeking out his own, and they just stood there for a long moment, just holding onto each other. Erik wasn’t an idiot; he knew how lucky he had been to find someone who made him as happy as Charles made him. Many people went...
Charles was the one who broke the silence, his voice a little hoarse with emotion. “Come on, let’s test it out,” he said gently, and Erik followed him to the shelves where Charles kept his record collection. Eventually pulling out an Etta James record, Charles slid out the sleek black vinyl and loaded it gingerly on the turntable, placing the tracking needle on it. When the music began to play, Erik hummed along to the familiar swell of strings on the introduction for ‘At Last’.

“Will you do me the honour?” Erik asked, holding out his hand in a request for a dance like the Victorian gentlemen of yore. Charles graciously took his hand, pressing himself up against Erik from chest to thigh, sliding an arm around Erik’s waist. Erik gladly reciprocated, his hand sprawled over the small of Charles’ back. Then they began swaying slowly from side to side, in time to the song and the soaring vocals of Etta James.

*The night I looked at you*
I found a dream that I could speak to
A dream that I can call my own.

“*Charles.*” Erik breathed the word out into Charles’ hair, feeling Charles’ arms around him tighten in response. The depth of feeling for this man scared him, but in a good way, making him giddy and breathless. Erik loved him with every atom of his body. It was all-consuming and terrifying and overwhelming, and Erik didn’t know what he would do if he ever lost Charles. He simply held Charles tighter, pressing his cheek against his hair, smelling the familiar aromatic and mildly citrus scent of the bergamot shampoo Charles used.

“I love you, Erik,” he heard Charles say, and he pulled away so they could look at each other. Charles had the softest smile, his eyes so vulnerable as he stared straight at Erik, fingers carding through Erik’s hair. “I love you so much.”

Erik leaned in, his forehead pressed against Charles’. “You’re my life,” he whispered, before closing the remaining few inches between their mouths and kissing Charles deeply, both of them still swaying to the song. Erik traced the seam of Charles’ lips with his tongue before pulling away, both of them a little breathless. “I can’t imagine my life without you in it,” he said in a low voice. “Don’t ever leave me.”

“Never,” Charles said immediately before reclaiming Erik’s mouth in a second kiss. The record player was now playing the next song, but Erik barely noticed, too caught up in the way Charles was trying to possess his mouth. He felt himself being pushed backwards, and he smiled when his ass collided with the massive oak desk, levelling himself on it so he could grab Charles closer and kiss him even harder.

They were still kissing when the record finished playing, and Erik was blinking in a daze. Had three songs really gone by already? When they pulled apart for breath, Charles was smiling, touching his red puffy lips. Erik couldn’t stop staring at them, remembering how he was the one who had made them this way. “What am I going to do with you?” Charles mused, shifting forward so that Erik was sprawled on top of the desk. He could feel the outline of Charles’ erection in his trousers, pressed against his hip. “I’ve got a beautiful man in my arms, and no bed in sight.”

Erik’s face fell. “And no lube, too,” he added, watching as Charles’ eyebrows drew together in a frown. “Otherwise, this man wouldn’t mind if you pushed him on top of the desk and rode him like a crazed cowboy.”

Charles threw back his head in a delighted laugh, stroking the collar of Erik’s shirt. The feeling of his thumbs smoothing across Erik’s collarbone made him shiver. “Then we should probably go find
some lube, shouldn’t we?” Charles said with a sly smile. “And a big, giant bed. I wonder where we could find these things.”

Erik pretended to think hard, which was quite a feat as Charles was now kissing his neck. “I know we might have a giant bed upstairs,” he said wonderingly. “And there might be a tube of lubricant there or five.”

He could feel Charles chuckling against the crook of his neck. “Then maybe we should make our way there?” he suggested, punctuating every word with a soft kiss. Suddenly, his smile widened and turned a little naughty as he placed a hand on Erik’s chest. “Actually, wait here for a while. Let me go upstairs first and take care of something. Come up when I text you?”

Erik raised an eyebrow at him. “Why do I have the feeling you’re up to something?”

He was not prepared for the way Charles suddenly slipped his tongue inside Erik’s mouth, tasting every inch of it before pulling away, a strand of saliva hanging between them. With the way all his blood was currently rushing south, Erik could barely think. “Um. Uh, okay, do what you have to do,” he murmured, still staring at Charles’ lips.

“Good.” Charles flashed him one last grin before backing away and heading upstairs, leaving Erik alone with his lust-clouded thoughts. Charles’ scent still lingered in the room and on his clothes, and Erik plucked at his turtleneck, lifting it to his nose to take a good whiff. Yes, definitely Charles’ clean, warm scent. Erik shook his head with a sigh. He was so fucking hopeless.

Deciding to make himself useful, he unplugged the record player and set it aside carefully, covering it with a piece of fabric he found on the sofa. He was almost done when he felt his phone vibrate in his pocket, and smiled when he saw it was Charles: “I’m ready, come get me ;)))”

Chuckling to himself, Erik headed out and climbed the stairs two at a time, looking forward to the surprise Charles had in store for him. So far it had already been a day full of surprises, from his very pleasant morning wake-up call to Charles’ gifts to the wonderful, sweet notes that Charles had been leaving for him all over the house, written on yellow Post-Its. Erik smiled, thinking over the ones he had really liked. He had found, ‘I want to spend the rest of my days with you’ tucked somewhere into the cat calendar Raven had given them for Christmas, and also, ‘If a picture paints a thousand words, a thousand pictures will not be enough to encapsulate what I feel for you,’ pasted on the frame of Erik’s favourite painting, a post-modern rendering of a sunset. Erik had kept all the notes in his wallet, right beside his various pictures of a smiling Charles.

When he got to the bedroom, he heard muffled soothing music coming from behind the closed door. Pushing it open, his mouth dropped open at the visual feast that greeted his eyes: A completely naked Charles, sprawled on top of a red and purple duvet, his crotch covered with a large bouquet of red, red roses. There were rose petals scattered everywhere, as well as a few lit candles perched on a nearby shelf. “Happy Valentine’s Day,” Charles said with a smile, which was just this side of naughty.

Erik had to take a deep breath and calm down, or else he would come in his pants. “Wow,” he finally said, shaking his head in wonder. “You’re....wow.”

“Aren’t you going to come here and unwrap your present?” Charles grinned at Erik as he picked up a single long-stemmed rose and teased it against his lips, which were almost the same shade of red. Erik just stood there and stared; he was so hard that he felt like his pants were going to burst at the seams.

Stepping forward and closing the door behind him, Erik slowly started to peel off his turtleneck,
appreciating the slight hitch of Charles’ breath as he revealed his bare torso. Flashing a crooked grin at Charles, Erik started unbuckling his belt, then shucked his pants and briefs. He caught Charles licking his lips as his gaze fixated on Erik’s erection, which was already curving up towards his belly. A common affliction, whenever Charles was present.

Erik gave his cock a slow stroke, his eyes roaming over all that pale, creamy skin that had a hint of a rosy blush to it. Best of all, there were red marks peppered all over Charles’ body: the reddened teeth-marks on his shoulders, the hickeys along the curve of his neck from hours of slow necking, the fading handprints on his thighs the exact same shape and size of Erik’s hands.

Finally, Erik’s eyes met Charles’ own: a stormy, intense blue, the pupils so dilated that Charles’ eyes almost looked black. He must be as turned on by this as Erik was.

“Come here, darling,” Charles said, his voice hoarse with want.

Erik went.

* * * * *

It was a long shot, preparing himself like this and covering himself with roses for Valentine’s Day. But Charles trusted Erik not to find it corny, or even if he did, not to laugh at him. However, it seemed to work: Erik took less than thirty seconds to shed his clothes, and was now appreciatively raking his eyes over Charles’ naked body, his tongue absently darting out to run over his bottom lip.

When Charles called him forward, Erik got to his knees, bending down to hover over Charles and kissing him gently, nipping at his lips. When Charles let out the softest, strangled moan, Erik pulled away, staring at Charles’ mouth and murmuring, “So red,” in a daze. Then he was kissing his way down Charles’ chest, taking a detour to kiss and suck on each of his nipples. Charles tugged on the hair at the back of Erik’s head, tightening his grip to show that he liked it. Judging from the drop of precome that rolled off the tip of Erik’s cock and onto Charles’ stomach, Erik seemed to like it, too.

“I want you to pull harder later, okay?” he whispered.

“When?” Charles asked, curious.

Erik only shot him a mysterious grin before moving down, nuzzling his belly lovingly. Charles had been feeling rather self-conscious about this area, wondering if he had put on a few pounds, but the way Erik was licking and kissing his belly put all his fears to rest. He stroked Erik’s hair, smiling when he remembered the trim he had given Erik a couple of days ago that had involved a lot of touching and an extended scalp massage that had resulted in them having sex right then and there in the chair and Erik declaring that he was never returning to his regular hairstylist again. Charles had left Erik’s fringe long as he enjoyed the way it curtained his face when Erik braced himself over him as they made love, and of course he also could never resist pulling on it in response to Erik’s terribly devastating mouth. He did so now, and Charles could feel his cock getting harder, the head nudging against the stems of the roses.

However, Erik was now slowly removing the roses one by one, grinning up at Charles as he made himself comfortable between Charles’ legs. When he came to the last rose, he didn’t put it aside, still holding onto it as he examined it carefully. “Glad to see these don’t have thorns,” Erik said, twirling the stalk in his hands.

Charles shifted a little, spreading his legs wider so he could accommodate Erik’s broad shoulders. “Oh? What would you do if they had thorns?” he asked with a grin.

Erik looked thoughtful. “Kill the florist,” he said with a chuckle as Charles laughed. “And then I’d
kiss you all better.”

Charles let the pads of his fingers slide along Erik’s scalp, making him shiver. “I don’t have to be hurt for you to kiss me all better.”

Erik’s generous mouth quirked up into a crooked smile. “That’s true.” He let the rose dip down, trailing its soft red petals against the base of Charles’ eager cock. It felt like the smoothest velvet, and Charles couldn’t help arching up against the feather-light touch, biting back a moan.

“Don’t hold back,” Erik commanded, still trailing the rose up and down Charles’ erection. “You know I love the noises you make in bed.”

Charles grinned, sliding a foot up and down Erik’s back. “Only you can make me produce them.”

“Good.” There was a possessive undertone in Erik’s voice that just made Charles even harder, if possible. Now he was lowering his mouth, teasing the head of Charles’ cock with the soft rose petals.

Charles’ fingers tightened in Erik’s hair, his breath now coming in shallow pants. “Oh God, Erik, please, please, please, I want to feel you--”

Erik only smiled before he brushed his lips against the tip of Charles’ cock, leaving a smear of pre-come on his chin. “You always taste so good,” Erik murmured, before bestowing a series of reverent kisses on the tip of his erection, loving and gentle. “Always love having you in my mouth.”

“God, yes...” Charles bit down on his lower lip as Erik started sucking on the head, his low moan rumbling around Charles’ cock and causing excruciatingly pleasant vibrations. Charles wasn’t as big as Erik, of course, but he was still a decent size, at least decent enough to make Erik walk funny after the first time Erik had bottomed. Now, with lots of practice, Erik could take almost all of Charles into his mouth, and that was exactly what he did without warning now, his mouth a smooth, slow glide over Charles’ cock, and Charles was shouting at the warm, heavenly heat of Erik’s mouth enveloping him. “Oh my God, Erik, yes, yes--“

Erik tugged on his wrist, and Charles remembered what he had said earlier about gripping tighter. Well, he didn’t need to be asked twice. Charles tugged on Erik’s hair, pumping into his mouth with wanton pleasure, greedily drinking in the sight of Erik’s cheeks hollowed as he continued to suck Charles.

“Erik, Erik, oh fuck yes, Erik--“ Charles was gasping for air, and he let out a high, keening moan when he felt Erik’s fingers searching out his entrance, circling carefully before sliding into him, two at a time. Charles was glad he had thought ahead to prep himself with lube before calling Erik to come up, and he could tell the exact moment Erik discovered that Charles was already prepared. Erik let out a loud moan around Charles’ cock, his elegant long fingers scissoring in before curling at that spot and making Charles curse and pant. He could also see Erik thrusting his hips against the duvet, desperate for any friction, and Charles really wanted to make love to him right now, to feel Erik inside him and their hands linked together.

“Erik, wait,” Charles managed to call out, fighting down the imminent orgasm building at the base of his spine. Erik released his cock with a slow ‘pop’, looking up at Charles enquiringly. “Erik, I want you inside me, please,” he pleaded, palming the side of Erik’s face gently.

“As you wish,” Erik said, his voice hoarse from taking Charles almost all the way in, and Charles wasted no time in yanking him up and tonguing his abused mouth for a wanton kiss. He could taste himself in Erik’s mouth, and this made him drag his nails down Erik’s sweaty back, making him
“Erik, please fuck me,” Charles pleaded, and Erik quickly nodded, spreading open Charles’ legs and guiding himself in. Charles felt his eyes go wide as Erik slid into him, the head popping past the ring of muscle, and then Charles relaxed as Erik began kissing him tenderly, stroking his hair back as he sucked on the tip of Charles’ tongue.

When they broke apart for air, Charles twined his fingers with Erik’s, then pressed it against his chest, right above his hammering heart. “I love you,” Charles murmured, eyes locked with Erik’s, not that Erik ever took his eyes off Charles.

“Love you, too.” Erik nuzzled against his cheek, peppering kisses all over his face before his hips snapped forward in urgent thrusts, which was how Charles could tell that Erik was close to coming. Charles let himself go, giving in to the glorious orgasm curling in his midsection, his legs cradled around Erik’s pumping hips, the sweet scent of crushed rose petals in the air. Erik’s breaths were ragged, his face flushed red as he began huffing out Charles’ name, his fingers squeezing Charles’.

“Oh God–” Charles slammed his eyes shut as he arched up against Erik, spilling wetly between both their bellies as he completely unravelled in Erik’s arms, voice hoarse from shouting Erik’s name. Erik followed only a split second later, driving into Charles with a final thrust so hard that it sent the duvet askew, burying his face in Charles’ shoulder as he came inside Charles with a loud shout of his name. Charles trembled as his eyes rolled back when he felt Erik spill hot and wet inside him.

Their hands were still entwined as they both lay there, Erik still on top of Charles, both trying to recover their breath. “Wow,” Erik said, still breathless as he shifted slightly. “Just....wow.”

“I know.” Charles chuckled, squeezing Erik’s hand tighter. They lay there for a while, and Erik rested his head on Charles’ shoulder, grinning widely.

“Your heart’s still pounding like a drum,” Erik said with a laugh, dropping a kiss to Charles’ chest. However, he was now raising his head, taking a look around them curiously. “You know, this duvet is kind of familiar.”

Charles pretended to look as innocent as possible. “Is it now?”

He could see the moment realisation dawned on Erik’s face. “This is the duvet my mother made for me when I was 15! She asked me what colours I liked, and I told her red and purple.”

Charles’s mouth was an open ‘O’ of understanding. “That explains the retina-searing colour clash,” he deadpanned, making Erik narrow his eyes at him.

“Red and purple are a fantastic combination, you know,” Erik grumbled, resting his head on Charles’ shoulder now. “They’re both strong, manly colours.”

Charles let out a sigh. “Oh darling, your fashion sense is intolerable. It’s fortunate that you are good in bed,” he teased, laughing when Erik gently butted against his shoulder.

“Well, a happy Valentine’s Day to you too, Liebling.” A quick glance downwards showed that Erik was smiling, though, and Charles pressed a kiss to the top of Erik’s rumpled head.

“Happy Valentine’s Day to you too, darling.”

* * * *

Raven had been invited back to Charles’ house in Westchester before, but they hadn’t been able to
spare the time to go, and then Charles’ career had taken off at breakneck speed five years ago. Now she was finally able to make a visit with Hank in tow, stopping at North Salem and staying with Charles and Erik for a while before they continued up to Canada to meet her family. Raven was a little nervous about that, but she had every confidence that her father would like Hank far more than some of the ‘tattooed deviants’ she had brought home before.

However, her jaw dropped when the cab trundled up the gravel driveway to the fucking enormous mansion, far bigger than she had been led to believe. Charles had probably been trying to be modest all these years, calling it “the house in upstate New York” or “my place in the country”, and Raven was knocked clean off her feet. Judging from the way Hank’s jaw was currently unhinged, he was pretty blown away as well. “You didn’t tell me Charles lived in a palace,” he whispered to her.

“Believe me, this is news to me, too.” They both continued to gape until the cab driver came to a stop at the end of the driveway, and Raven blinked when the driver cleared his throat for the umpteenth time. “Oh, sorry.”

As Hank was paying the driver, Raven spotted a beaming Charles in the doorway, running out to the cab. “You made it!” he yelled by way of greeting, flinging his arms around her as he laughed. She hugged him back tightly, her bag squashed between them, and she could make out Erik’s taller figure coming up right behind Charles, gently rescuing her bag with a low chuckle.

“I’ll take care of the bags while you two catch up,” Erik said dryly as he picked up another suitcase, and Raven saw him give Hank a cordial nod. Oddly enough, at this point Charles cleared his throat loudly, and this made Erik stop and smile at Hank, putting down a bag and patting him on the shoulder. “You look good, man.”

“Uh, thanks.” Hank was a little suspicious, exchanging a confused look with Raven who simply shrugged. Charles wrapped an arm around her waist and they happily waltzed into the house together side by side, even though Raven was secretly wondering what the hell she had just witnessed.

“So how’s married life?” she asked teasingly, laughing when Charles turned a nice shade of scarlet. Erik, however, looked ridiculously happy at this, his smile widening from ear to ear.

“Don’t be silly, Raven.” Charles smacked her on the arm before tugging her into the hallway, and Raven was stunned by the lovely antiques lining the corridors. Hank was right behind her, gawking at everything with an open mouth, and of course Erik was the only one who wasn’t looking at the house, his eyes solely trained on Charles’ ass in front of him. Raven rolled her eyes, secretly amused.

“Let’s take a walk to your room, and then you’ll get a royal tour of Casa De Charles and Erik.” Charles wiggled his eyebrows at them as he led everyone upstairs, and on the second floor, there was an endless row of doors leading to various rooms. No matter how hard Raven tried, she couldn’t even make out the end of the corridor, which seemed to stretch on forever.

“What is down there?” she asked Erik, who was beside her. At his doubtful look, she frowned at him. “Surely you’ve already explored the whole place, right?”

Now it was Charles’ turn to look doubtful. “Um, well, you see, the thing is--”

It suddenly hit her like a ton of bricks. “Oh, my God. What have you two been doing for two whole weeks?”

While Charles and Erik both turned an interesting shade of pink, Hank simply wore an understanding grimace. “Raven, you’d better not go down that road,” he warned her.
Raven held up her hands in surrender. “All right, all right, the less I know, the better. Right?”

Charles tugged her towards him and pressed a kiss to her temple. “That’s my girl,” he said with a wink as he swung open the door to the guest room.

“Also, knock before entering any room,” Erik reminded her. “That also includes the laundry room, the kitchen, the conservatory...”

“Don’t forget the library, darling,” Charles chimed in, and Erik nodded with an ‘ah’. Hank simply looked as though he was going to faint.

“Rrrright.” Raven raised her eyebrows, turning to Hank. “Do you think if we run down the driveway, we’ll be able to catch up to the cab that just left?”

“Oh come now, we’re not that bad,” Charles chided her, taking one of her bags from Erik and putting it down by the bed. “We’re going to have a wonderful time here, wait until you see the rest of the mansion!” He started counting off his fingers. “We have a pool, an indoor gym, a basketball court—”

“Basketball?” Hank interrupted, smiling for the first time that day, his eyes lighting up. “I love basketball, maybe we can get in a game sometime.”

Raven loved it whenever she got to witness Hank being excited about something. He would get this goofy little grin and start talking really fast, the exact opposite of his normal quiet and reticent self. Even Erik seemed surprised, raising his eyebrows at Hank who was bouncing on the balls of his feet, and Charles was just smirking at her, hands in his pockets. Crap, had she been caught staring adoringly at Hank again?

“Well, I think we should definitely have a match,” Erik said, depositing the rest of their bags near the wardrobe before checking his watch. “We’ll let you guys get settled in, and then we’ll meet you at the court at three?”

“Three-thirty,” Charles said quickly, giving Erik a knowing smile, and Raven could see the exact moment the lightbulb went on over Erik’s head before he returned Charles’ smile.

“Three-thirty it is.” Raven’s smirk was bigger than Charles’. “Don’t be so blissfully incoherent that you forget the time! Hank and I are so going to kick your asses.”

“We’ll see about that, my dear.” Charles went over to where Erik was standing, wrapping an arm around Erik’s waist and looking very at home there. Erik chuckled, bending down and pressing a kiss to Charles’ lips, and of course Charles wouldn’t let him stop there, tilting his head and deepening the kiss with the softest, breathiest moan.

Raven could hardly believe her eyes. “You guys aren’t going to have sex right here in our room, are you?”

They broke apart, Charles laughing in embarrassment while Erik just kept staring at him. “Sorry, we get carried away sometimes.” Charles quickly led Erik out of the room past a horrified Hank, the two of them chuckling before closing the door behind them. Raven simply shook her head with a grin as Hank walked over to embrace her with his long, lean arms.

“Aren’t you glad we’re not as bad as them?” he murmured to her, and she laughed, standing on her tippy toes to meet his lips for a kiss.

“Oh I don’t know, I wouldn’t mind us having sex all over the place,” she said with a giggle, before
he started edging her towards the bed, wiggling his eyebrows.

“Should we start giving Charles and Erik a run for their money?” he murmured, before kissing her soundly, swallowing her delighted chuckles before they flopped down onto the bed and under the covers, giggling as they did so.

* * * * *

Both couples arrived at the basketball court at almost four, looking chirpy and a little dishevelled. Erik and Charles were both wearing grey sweatsuits, while Raven was wearing the Bane T-shirt that Charles had gotten for her from Tom Hardy, who had sent a few promo tees over as a present. She had paired it with grey tights that showed off her shapely form, and Erik was very amused to see just how distracted Hank was by this. Surprisingly, Hank himself looked nice as well, wearing a sleeveless tee and basketball shorts which made him look much younger than he normally appeared. Erik felt a little old in comparison, wondering if he looked like Hank’s grandpa with his own dowdy sweatsuit.

“You old farts ready to get your asses kicked?” Raven taunted them, waving the ball around with a laugh.

“That’s no language for a young lady,” Charles sniffed at her, rolling up his sleeves and displaying his pale arms. Erik lost concentration for a while after that, staring at them and remembering what he and Charles had been doing only twenty minutes ago in the shower that he looked up only when Raven was yelling his name.

“Jesus, Erik, are you even paying attention?” she said crossly, and Erik simply gave her a sheepish grin. “Do I have to repeat the rules of the game again?”

Charles must have taken pity on Erik, for he was walking over and sliding an arm around Erik’s waist, smiling up at him. “Since there are only two people in each team, we’re only going to use half the court. Fouls will result in a free throw. We’re playing two halves, and each half is twenty minutes. Anything else you didn’t get, darling?”

“Nope, except for one more thing.” Erik bent down and kissed him soundly, still tasting himself in Charles’ mouth from their little adventure in the shower. “I love you.”

“Yeesh,” Hank said in disgust, while Raven threw the ball at them.

Charles managed to deflect the ball with a kick, grinning up at Erik. “Love you, too. Now let’s teach these two a lesson.”

Ten minutes into the game, and it was already painfully clear who was being taught a lesson. Raven was a fantastic shot, hooking the ball into the basket every single time, and Hank was extraordinarily adept at anticipating her passes and her every move. Charles, on the other hand, seemed too hesitant at tackling Raven, and Erik was busy trying to defend Charles and make sure that no one aggressively tackled him. Raven was on fire, sinking shot after shot and exchanging high-fives with a triumphant Hank, and Erik didn’t even know what the score was.

“Come on, you two, you’re making it too damn easy!” Raven shouted at them. “Charles, you don’t have to be afraid to tackle me, I won’t break.”

“I’m not!” Charles protested, but Erik could see the hesitance in his eyes. He checked his watch, and thankfully the first half was almost over. They were getting massacred out here, and the competitive side of Erik was making him itch to up the ante and trounce the other couple on the court. He tugged
Charles aside, whispering in his ear a few strategies to try and get the ball away from Raven. Of course, it didn’t help that Charles was all sweaty and pink with exertion, and Erik had to pause and remember what his plan was at some points.

“So you distract Hank, and then I’ll try to steal the ball from Raven and make a shot,” Erik said, watching a bead of sweat travel down Charles’ temple. “Er, yup, that was my plan.”

“All right, it’s worth a shot,” Charles said, pulling Erik down for a quick kiss before they went on their separate ways, Charles circling Hank while Erik followed Raven around like a shadow, narrowing his eyes at her.

“Whatsoever you’re thinking of trying, Lehnsherr, it’s not going to work,” she taunted him. “You and Charles suck really hard at this.”

“Raven, please do not talk about sucking at a time like this,” Hank pleaded, holding the ball up and out of Charles’ reach. “Don’t give them ideas!”

“Charles, now!” Erik shouted, and Charles jumped up, neatly smacking the ball out of a surprised Hank’s hands, and Erik dove for it quickly, grabbing it as it bounced towards him. He dribbled towards the free-throw line, although he was derailed when he felt something heavy jump onto his back, and he cried out in surprise as hands clapped over his eyes, Raven yelling above him, “Quick, Hank, get the ball!”

“Raven!” Charles shouted. “I expected more from you!”

Still blind, Erik turned in the direction of Charles’ voice and flung the ball at him, hoping for the best. Now he could feel Raven struggling to get off him and go after Charles, but Erik held onto her in a tight grip, grinning when he heard Charles’ triumphant yell of victory and Raven’s anguished, “Noooooo!”

“Goddamnit,” Hank swore in disappointment as Raven and Erik finally released each other, and Erik happily ran over to pick up a cheering Charles, laughing as he carried Charles around the court in celebration, and Charles bent down and kissed him soundly.

“Jesus, it’s not like you guys won,” they heard Raven’s irritated voice. “The score is like, 46 to 5.”

Erik pulled his lips away from Charles’ to point at her. “Admit it, Darkholme, we got the best of you,” he said with a grin. “And even when you played dirty! For shame.”

Raven turned away haughtily. “I did not play dirty!”

Charles huffed out a laugh of disbelief. “Raven, you were clinging onto Erik like a koala! That most definitely constitutes holding, my dear.”

“Let’s take a break before the second half,” Hank suggested, probably afraid that they were going to start throttling one another.

“Good idea,” Charles said, wiping the sweat off his face with the back of his hand. “Erik, come and help me wash up a bit?”

Erik instantly forgot all about the game.

* * * * *

Erik pressed his lips against the nape of Charles’ neck, and Charles chuckled when he proceeded to
bury his nose in his hair, Erik’s slight stubble tickling his skin. “Stop it, I’m going to ruin the eggs,” Charles protested, squirming in Erik’s embrace.

“I’m just helping you improve your ability to multitask,” Erik replied, and Charles could feel him grinning as he trailed slow kisses along his shoulder, hands tugging lightly on his partially unbuttoned pyjama top to expose more skin. Well, technically it was Erik’s pyjama top, but they had both long decided that Erik’s shirts looked best when worn by Charles (along with nothing else).

“Erik, you are a terrible, terrible man,” he chided as he fumbled for the slotted spoon, sucking in a breath when Erik pressed him up against the counter, the heat from Erik’s bare chest searing through the thin cotton flannel fabric across his back.

Erik let out an amused laugh from deep in his throat, and Charles trembled slightly when he felt rather than heard it against the shell of his ear. “Am I?” Erik asked, his voice dropping an octave, and that was all the warning Charles received before Erik bit down on his earlobe, unable to stifle his sharp gasp when Erik’s tongue began flicking deftly at the tip.

A loud shriek startled them, and Charles snapped his head up just in time to catch Raven’s retreating form. “Oh, my God! Couldn’t the two of you at least have had the decency to get a room? There must be like fifty in this place! My eyes, Jesus Christ! Someone get me a fork.”

Charles felt his face heat up as he doubled over laughing. “Raven, please come back. There’s no need to maim yourself, I promise you we are fit for polite company.”

Raven peeked her head through the doorway and cracked one eye open tentatively, “Is Erik standing behind you naked? No, wait. Forget I even asked.”

“He’s wearing the pants that the top I’m in belongs to, it’s an excellent way to save on laundry,” Charles answered, trying hard to keep a straight face.

“And Charles is wearing underwear today. Don’t be a prude, Raven,” Erik added nonchalantly, leaving Charles to hide his face in embarrassment.

“ Fucking hell, I’m not sitting on any flat surface in any of your homes ever again!” Raven wailed, sounding truly horrified. However, she did begin gingerly toeing her way back into the kitchen, much to Charles’ relief.

“Calm down, Raven. Have some breakfast. Do have a seat, I assure you the stool is clean,” Charles said as he scooped a poached egg out of the simmering water.

Raven glared at the stool long and hard, presumably disinfecting it with her withering gaze before perching herself regally on top. She watched dumbfounded as Charles buttered a toasted English muffin and layered slices of smoked salmon onto it, raising a quizzical finger, “Wait, you made breakfast?”

“Yes, Raven. Oh, don’t look so shocked.” Charles grinned when Raven blinked at him in disbelief, “Erik has been teaching me. I destroyed a couple of eggs before you came down, but once I started thinking of it as a practical experiment it really all came quite naturally. You see, you add vinegar to the water to help the egg white coagulate, and some salt so that the egg will float slightly when it’s done. And you have to make sure the water doesn’t boil so that the egg white doesn’t cook too quickly, it’s all very clever.”

“Charles is an exceptional learner,” Erik added, and Charles smiled as he tiptoed up to give him a quick kiss on the lips, tasting the last traces of coffee still lingering on Erik’s tongue.
Raven shook her head, looking like she was still not processing the scene before her very well. Perhaps she needed some tea. “Who are you and what have you done with Charles? The last time I had a meal at your place, you served me microwaved lasagne, and the centre of the dish was still frozen.”

“Like I said, Erik is an excellent teacher,” Charles smirked as he placed the poached egg on top of the smoked salmon, drizzling some Hollandaise sauce over the egg and topping it with a sprinkle of chopped chives before handing the plate to Raven. “Eggs Benedict with smoked salmon by Chefs Lehnsherr and Xavier. The Hollandaise sauce is homemade, by the way. Bon appétit.”

Erik passed her the cutlery and Charles waited expectantly as Raven cut out a small portion, the yolk oozing out perfectly and mixing with the buttery sauce. Raven placed it in her mouth, eyebrows shooting up as she chewed slowly. “How is it?” Charles asked while nodding smugly, smiling as he sidled over to slip an arm around Erik’s narrow waist, his thumb hooking on the waistband of Erik’s pyjama bottoms and tracing a path across the top of his hips.

Raven swallowed, resting her elbow on the table as she twirled her fork in the air. “Wow. Charles, this is amazing.”

“Thank you, my dear,” Charles beamed, resting his head on Erik’s shoulder as Erik draped an arm over his neck.

“You know, when you’re done playing Naked Chef at home, I could sign the two of you up for Celebrity MasterChef. I’m sure the producers would love to have you on the show. Can you imagine the ratings? Just dial back on the moon eyes, please. For the love of God.” Charles looked over when Raven gesticulated at them, knife and fork still in her hands, feeling slightly guilty for letting himself get distracted by how soft Erik’s eyes looked in the morning light that was filtering through the bay windows. Raven was right; they were no longer fit for regular human interaction.

Erik snorted beside him. “Raven, be careful with your cutlery. You could hurt yourself.”

“Charles, control your Erik,” she retorted, forking another piece of food into her mouth and shooting Erik a cheeky, tight-lipped smile.

Charles laughed and was about to jokingly chastise the both of them when he heard the sound of heavy footsteps falling on the marble floor. He looked to the doorway to find Hank shuffling in, a large duffel bag in his arms. “Good morning, Hank,” Charles greeted cheerily, tilting his head up meaningfully at Erik before making his way over to their other guest.

Hank appeared slightly worse for wear, his hair askew in some places. He smiled awkwardly at him and Erik before turning to Raven and gesturing to the bag he was carrying, asking her blearily, “What do you want to do with this?”

Raven hopped off her stool to grab the bag from him. “Thanks, Hank. I’d completely forgotten about this,” she said as she marched over to the banquette in the nook of the bay window. She unzipped the bag and shook it upside down to empty its contents onto the oval tavern table, resulting in a cascade of letters and packages that piled up into a small mountain of multicoloured envelops and boxes of various sizes. “Charles, you’ve got mail!”

“Thank you for bringing these over, my dear,” Charles said as he seated Hank by the counter, kissing the top of Erik’s shoulder when he served Hank his freshly made Eggs Benedict, rather proud of himself that Erik and Hank were getting along swimmingly.

“Erik, you have some mail, too,” Raven announced as she rummaged into the bag and appeared to
unzip an internal compartment, hair tumbling into the carrier where she was hunched over it.

Erik shook his head stiffly. “Impossible. I told Emma not to have a fan mail address.”

“Yeah, well for some reason your fans think you and Charles share the same one. I have no idea why,” Raven tossed her head back and replied with a grin, rolling her eyes. She fished out a small stack of letters from the carrier, sashaying over to hand them to Erik, who took them and eyed them with suspicion.

Charles hugged Erik in amusement. “Will you look at that? Someone’s really popular.”

“Says the person single-handedly responsible for the Earth’s deforestation,” Erik retorted, traces of a smirk in his voice. “How do we know these aren’t lined with anthrax? They’re probably all hate mail.”

Charles looked up into Erik’s eyes, searching them for a moment, wondering why Erik found it so hard to believe that anyone could ever love him. “Don’t be silly, Erik. There are so many people out there who hang onto every word you say.”

“Oh, Charles would know--"

Charles snapped his head back, flabbergasted. “Raven!”

“Fine, fine. I shouldn’t give Erik more reason to bang you. As it is, Hank hasn’t slept well in days because he keeps waking up to the sound of your head pounding against the headboard in the middle of the night.” Charles buried his face in Erik’s chest and whined in mortification, very aware of Raven cackling behind him with glee.

“Now, now. What makes you so sure that was Charles being slammed up against the furniture?” Erik shot back, and it probably said something about his rapidly decaying morals when Charles found he could not help but chortle when Hank promptly choked on his breakfast. Well, judging by the giggle Raven was failing to stifle and Erik’s self-satisfied grin, it wasn’t like he was the only one.

They really should never be allowed out in public ever again.

* * * * *
Erik lay on his side with his head resting on Charles’ lap, body curled to fit the gentle curve of the banquette. The woven fabric of the upholstered bench felt soft against his bare back, and Erik nudged contentedly at the plush cushions tucked comfortably between his feet. They had packed Raven and Hank into the taxi for the airport shortly after breakfast to catch their flight to Canada and, as much as he enjoyed their company, Erik was glad that they had the whole place back to themselves. He burrowed further into Charles’ lap, smiling as Charles absently started stroking his ear. The feather-light touch of Charles’ fingers brushing over the shell of Erik’s ear was soothing and comforting. Above him, Erik could hear the gentle slurp of Charles sipping his tea.

“Still busy with the fan mail?” Erik asked, nuzzling against Charles’ warm lap. There was the soft ‘clink’ of Charles setting his cup back on the saucer, then both hands were roaming through Erik’s hair, leaving him groaning in pleasure at the impromptu scalp massage.

“I’m never too busy for you, darling.” Charles smiled down at him before picking up his pen again, resuming his writing. However, something made him laugh, and Erik looked up at the pleasant sound which was making Charles’ stomach vibrate.

“What’s so funny?” he asked, slipping his fingers under the hem of Charles’ pyjama top and sliding them into the smooth dip of his bellybutton.

Charles shot a fond smile down at him before lifting the papers he was looking at. Erik saw a series of exceptionally beautiful fan drawings of him and Charles individually, as well as a hilarious cartoon of the both of them, Charles beaming while Erik was gnashing his teeth, obviously in a bad mood. “Mein Gott, that’s us!” Erik said in admiration, taking the drawings from Charles to have a better look. “That’s very clever.”
Charles was now stroking his ear again, sounding amused. “And this fan got our likenesses down pat, don’t you think? The drawing really does look like you. I’m going to stick it on the fridge.”

Erik raised his eyebrows at Charles, and of course this was a cue for Charles to start stroking them as well, his touch soothing on Erik’s forehead. “Really, Charles. The last time I checked, I do not resemble a Great White.”

Charles’ mouth twisted in amusement. “If you say so, darling.”

“You’re terrible,” Erik admonished him, turning to blow a raspberry through Charles’ shirt. Charles squirmed away, laughing as he batted at Erik weakly.

“Stop it! That’s ticklish.”

“Then be nicer to me,” Erik said with a grin, which Charles duly returned. Sitting up to give him a soft peck on the lips, Erik finally got a good look at what had been keeping Charles occupied for the entire afternoon. There were stacks and stacks of various photos scattered all over the table, and many of them bore Charles’ messy signature, the ink still drying on some of them. Erik was aghast. “Liebling, are you really autographing every single photo that fans send in to you?”

Charles shrugged. “It’s always been something I’ve done. I figured that if they took the time to write to me, the least I could do is send them back a signed picture.”

Erik sorted through the letters scattered all across the tavern table, pausing at one that looked like it had been written by a child. Erik smiled, leaning the side of his head against Charles’. Everyone really did love Charles.

He picked up a stuffed toy (one of the many gifts that Charles had been sent) that was sitting among the mess. “What animal is this even?”

Charles laughed, pinching its cheek. "I think he's an elephant. Little drummer elephant. He's cute."

Erik squinted at it, pursing his lips. "I doubt it, that's too short to be a trunk." A thought occured to
him and he grinned mischievously. "I think it's a lab rat. A mutated lab rat."

"Now why would anyone make a plush toy for a mutated-- Erik! Please, stop it! Stopp--" Charles wheezed, giggling as he tried to fend off the attacks Erik was launching all over his face with the toy. Erik desisted eventually, dropping the gift back on the table and smothering Charles’ face with kisses instead.

Charles was still giggling when he reached across the table and handed Erik his pen, which Erik recognised as being the one his father had given Charles over the holidays. "You know, rather than arguing over the species of this little chap, why don’t you do something a little more productive like helping me autograph these photos? Some of them sent pictures of the two of us together, I think it’d be nice if both of us signed them, don’t you?"

Erik took the fountain pen, letting out a fond sigh. It was not like he even knew how to ever refuse Charles.

* * * * *

Erik finished cutting the crusts off the sandwiches he had prepared, wrapping them in paper before placing them into the picnic basket. The weather had finally gotten warm enough for a picnic outside, which Charles had been wanting for the longest time. Erik had also agreed that it would be a good idea. Although he loved the mansion, it was nice to be outdoors for a change.

After making sure the champagne was resting in a bucket of ice, Erik picked it up along with the basket and headed out of the kitchen towards the living room. Charles was waiting there for him, wearing one of his cardigans with dark jeans and his favourite blue fingerless gloves. He had a tartan picnic blanket draped over one arm, and was carrying their two different chess sets with his other arm. His face lit up when he spotted Erik, and although their hands were both full, Erik couldn’t resist bending down to give him a slow, chaste kiss before they walked out into the sunshine together. The weather was much sunnier, although the wind still had a bit of bite to it.

“You look gorgeous,” Erik said sincerely, his eyes roving over Charles’ soft, ungelled hair, then travelling down to those eyes - fuck, they looked even bluer in the sunlight - and then to that mouth,
which was now twisted in a smile. “What’s so funny?”

“Nothing.” Charles shot him a sly sideways look. “I thought the picnic wasn’t going to happen, because you seemed like you were ready to toss everything away and jump me at the door.”

Erik didn’t mind admitting that the thought had crossed his mind. He must have looked guilty, for Charles was chuckling now, his laughter unbridled and joyful.

They found a good spot near a copse of trees, and Charles laid out the blanket while Erik unpopped the champagne bottle. The cork flew out and almost hit a startled bird, making the two of them laugh. Next, Charles unpacked the food while Erik poured out the fizzy champagne into the two flutes he had packed earlier.

“To the wonderful man who packed this picnic;” Charles said with a grin, raising his glass.

Erik held his up as well. “And to the wonderful man who helped to make the food.” They clinked their glasses together, their eyes locked over the rims, and when they were done, Charles leaned over and kissed Erik sweetly on the lips. The kiss lingered, as always, the same way Charles’ scent always seemed to linger all over Erik’s clothes.

Erik forced himself to finally release Charles before the food got cold and the champagne got flat, and Charles happily scooted back onto the tartan blanket, handing Erik his sandwich before biting into his own. However, Erik almost choked on his sandwich when Charles made a pleased moaning noise. “Oh my word, Erik, this is delicious.”

Grabbing a paper napkin, Erik hastily wiped his mouth before chasing the food down with bottled water. “Charles, if you’re going to make more noises like that while you eat, I hope you know the Heimlich Manoeuvre,” Erik warned him, tossing the napkin aside.

By now, Erik had learned that the more innocent Charles appeared, the more he was up to something. “Me? I didn’t do anything.” Charles continued munching on his sandwich, but the mischievous sideways smile he shot Erik completely ruined his entire facade. “I was just saying the food is fantastic. What’s wrong with that?”

Erik shot him a sceptical look. “Right, because normal people make sex noises when they eat,” he said dryly, and he could see Charles struggling not to smile.

“Of course, it’s a way to show your appreciation to the chef,” he said seriously, and Erik watched him take another bite of the sandwich, his eyes rolling back in pleasure. “Oh, my God, Erik, this tastes so good in my mouth,” he moaned, making Erik’s jaw drop.

“Charles,” Erik breathed out in warning, but he could feel his legs falling open and spreading further apart to accommodate the sudden tightness of his pants. To make things worse, Charles was now slowly sucking on his fingers, eyes locked with Erik’s as Charles slid his index finger into that cherry-red mouth, cheeks perversely hollowed in a sight all too familiar to Erik.

“Charles, please...” Erik was aware that he sounded strangled now, as Charles must have taken pity on him and was crawling over to kiss him gently.

“I can’t help it, you bring out the naughty side of me,” he whispered against Erik’s lips, and Erik’s hands slid down his back, pulling up the hem of his shirt and sliding his hand under it so he could feel Charles’ skin. They kissed again, much slower this time, and when Charles pulled away for breath, Erik didn’t feel quite so frantic, as though they had all the time in the world. That wasn’t exactly true, of course, but for now, under a watercolour-blue sky, Erik could almost believe it.
“I can’t remember a time when I was happier,” he found himself saying as Charles smiled at him, rubbing his leg.

“What about our first kiss?” Charles said, lifting an eyebrow at him.

“Ah yes, that was one of the best moments of my life.” Erik reached out, brushing back Charles’ hair which was blowing about in the breeze and obscuring his eyes. “And this feels like another one, too.”

“You’re such a sweet talker,” Charles pretended to grumble, but his growing smile told another story. His thumb was rubbing at the crinkles in the corner of Erik’s eye, and Erik nuzzled back against his hand, thinking that no one deserved to be this happy.

After they finished their sandwiches, it was good to just sit and talk and enjoy the warmer weather. Erik took the opportunity to watch Charles talk, because whenever Charles got really excited about any of his favourite topics, he was a delight to behold. His eyes would light up, his hands would start gesturing all over the place and his voice would be all warm and soothing, like a comforting old sweater. Erik smiled lazily, his eyes tracing the familiar planes of Charles’ body as he sipped at his champagne. They were almost done with the bottle now, and thankfully the alcohol had helped to loosen Charles’ tongue, making him chatter even more and giving Erik a longer opportunity to watch him.

Erik knew the one place he could ever belong was with Charles.

He had spent years living out of a suitcase, running like a madman from location to location for work, never staying in one place long enough to put down roots. And yet, it felt like he had lived a lifetime in just these few short weeks he had spent tucked away together with Charles. After all those years on the road, Charles’ not quite humble abode in Westchester had been the first place that truly felt like home. The only place he wanted to call home, if he were to be honest, and he was rather sorry that they had to leave it behind soon.

“So I was thinking we should stay at your place when we get back to LA. It’s a lot closer to the studios than Beverly Hills, and I’m sure you’re tired of constantly being surrounded by all my dusty old things,” Charles suggested as he poured out the last of the champagne, handing Erik his flute.

Erik knocked back his glass, shaking his head as the bubbles fizzled down his throat. “That’s not true, I like being around your things. But you’re right; my place is nearer to both our studios.” Erik paused, putting aside the champagne flute to reach over and kiss Charles softly on the lips, “I’m going to miss you.”

Charles’s eyes softened and he tilted his face to brush his lips against the heel of Erik’s hand. “We’ll still see each other at night and in the mornings, and I could go to your set when I get a day off. It won’t be that bad.”

“But it won’t be the same. I wish we could stay just in the here and now.” Erik answered, running a hand along Charles’ thigh.

“Oh, Erik. I love you.” Charles leaned in to claim Erik’s lips before pulling away. “This much.” Charles held his hands apart, feigning a concentrated attempt at gauging the distance between his palms before looking back up and grinning.

“Hmph. Too little.” Erik pretended to pout as he pushed Charles onto his back, pinning his arms wide apart. Erik kissed and nibbled down his neck, delighting the touch of the skin of Charles’ throat against his lips, the feel of Charles’ laughter vibrating through the two of them, the scent of Charles’
hair mingling with the crisp smell of freshly crushed grass. They still had time here, time to love and be loved, and Hollywood could not have felt farther away. The rest of the world could wait.

Notes:
1. The title of this chapter is a quote from 'The Bridges of Madison County'.
2. Erik being a good househusband in Excalibur.
3. “Do you want a cup of tea?” is a quote from the interview James McAvoy gave on the Graham Norton Show.
5. James McAvoy covered in roses in ‘Shameless’, on a duvet that looks suspiciously like Magneto’s cape.
6. Pictures Charles took of Raven and Hank playing basketball.
7. High resolution versions of the amazing drawings that the always lovely kannibal did for the fan mail section.
8. The picnic was based on this screenshot and this adorable fanart.
Parting is Such Sweet Sorrow

Chapter Summary

Erik and Charles savour their remaining time together before they have to part ways to film separate projects in Asia, but they discover it is not so easy letting go of the one you love.

Chapter Notes

Thank you as always to xsilverdreamsx for doing up the articles, this fic wouldn’t be the same without her. We’re going to take longer than usual to finish the next chapter, so don’t worry if the update takes a while, we’re just being slow, drunk snails. If you’re feeling bored, you can poke @eriklehnsherr__ and @charlesxavier__ on Twitter, they don’t bite...hard.

Soundtrack: Eagle Eye Cherry - ‘Save Tonight’

It was beautiful and astonishingly sunny in Westchester on the day they left. Erik concentrated on the road, refusing to glance at the rearview mirror and see what they were leaving behind. Still, it didn’t matter. It already felt like he was leaving a fundamental piece of himself back in the mansion, a piece that had spent sharp, crisp spring days with Charles just reading, cooking, laughing, dancing, watching TV and making love. Someday, he promised himself - and indirectly, Charles - they would come back and finish making this place their own. The thought of raising a family and growing old together helped to chase away his dark thoughts, making him smile a little. They had the rest of their lives, after all. What was a few months apart?

He threw a sideways glance at Charles, who was twisted around forlornly in the passenger’s seat, waving goodbye to the mansion. Erik reached over with one hand and grasped Charles’, their fingers immediately twining together. Turning to face the front again, Erik could see the tiny rueful smile that made Charles’ mouth look like a little red purse. “I hate leaving,” Charles said with a sigh, his thumb brushing back and forth against Erik’s palm.

“I know.” Erik lifted their joined hands to his mouth, pressing a reverent kiss to the back of Charles’ hand. “We’ll be back here once we’re done filming overseas, you’ll see.”

The corners of Charles’ mouth drooped down even more. “I hate that, too,” Charles said, his voice low and soft. “Why do we have to film so far away from each other?”

Erik squeezed Charles’ hand a little harder, taking his eyes off the road long enough to give Charles a sideways smile. “We’ll still be on the same continent with only one hour’s difference in the timezone. I’ll call you all the time. And I’ll visit, too,” he promised.

Charles did brighten a little at that, scooting over so that he could plaster himself against Erik’s body,
his head resting on Erik’s shoulder. Erik allowed himself only a brief moment to bury his nose in Charles’ hair before refocusing his attention on the road, rubbing his cheek against the mop of dark waves. It wasn’t the most comfortable way to drive, but it was definitely the best.

Charles was asleep and snoring softly by the time they reached LaGuardia, and as Erik finished parking the car, he gently shook Charles awake, watching as those ridiculously blue eyes slowly fluttered open. “Are we here?” he asked with a yawn, and Erik nodded, rubbing his thumb at the corner of Charles’ right eye. Charles nuzzled against his touch, and they kissed slowly for a while, not looking to start anything, just a warm exploration of mouths and lips.

After getting out their luggage, Erik made sure the car was well-locked before handing them to Charles. They had arranged for Darwin to drive it back to the mansion, then join them in LA later. Erik didn’t realise that being in a relationship meant he had to take into account all sorts of logistical details like this, but it was a very small price to pay for such a big reward. Smiling at Charles, Erik took both their bags in one hand, then reached for Charles’ with the other as they walked out of the parking garage hand in hand.

They met with Darwin in the Departure Hall of the central terminal, walking past people who were either ignoring them or staring slack-jawed and poking at their companions in disbelief. “Hey guys,” Darwin said, smiling broadly. “Had a good vacation?”

“The best,” Charles said, beaming as he slid an arm around Erik’s waist. “And I take it you had a good time as well, you lazy bugger?”

Darwin shrugged mysteriously, handing the plane tickets over to Charles but Erik’s sharp eyes didn’t miss the giant red hickey right under his shirt collar. “Wait a minute, what’s this?” Erik asked, pointing at the mark as Darwin actually blushed.

“Well, I-um....” Darwin artfully eased away from Erik’s probing hand and snatched the car keys from Charles. “Anyway, I’ll bring the car back to Westchester--”

“Wait a minute,” Charles said, frowning deeply as he stared at the nearby newsstand. “Isn’t that Alex trying to hide behind a copy of ‘Abs of Steel’?”

The three of them turned to stare in the direction of the newsstand, and sure enough Erik could make out Alex’s spiky head poking out from behind the magazine he was holding up. “Wow, Armando.” Erik whistled, impressed. “Looks like someone got lucky over the holidays.”

Charles seemed stunned, his blue eyes so wide that he looked like a cartoon character. Erik had never wanted to smooch him more in his life. “Really, Darwin? You and....Alex?” he asked tentatively.

Darwin was staring at the floor, probably wishing a wormhole would open up and swallow him whole. “You guys had better get going or you’ll miss your flight.”

“I’m sorry,” Charles said sincerely, rubbing Darwin’s arm. “It’s just that I was surprised, I didn’t think Alex was your type.”

“You and me both.” But Darwin was smiling again, even though his cheeks were still red. “Anyway, I’ve checked you guys in, so you can just head to the first class lounge.”

Erik took pity on the blushing Darwin. “We should be getting on our way anyway,” he said, putting an arm around Charles’ shoulders. “We’ll see you in LA, Darwin.”

There was a mischievous smirk on Charles’ face as he craned his neck to look at the newsstand.
“And bye, Alex!” he called out, making Alex run to hide behind the magazine stand.

Laughing as they made their way to the gate, Erik nuzzled against Charles’ temple. “Looks like you owe me a nice back massage,” he whispered into Charles’ ear. “I told you Alex and Darwin had the hots for each other.”

“Was it obvious?” Charles wondered, resting his head on Erik’s shoulder.

“Not as obvious as I was around you, if Emma is to be believed,” Erik said with a chuckle, before planting a kiss on Charles’ lips.

* * * * *

The house in Hancock Park was exactly as they had left it, except for the slight smell of lemon furniture polish that still hung in the air from the weekly cleaners’ visits. Erik wheeled their suitcases in, smiling as Charles took off his cardigan and draped it over the couch. Erik always loved seeing Charles’ things strewn all over his own belongings, a reminder that Charles had permeated his life to such a wide extent. Charles was everywhere in his life, and that was exactly how Erik liked it.

They had a long, steamy shower where they fooled around for a bit and washed each other’s hair, then slipped into fluffy white ‘His’ and ‘His’ bathrobes that Emma had sent over for Christmas. They grabbed a quick snack in the kitchen, Charles flipping through the news channel while Erik stood by the counter and went through his mail. Mostly bills, although there was a very sweet postcard from his mother who had been excited to visit New York. “Liebling, look,” Erik said, holding it up for Charles to see, and Charles immediately hopped over, taking a bite out of his oatmeal cookie as he read the postcard.

“Aw, that’s so lovely of her.” Charles rubbed his cheek against Erik’s chest, and Erik couldn’t resist bending down to bury his nose in that dark hair. Charles smelled fantastic, as always. “Are your parents still in Albany visiting your relatives?” Charles asked.

“The last I checked,” Erik murmured into his hair. They just stood there for a long moment, Erik rubbing Charles’ arm up and down slowly. Even through the fluffy softness of the bathrobe, Erik could feel the warmth of Charles’ skin. He could also hear the soft crunch-crunch of Charles munching on his cookie, and from this angle, Charles reminded Erik of a hamster nibbling on a treat.

“Come on, let’s go upstairs and take a nap,” Charles suggested, taking a nearby paper napkin and wiping his mouth.

“Do you mean an actual nap, or, you know, a ‘nap’?” Erik asked, hooking his fingers in the air to emphasize the quotation marks. Charles laughed, sliding his hands into the pockets of Erik’s bathroom and smilling up at him.

“It depends,” Charles said, his voice dropping low as he pressed his entire body flush against Erik’s, making Erik dizzy with the feel of Charles rubbing up against him. Erik bent down, nipping at Charles’ plush bottom lip.

“Depends on what?” he asked, a little breathless before he started sucking on Charles’ lower lip, not giving him a chance to answer.

The kiss was messy and sloppy, but Erik had absolutely no complaints as he completely ravaged Charles’ mouth, tasting traces of oatmeal. Charles only moaned softly as he completely opened up to Erik’s attack, pliant and willing in his arms. When Erik finally broke away for air, he was seriously tempted to fling Charles over his shoulder and carry him upstairs to bed, caveman-style.
“I think that convinced me,” Charles murmured a little breathlessly, licking at Erik’s mouth. And then Charles was backing Erik up against the counter and just taking Erik’s mouth like it belonged to him, and Erik slid a hand under the hem of the bathrobe, running it along the smooth, heated skin of Charles’ inner thigh before it palmed the warm heat of Charles’ hardening cock.

Charles pulled away from the kiss and buried his face in Erik’s neck, thrusting into his hand with a low groan. “Upstairs?” His voice came out sounding a little wavering and unsteady.

“Oh God, yes,” Erik gasped out before slipping his hand out and taking Charles’. They made their way out of the kitchen and up the stairs, and they were only halfway up before Charles slammed Erik up against the wall and kissed him frantically, his hands scrabbling against Erik’s shoulders as though Charles were trying to clamber up him.

Erik gasped as Charles’ fingers raked through his longish fringe, tugging down on it and making him moan. Seeing Charles needy and desperate for him like this made his knees weak, made him want to just push Charles down onto the nearest solid surface even if it was only the jagged stairs, then fuck him so hard until they both had bruises on their knees and elbows. Charles ignited Erik’s passion and lust in a way that was still hard for him to understand, making Erik drunk simply on the taste of his mouth and skin. Erik had never, ever felt this way about anyone before, had never felt the all-encompassing need that he felt now to hold Charles close and mark him all over as his.

“We should get to the bed,” Erik huffed out, because the master bedroom was really only a few steps away, and Charles was nodding, but he made no move to go anywhere, still pinning Erik to the wall and giving Erik pecks on the mouth, like little sips. All thoughts of the bedroom vanished, though, when Charles started undoing Erik’s bathrobe, smiling slyly against Erik’s mouth.

“I can’t help it,” Charles said innocently, and Erik was absolutely certain Charles knew the exact effect those devastatingly blue eyes were having on him. “I must have you now, Erik.”

Of course Erik couldn’t resist, not especially when Charles started rubbing his leg against Erik’s thigh. The kiss was far deeper this time, Charles’ tongue sweeping over every inch of Erik’s mouth, over his gums and teeth and sucking on his tongue. Erik gasped for breath as he felt Charles’ hand wrap around his erection, stroking him firmly and excruciatingly slowly from base to tip, brushing his thumb against the head.

“Charles,” Erik whispered, burying his nose in Charles’ neck as he closed his eyes, letting himself be completely enveloped in the feel and smell of Charles. Besides, Charles was making these sweet little hitching noises that always drove Erik wild, and Erik undid Charles’ bathrobe belt as well, fumbling for a bit before it finally fell open.

He took pride in the stuttered ‘a-a-ahh’ that Charles emitted when Erik wrapped his hand around Charles’ erection, pumping him slowly. “Oh God, yes, Erik...” Charles was panting, his other free hand tangling in Erik’s hair, and Erik had never been so grateful that he had allowed Charles to keep his fringe long. He began sucking on the curve of Charles’ neck where it met his shoulder, his cheeks aching to smile when he heard Charles’ frantic cries, his hips jerking upwards into Erik’s steady grip.

“Come for me,” Erik mouthed against that pale, creamy skin dotted with galaxies of freckles, licking the ones he could see and increasing the speed of his strokes. Charles’ moans were broken now, his grip clumsy on Erik’s cock as his thrusts became erratic. The need to possess Charles, to mark Charles for himself was overwhelming, and Erik released Charles’ erection, ignoring the groan of protest that followed. “Just hang on,” Erik murmured, reaching down and sliding his hands under Charles’ thighs, then lifted him up and spun him around, slamming him against the wall with a surprised ‘oof’.
“Erik!” Charles sounded pleasantly surprised - and thrilled - and the way he was biting down on his bottom lip mischievously made Erik take his mouth again, loosening that lip and sucking on it, his cock now thrusting against Charles’ fair stomach. Then Charles braced his arms on Erik’s shoulders and heaved himself up, and they both groaned when their cocks met, Erik dizzy at the feeling of Charles’ warm, pulsing cock against his own.

“Harder,” Charles pleaded, his voice hoarse, and Erik obeyed, thrusting against him so hard that Charles’ legs tightened around his waist, his face fire engine red. His head fell back with a low purr, hitting the wall with a soft thump. “Oh God, Erik, yes, just like that…”

“Mine,” Erik growled as his grip tightened on Charles’ thighs, which were now slippery with sweat, and Erik felt like his skin was on fire, and only Charles’ touch could put it out. Their mouths met again and Charles tugged hard on his hair, making Erik moan half in pain and half in delirious pleasure. “Charles, mine, you’re mine--”

“Yours, fuck, Erik, forever yours,” Charles huffed out before he bit down on Erik’s already abused shoulder, and there was a warm burst between their stomachs, Charles moaning Erik’s name like a long, drawn-out prayer. Now it was even more slippery and easy for Erik to thrust, clutching Charles tightly as he buried his nose in Charles’ hair, mouth open in a silent ‘O’ as he came all over Charles’ chest and hands. They were both panting frantically, bathrobes hanging open in a wide gap, clutching each other with clumsy hands.

“Love you,” Erik gasped against his temple as he let Charles down slowly onto the floor, steadying Charles as he wobbled a little, trying to catch his breath.

“Love you, too,” Charles panted, fingers tightening in the folds of Erik’s bathrobe. “I think my brain is somewhere at the bottom of the stairs.”

Despite his exhaustion, Erik chuckled as he bundled Charles in his arms, urging him towards the nearby master bedroom. “Well, I think my brain melted. So tit for tat,” Erik said, nuzzling the warm nape of Charles’ neck.

Yawning, Charles tumbled onto the bed, stretching out as Erik went to get a wet cloth to clean them up. “So worth it, though,” he mumbled, watching Erik with sleepy eyes as he carefully wiped Charles clean, then retied his bathrobe.

Erik shot him a secretive little smile. “You’re always worth it, Liebling. Now, let me kiss the bump on your head better.”

* * * * *
"First Class" Actors Look East

Charles Xavier and Erik Lehnsherr to begin new film projects in Asia next month

By BEN REILLY

Bryan Singer’s “First Class” may not be hitting the screens just yet; but that doesn’t mean the stars of the 60s themed action thriller will be taking any time off before then. Charles Xavier and Erik Lehnsherr, who play two FBI agents in the film, are already signed on to new projects respectively.

Known for his roles in action-packed films with notable actors such as Bruce Willis and Jason Statham, Erik Lehnsherr will be starring in John Woo’s "Rule of Capture", the latest addition to Woo’s previous Chinese mafia-themed offerings. Filming begins in Hong Kong next month.

In the meantime, Charles Xavier will be taking a different kind of role in indie director Yuriko Oyama’s new film, which begins filming this week. Instead of his usual romantic comedy roles, Xavier will play a white collar professional who is forced out of his job and goes to Japan where he finds himself. The production will begin in Hollywood before wrapping up in Japan.

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With a heavy heart, Charles had sat down with Darwin and gone through the nitty gritty of all their travel details for the next few months. Ordinarily Charles loved Japan, and he also loved the ardent, crazy fans who knew every detail about him and made him take pictures in all kinds of cute, silly poses. However, going to Japan this time meant a few months apart from Erik, and he wasn’t looking forward to it at all.

Darwin must have sensed this and had kept quiet and not teased Charles as he was wont to do. Charles hadn’t been able to keep from wondering if Alex was going to come along with Darwin to Japan, and of course it had made him think about Erik visiting him, and that made him depressed all over again. After months and months of spending almost every minute together, this was going to be like going cold turkey.

Erik had already started filming a few studio scenes for the new movie he was shooting with John Woo, which was about a private investigator who had to enter the seamy underworld of the Hong Kong triads to find a client’s missing sister. Pretty standard action fare, except that it was directed by John Woo and starred Erik to pull in takings from North America. There were also quite a few mainland Chinese big name actors attached to the project, and Charles was sure that the producer for this project was even more fond of rolling around in money than Shaw was.

Since Charles hadn’t started his own studio scenes yet, he would follow Erik down to the set, watching from the wings and trying not to wince or frown whenever Erik had to take a particularly hard fall or get ‘punched’ by a stuntman. He had to constantly remind himself that Erik had been doing this for years, way before Charles even came along. Erik was a professional, and Charles had to trust him to know what he was doing.

When they were in Erik’s trailer, Charles was trying his best not to look glum, but he should have known that he couldn’t hide anything from Erik. “Liebling, what’s the matter?” Erik asked, going over to sit next to Charles on the tiny couch.

Charles gave him a wan smile. “Nothing, I just don’t like seeing you get hurt, even if it’s all fake.”

Erik pulled him into his arms, lying back so that they were in a nice, warm huddle. “It’s my bread and butter,” Erik said gently, stroking back Charles’ hair. “But I appreciate that you’re concerned about me.”

“They’re not going to have you do many of your own stunts, right?” Charles asked. He hated sounding like a worrywart, but the idea of Erik getting hurt made the lump in his throat refuse to go away.

A low chuckle vibrated in Erik’s chest, which Charles was currently pressed up against. “It’s what audiences want to see me do. But I promise I will try to argue my way out of every stunt they ask me to perform,” Erik assured him. “Don’t worry, okay?”

“Good. Because if not, I’ll come down and give John Woo a piece of my mind,” Charles said, making Erik laugh again.

“I can’t imagine you getting upset and shouting at anyone,” Erik admitted, still smiling. “You’re so nice to everyone and they all love you. Even the paparazzi adore you, Charles. So it’ll be funny to see you have a showdown with John Woo.”

“Of course. I’ll do anything for you,” Charles said with a grin, and they traded a quick kiss before there was a thump on the door, and Remy yelling, ‘Erik, you’re due on set in 5!’
“I’d better go,” Erik said reluctantly, as Charles got off his chest. “I’ll see you for lunch?”

“I’ll be right here,” Charles said, giving him one last smile before Erik left the trailer, his footsteps heavy with displeasure. Charles himself wasn’t too pleased. After the luxury of filming ‘First Class’ together, it felt odd to start spending huge gaps of time apart.

Taking out his phone, Charles checked his e-mails and replied to a few before excitedly resuming the ‘Draw Something’ battle he was currently engaged in with Raven. He couldn’t help laughing out loud when he saw her latest drawing for the word ‘golfclub’, which showed a crude rendition of Erik with what looked like a third leg (that was, to anyone who didn’t know better).

Charles correctly guessed the word, shaking his head in amusement. Why did he have such a perverted agent again?

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Emma appeared to have lost weight since the last time they saw her, and Erik felt a little stab of concern when he saw how loose her ivory blouse seemed. As it was, Emma already wore tight-fitting clothes, so her weight loss was dramatic enough for Erik to notice. He was debating whether to say anything about it - Emma had always thwapped him on the arm for mentioning anything about her weight, be it good or bad - but before he could decide, Charles was already stepping forward, his mouth in a worried twist. “Emma, have you been eating?”

“Yes,” she said, hugging her arms around herself rather defensively. “Why has everyone been saying that?”

“Because you look so thin.” Charles nodded, mouth set in a firm determined line. “That’s it, we’re going out for afternoon tea. Erik, get her coat.”

“But I’m not hungry,” Emma protested even as she let Charles drag her out the door of her office, Erik quickly grabbing one of her nearest coats. They climbed into Erik’s Audi, and Erik headed in the direction of the Beverly Wilshire while Charles told Emma gaily about their great little vacation in Westchester, then made her promise to visit them. Even without looking, Erik could hear the eye-roll in her voice as she said, “Yes, Charles, I promise to visit. Now stop giving me those big blue cow eyes. They won’t work on me, I’m not Erik.”

“Hey!” Erik protested, even as Charles laughed and reached over to squeeze his hand. “I’m not Charles’ mindless slave.”

“Whatever you say, sugar,” Emma said, bored as she fixed her hair in the rearview mirror.

When they finally reached the hotel, the restaurant seemed full for high tea service, but the head waiter simply smiled and immediately brought the three of them to a private dining room that was marked ‘RESERVED’. “Thank you very much, my good chap,” Charles told the waiter with a pat on the shoulder, while Erik discreetly slipped the man a fifty. They sat down and ordered from the high tea menu, which took quite some time as Charles forced Emma to order more than just cucumber sandwiches.

“Really, I’m fine,” Emma said with a yawn, as the waiter retreated from the private room with orders for enough food to feed a small army, or at least Alex, Sean and Darwin. “I’ve just been so busy with work, that’s all.”

Charles’ eyebrows shot up. “Oh, too many scripts have been coming in for Erik?” he asked, sounding pleased.
“On the contrary,” Emma said with a snort, making Charles frown. “Look, I’m really happy for you two, I’m glad you found each other because Erik is much, much happier now and less likely to bite my head off.” Here she sighed, looking Erik straight in the eye. “But ever since you two came out, the number of scripts coming in for you have been...dwindling.”

Well, that wasn’t exactly a surprise. Erik simply shrugged and sipped his water, while Charles turned to Emma in consternation. “What do you mean? Like, a lot less?” he asked, eyebrows drawn together in worry. Erik found himself absently wishing to smooth that frown with his thumb and make Charles smile again.

Emma nodded reluctantly. “I’m afraid so. Erik is a big enough name so we still have some script offers coming in, but not the high numbers we did in his heyday. And your little stunt over Halloween probably didn’t help.”

Erik cleared his throat so that the two of them were now looking at him. “I think that’s normal, we’re bound to have highs and lows, Emma,” he said matter-of-factly. “I don’t really care as long as I still can work, and Charles can be with me, or the other way around.”

Emma raised a cool eyebrow, smirking. ”Wow, Charles really fucked the megalomania right out of you. The old Erik would have had some choice words to say about the studio fat cats right about now.”

Erik merely shrugged, smiling when Charles leaned over to place a soft peck on his cheek. As two servers entered the room with trays of food and tea - and coffee for Erik - they happily started eating, and Erik was touched to see Charles subtly pushing some of the richer desserts towards Emma. That was how Charles was, always compassionate and concerned about other people, even when he didn’t know them too well. Erik reached over and grasped Charles’ hand under the table, and Charles turned to him with the biggest smile, his eyes soft as he squeezed back. Erik felt a bloom of warmth in his chest, stroking the back of Charles’ hand with his thumb. It was one of his favourite non-verbal ways of saying ‘I-love-you’, and Charles was saying it right back.

“Do you two need me to leave the room?” Emma said dryly, as Erik blinked, tearing his gaze away from Charles.

“Don’t be silly, Emma.” Erik rolled his eyes at her as he lifted his coffee cup with his free hand. “Charles and I are perfectly capable of being in public without jumping on each other.”

Emma sipped her tea with a knowing grin. “Oh, I don’t know, Charles looks like he wants to sweep all the scones off the table and let you bend him over it.”

Charles’ eyes widened. “Emma! I wouldn’t waste scones like these.” He piled more on her plate, although the telltale pinking of his cheeks suggested that her suggestion had gone down very well with him. “Here, eat more.”

“Anyway,” Erik said quickly, once it looked like Emma was going to make another smartass remark, “It doesn’t matter, as long as we still have scripts coming in, right?”

Emma let out a sigh. “Yes, I had to twist a few arms to wrestle a few good scripts that I thought would suit you, I can be very persuasive when I want to. I’d like you to take a look when you have a chance.”

“Thank you, Emma,” Charles said sincerely, and she visibly melted, giving him a rare, sweet smile. Erik was frankly amazed; whenever he saw Emma smiling like that, it was usually at someone else’s misfortune. Everyone really did like Charles.
“Fine.” Erik turned to Charles, squeezing his hand. “Will you have time to look them over with me before I have to fly off?”

“Of course, just let me know when.” Charles gave him a brilliant smile, and Erik leaned over to give him a quick peck on the lips. Charles tasted sweet, like strawberry jam, and to be honest, Erik would have happily deepened the kiss if he hadn’t felt Emma’s razor-sharp gaze burning into his profile. He forced himself to pull away, brushing a thumb against Charles’ moist lip.

“Thank you for not making out in front of me,” Emma muttered, daintily sipping her tea.

Charles flushed a little, exchanging a wink with Erik before he continued talking. “Well, I do understand the hesitation of the bigger studios, to be honest,” he said, buttering a scone with clotted cream. “Erik has always been an action star, and his entire selling point was the whole macho let’s-save-the-world image he had going.”

“Exactly,” Erik said, gesturing in Charles’ direction. “So considering that my image is in that mould, it’s not a surprise now that the studios are taking a step back. We talked to Raven, and while romantic scripts for Charles are slowing down, he’s getting offers for many quirky, independent roles.” Erik had to pause, however, when Charles started licking the cream and jam off his fingers, his train of thought completely derailed.

Emma was now saying something, but Erik barely heard her as he continued staring at Charles, that pink tongue lapping at his fingers and moistening them. He was promptly startled out of his pleasant daze when there was a hard smack on his arm, and he turned to find Emma scowling at him, holding her purse. “Erik, you putz, are you even listening to me?”

“Sorry,” Erik muttered as he rubbed his arm, while Charles shot him a playful smirk.

Emma let out a long suffering sigh as she slathered jam on her scone. “Now I know what Raven meant when she said the two of you needed to go to rehab for sex addiction.”

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It was interesting that at the same time Erik was going to be filming in Asia, Charles was also going to be filming on the same continent, even though he would be four hours away by plane. Still, it was far better than being half a world away and in entirely different timezones, so Charles was already grateful for small mercies and that he was only shooting in Japan, not Jamaica.

He kept his hand on Erik’s thigh as they drove down to the Universal lot, and Erik gave him a nice, lengthy goodbye kiss before promising to come and pick Charles up after Erik finished the day’s shoot. Watching Erik whizzing off the lot in the Porsche, Charles headed in to the offices, where a PA brought him up to a small auditorium filled with various cast and crew for the Japanese project.

It was quite an interesting project, a quirky offbeat drama very different from his usual rom-com offerings. Charles had fallen in love with the script, a story about an American corporate slave who loses his job and ends up going to Japan for a bout of soul-searching, but falls in love with the country instead. Charles liked these fish-out-of-water scenarios in which characters were dumped in a foreign country where they didn’t know anyone as well as the language, and the only thing he didn’t like about the movie was how long it was going to take him away from Erik.

“Mr. Xavier,” a neat, trim studio exec walked up to him and shook his hand firmly. “Yuriko will be in shortly, would you like something to drink?”

“Just some Earl Grey, please,” Charles said politely, flashing her a quick smile. Once the tea came,
he sat down next to the rest of the principal cast and started chatting with them, trying not to think too hard about the impending separation from Erik. They were both adults, after all, and it wasn’t as though he couldn’t function without Erik.

Charles paused as he sipped his tea. Maybe that wasn’t exactly true, but it was damn close.

His thoughts were interrupted by the loud ‘click’ of high heels marching into the room, and he realised it was Yuriko and the rest of the production crew. She was much better-looking than she was in the few photos Charles had seen so far, and also a lot scarier, if her razor-sharp glare around the room at the cast and crew was anything to go by. She briskly introduced herself, then got right down to brass tacks in a very no-nonsense manner that Charles thought Erik would appreciate. Charles himself thought it was all a little impersonal, but then Yuriko was well-known for her abruptness and efficiency.

Standing behind Yuriko was a tall, familiar dark-haired man who was wearing a long scarf and - here, Charles rolled his eyes - shades. He took them off as he surveyed the room, and when he squinted a certain way, Charles was instantly reminded of Alex. This had to be Scott Summers. Scott handed his glasses off to a waiting assistant, then stood beside Yuriko with his arms crossed. Charles tried not to smile. Scott’s reputation as a producer certainly preceded him.

After her brief introduction, Yuriko turned and barked something in Japanese at a mousy-looking PA, who quickly hurried over and started doling out copies of the production schedule. Charles had already received his in advance when the studio had sent it to Raven, but it still didn’t prevent the unhappy twist of his mouth when he saw how few weekends he had off. There was hardly any time to jump on a flight and visit Erik, like he had planned to.

“Charles?” His head jerked up, blinking at being unexpectedly - and sharply - singled out. Yuriko was staring at him, and everyone’s heads had swivelled around to face him as well. He could feel his cheeks heating up in a blush, and Yuriko must have taken this as a sign of weakness. “Is there a problem with the schedule?”

“Well, I...” Charles’ eyes darted down to the cramped schedule in his hands again, then back up at the director. “I was just thinking that we barely get any time off. It’s not just myself I’m concerned about. It can’t be good for the crew, too.”

Surprisingly, there was a low murmur of assent around the auditorium, and Charles saw someone in the corner in a leather jacket sitting up, unfolding his legs. “I agree, people are bound to fall ill,” a Japanese-accented voice said, and Charles realised it was one of his co-stars, Kiro, a pale, twitchy man with a long, side-swept fringe. He tucked it behind his ear now. “Perhaps we could extend the shoot just by a few days so we have time to rest, Yuriko-san?”

Her mouth twitched. It was obvious that she had a soft spot for Kiro, and Charles realised that in a very odd way, she reminded him of Erik in the beginning and how he had been so grouchy, but he had never failed to look at Charles differently and treat him differently as well. Erik had always been softer with Charles, and Yuriko seemed to be doing the exact same thing.

“Kiro-san, you must understand,” she said with a soft, relenting sigh. “Don’t you wish for filming to wrap up faster so you can go back earlier to your loved ones?”

Instantly Charles thought of Erik, of the soft way he had smiled at Charles that morning in the reflection of the bathroom mirror, and he realised she was right. He just had to grit his teeth and suffer through this, then.

Scott stepped forward at this point, putting a hand on Yuriko’s shoulder. “I think Yuriko is right, so
if anyone else has a problem with the way I did the schedule, come and see me.’

Predictably, no one did.

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Yuriko managed her set with the brutal efficiency of the Shinkansen rail system, and Charles found himself reeling from the whiplash whenever she abruptly sliced through a scene with a fiercely hissed ‘Cut!’ and ground everything to a screeching halt. This was sometimes the result of her being unhappy with the way he was playing out the scene or the liberties he had taken with the script, and Charles would effusively apologise whenever he felt like he was the one responsible for holding up production. The upside to her iron-clad grip on things was that his hours rarely dragged past the expected daily schedules, and he occasionally had the luxury of popping onto Erik’s set to take a peek at how things were going. Today had been one of those early days, and Charles had been on the verge of asking Darwin to give him a lift over to the Paramount lot when he received a text from Erik saying that filming had wrapped ahead of time and that he was coming over. Charles was not above admitting that he had smiled stupidly at his phone for a good minute as he typed his reply, looking forward to spending the rest of the day with the man he loved.

Erik pulled up in his silver Porsche barely ten minutes later, and Charles felt himself grinning hard enough to make his cheeks hurt as he got into the car. He gave Erik a deep, lingering kiss in greeting, the tip of his tongue tracing the curve of Erik’s bottom lip before pulling away. “Hello, darling. How was your day?”

“John was tolerable, and I didn’t even snap once at any of the extras, so it was on the whole strangely pleasant,” Erik answered with a broad grin and began rubbing Charles’ thigh affectionately. “But that’s unimportant. What would you like to do?”

Charles chuckled, hooking his arm around Erik’s. “Why do I feel like we’re playing hooky?” he joked before pursing his lips, tapping the index finger of his right hand against them while he considered. “We still have a while before dark. How about Santa Monica, for old times’ sake?”

“Santa Monica, it is.” Erik shot Charles a fond look as he pulled out of the lot and they were soon on their way towards the coast, the sky above them already tinged a slight shade of pink. It was the end of March and the days were finally getting longer, giving the illusion that the time they had left together was not slipping away as quickly as it was. Charles squeezed Erik’s hand gently, trying to hold on to whatever time they had remaining.

“You made it over to my side surprisingly quickly, I hope you didn’t break any laws while you were at it,” Charles teased as he tilted his head to face Erik, momentarily captivated by how the early evening light brought out the subtle shades of red in Erik’s hair.

Erik chuckled and shook his head. “That’s rich, coming from you. I might have pushed the speed limit a little but, unlike someone, I didn’t go around running every red light.”

He laughed, battling playfully at Erik’s arm. “You’re really never going to let me live that down, are you? I’m just saying we can’t have you getting suspended as well, or we’ll have to get Remy to chauffeur us around.”

Erik visibly shuddered and Charles couldn’t hide his amusement when he actually felt the vehicle slowing down. “That pretty-boy moron is never getting his hands on any of my cars.”

“Thank you for driving me around, Erik. Darwin would have handled it if you hadn’t volunteered, but I’m glad that it’s you,” Charles said, his voice softening at the end.
“It’s my pleasure. Driving you was the favourite part of my day when we first started out. It still is,” Erik replied, and Charles let out a soft sigh when he felt that familiar, gentle ache in his chest, lifting Erik’s hand to brush his lips across the top of his knuckles.

Charles spent the rest of drive to Santa Monica picking Erik’s brain about the scene where his character, Johnny Martin, gets laid off. He had always enjoyed going through a scene with Erik on ‘First Class’; Erik’s opinion of how it should be played was often vastly different from his own, and Charles was glad that they were able to continue working together in some capacity despite being on separate projects. True enough, Erik thought that Johnny should uncheck his temper, while Charles himself had subscribed to the notion that Johnny would be slightly more understanding, given the current economy. Erik did have a point, though. Perhaps latent fury was the best way to go.

Charles had been so caught up in their discussion that he barely noticed when they pulled up to the Santa Monica pier; the drive having felt like it had gone by in an instant. They found a parking lot easily and Erik took his hand as they made their way over to the pier, his grip tightening the moment they stepped onto the boardwalk. Charles tilted his head up, studying Erik’s knitted brows and how he was clearly steering them as far away from the side of the platform as possible, positioning himself between Charles and the ledge. Charles paused, leaning up while placing his free hand soothingly on Erik’s chest as he stared meaningfully at Erik. “I didn’t know it still bothered you.”

Erik relaxed at that, letting out a breath Charles didn’t know he was holding and loosening the firm hold he had on Charles’ hand. “All the time, if I let myself think about it. Watching you fall was the single most terrifying moment of my life.”

“Oh, Erik.” Charles slid his hand up from Erik’s chest to cradle the side of his neck, lifting himself onto the tips of his toes to press their lips together. “You have to let go,” he whispered, close enough to feel the warmth of Erik’s breath against his parted lips before he kissed him again, circling the tip of his tongue against Erik’s and smiling when he felt Erik release his hand entirely to wrap his arms around him. He had learnt from a young age to fend for himself, never knowing how it felt like to be coddled or protected. And now here was Erik, all signed up as his personal superhero, and it felt absolutely wonderful. “I always feel safest when I’m with you, but you can’t save me from everything, darling.”

Charles chased Erik’s lips for one last peck as Erik pulled away, flicking his gaze up to Erik’s eyes that looked much softer now, smiling when Erik cracked a lopsided grin. “I’m going to damn well try.”

Charles smiled broadly, tugging on the collar of Erik’s shirt as he shook his head, “I’m sorry, but--”

They were interrupted by a sharp gasp, and Charles turned to find four young women in their twenties staring at them. Probably tourists, judging by the cameras they held in their hands. He released Erik and tried for a polite smile, Erik’s hand settling proprietarily on the small of his back.

“Could we have a picture with you two?” one of them asked shyly.

“Of course, sweetheart,” Charles replied, wrapping an arm around Erik and settling himself comfortably against his side as they crowded around for the photo, which of course turned out to be one from each camera. As was often the case, this led to even more people circling them, all wanting pictures taken as well, and Charles snuck an amused smile at Erik who made a show of rolling his eyes dramatically after what must have been the fifteenth photo.

“Charles, could I have an autograph, please?” someone else asked.

“My pleasure.” He pulled out the Sharpie he always carried with him as he took her aquarium ticket
from her, scribbling his name across half the front surface. “Would you like Erik to sign it as well?”

“Yes, if he wouldn’t mind?” she answered, looking at Erik cautiously.

Charles tried his best not to laugh when Erik shot him a look that said, in no uncertain terms, that he
was going to collect on this when they got back tonight. Erik nodded at her, taking the ticket from
Charles, “Of course I wouldn’t mind. What’s your name?”

They carried on like that, taking turns with the marker to sign all manner of objects, Charles making
small talk whenever Erik was busy with the autographs, until Erik eventually surrendered about ten
minutes in, clearing his throat, “As much as we’d like to stay, there’s somewhere Charles and I have
to be.”

“Right, it was lovely talking to all of you,” Charles added, letting Erik pull him away. Charles
snuggled up to him when they were out of earshot, rubbing his outer hand soothingly over Erik’s
abdomen as they strolled along the boardwalk with their fingers entwined. “You were lovely, too.”

He smiled and closed his eyes briefly when he felt Erik press his lips to the top of his head. “The
paps will probably be here in half an hour,” Erik said as he ran his fingers through Charles’ hair.

Charles chuckled. “Just another typical date night, then.” He couldn’t help luxuriating in the feel of
Erik’s hands sifting through the strands of his hair, like a mini-head massage. Erik put out warmth
like a furnace, making Charles need nothing thicker than a cardigan even in the chilliest weather. On
the pier here it was a little nippy, but Erik’s arms encircling him kept him warm and toasty. Charles
slid his hands into Erik’s pockets, sighing in contentment. He honestly couldn’t be happier at this
exact moment.

He could hear Erik sniffing the air. “I smell cinnamon and sugar,” he said tentatively, looking
around. “Liebling, are you up for a churro?”

Charles was wrong: it just got better. “That sounds delightful. I could do with something sweet.”

“Really?” Erik sounded amused, stopping in his tracks so Charles had to stop, too. Just as Charles
turned his head to see what Erik was up to, he found Erik’s lips on his own, giving him the sweetest,
gentlest peck. “There, since you wanted something sweet.”

Charles couldn’t help grinning into the kiss as Erik pulled away. “Darling, you spoil me. I’m going
to make demands for sugary treats all the time now,” he declared softly, trying not to be mindful of
the passers-by taking a moment to gawk at them before carrying on their way.

Erik laughed and kissed his cheek again. “Come on then, let’s get some churros. I’m a little hungry.”

They stopped by a little pierside stall, a petite Mexican woman frying up batches of crispy churros
while her son rolled them around in a mixture of sugar and cinnamon. Erik paid for two churros,
tipping the boy handsomely and making him smile, and handed one to Charles. They both held
hands as they continued down the pier, Erik carrying the bag of churros while Charles took bites of
the crispy treat, then tore off pieces and fed Erik as well.

At one point Charles innocently licked the sugar off his lips, feeling Erik’s hand tighten in his and
realising Erik was staring at him, eyes half-lidded. “What is it?” Charles asked, concerned, his tongue
sweeping over his lips for traces of sugar.

He was stunned when Erik suddenly swooped in and attacked his mouth, tongue lapping at the seam
of his lips before Charles parted them to give him access, welcoming Erik in. Erik tasted like
Cinnamon and burnt sugar and himself, and he tasted so good that Charles closed his eyes, losing
himself in the feeling of Erik pillaging his mouth.  

When they broke away, they were both slightly breathless and dazed, Erik’s lips reddened and moist with Charles’ saliva. “Mmm,” Erik breathed out. “You taste like candy.”  

“So do you.” Charles licked the sweet trace of Erik off his lips, looking forward to heading home later where he could rip off Erik’s clothes and continue that very promising kiss. Erik was still staring at his mouth, but as much as Charles wanted to throw his legs around Erik’s waist, they were starting to attract quite a bit of attention, so that was out of the question. Charles cupped Erik’s face, stroking his cheek. “Come on, we’d better continue walking before people start watching and selling tickets.”  

Erik chuckled, turning to press a brief kiss to Charles’ palm. “You’re tempting me to consider it,” he admitted but he took Charles’ hand again and they continued their stroll down the pier. The sun was beginning its slow descent in the horizon, sinking into a pale pink and red wash of colours strewn across the milky blue sky. It was the beginnings of one of the most beautiful sunsets Charles had ever seen, and he was glad Erik was here to share this with him. They carried on down the pier, chasing the last streaks of daylight until they reached the end of the boardwalk, only the railing separating them from the crashing waves below.  

“I am very fond of sunsets,” Charles whispered as he circled his arms around Erik, leaning his temple against Erik’s chest as he cast his eyes on the ocean, watching the sun burn down to cinders while the steady pounding of Erik’s heart echoed with the sounds of the sea.  

Erik returned his embrace, and Charles relaxed at the warm press of Erik’s cheek to the crown of his head. “When the sun has set, no candle can replace it.”  

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“You know, I was a little jealous of all those people earlier,” Charles said after they had shuffled into a car of the Ferris wheel, sliding his arm behind Erik’s shoulders and letting it rest on the top of the circular seat.  

Erik’s eyebrows shot up. Surely he hadn’t been paying those fans that much attention, and had definitely granted them nowhere near the amount of affection that he had showered on Charles during that time. Besides, he would have plainly ignored them if not for the fact that Charles always felt the need to be no less obliging to any random person who walked up to them on the street than he would to Erik himself. “Why?”  

“Why? Erik Lehnsherr, I dare say I am your biggest fan. And yet you’ve never given me your autograph,” Charles responded incredulously, teasingly pouting at the end for good measure, and Erik had to curb his urge to bend down and suck on that moist lower lip.  

Instead, Erik laughed. “Give me something and I will sign it right now.”  

Charles grinned and reached into his pocket to fish out his marker, handing it to Erik while arching an eyebrow wickedly. “Oh, no need for that.”  

Before Erik could figure out what was going on, Charles was gripping onto his shoulders and swinging a leg across his lap, kneeling over him precariously as the car continued on its ascent. “Mein Gott, Charles! Get back down, this is dangerous,” Erik insisted in a panic, hands immediately grasping onto Charles’ hips in an effort to steady him, suddenly acutely aware that there were no safety barriers in the cars.  

Charles broke out in a laugh, still smiling when he slid his palms along Erik’s shoulders to wrap his
hands around the back of Erik’s neck. Only a sliver of orange and gold remained just above the horizon, the rest of the world cloaked in the shadow of twilight, Charles’ alabaster skin a stark contrast against the darkened sky, hair loosened by the land breeze that was blowing out to the Pacific. He looked beautiful, ethereal, and almost delicate. “Calm down, darling,” he whispered as he lowered himself, thumbs stroking the nape of Erik’s neck as he rested his hips on the top of Erik’s knees, and Erik felt himself ease upon the comforting press of Charles’ weight against him.

Satisfied, Charles let go of Erik’s neck, fingers now occupied with undoing the buttons of his own shirt. Erik watched transfixed as Charles slowly revealed an expanse of pale skin, stretching down from his neck with every pop of a button. He could feel Charles’ intent gaze on him the entire time, sending shivers down his spine until the last of the buttons slipped out through the fabric, exposing soft ripples of muscle that spread down to the waistline of Charles’ pants. Charles trailed his fingers up Erik’s chest, and Erik returned his attention to Charles’ face when his hands found their way back to Erik’s shoulders. Charles’ eyes were soft, his voice hushed, suddenly completely vulnerable in the fading light. “You can sign your name right across my heart.”

Erik felt his breath catch in his throat, hands reaching out to part the fabric of Charles’ shirt and reverently slide down his flanks, worshiping every rise and dip of flesh before coming to rest on the jut of his hipbones. He leaned forward, pressing his lips to the middle of Charles’ sternum and breathing him in, the scent so ingrained in him that he could not forget it even if he tried, calling to mind warm beds and wandering limbs, slow dances and lasting embraces, and all the best moments of his life. There was no mistaking how the drumming against his lips quickened with each slow exhale onto smooth skin, and Erik felt a tightening clench in the space in his ribs, in the same spot where his lips were pressed against Charles’ skin. Surely you must know that you’ll always have mine.

He pulled away, picking the marker from where he had left it on the seat, flicking his eyes up with a small smile to meet Charles’ for a moment before signing ‘Erik Lehnsherr’ in cursive script on the touch-warmed patch of skin between Charles’ pectorals, drawing out each light stroke of the felt tip against its porcelain canvas to savour the way Charles trembled beneath his hands. He blew gently on the drying ink when he was done, a silent prayer that this beating heart would be the one thing in his life he would never harm.

“I wanted so much to kiss you, that night in the car,” Erik whispered, afraid to break the still of the silence, overwhelmed with the feeling that this moment they were sharing was sacred, something he would cherish even in his final days. It was like they had come full circle, back at the beginning before he knew the taste of Charles’ skin against his tongue, or the sensation of Charles’ fingers running through his hair as he read from ‘The Once and Future King’ in the Queen’s English while they lay tangled up in bed, briefly spirited back to that night when they had pulled up by the side of the slip road, ‘Der Weg’ echoing in his ears. God, he should have kissed him.

Charles clutched the collar of his shirt, tugging him over insistently. “Then kiss me now, Erik. Kiss me now.”

Erik rushed forward to claim his lips, sliding down in his seat as he shifted Charles’ hips closer with a hand on the small of his back, the other splayed across Charles’ bare chest, wishing he could seep into that solid warmth like the dark ink beneath his palm. He sucked gently on his lower lip, sliding in when Charles gasped in response, relishing in the feel of wet heat and the gentle caress of Charles’ tongue. Erik circled the hand on his chest to his back, holding Charles close in the fading dusk, his kisses growing urgent when it struck him that the luxury of moments like this would soon be snatched away. Their time together was fleeting, ephemeral like the dawn and dusk, when both night and day could exist as one. He clung onto Charles hard enough to bruise, the two of them devouring each other between short, shallow breaths, vaguely aware of the quiet hum of the cool metal frame
against his back as the car rotated past the apex and gradually sank into the darkness, back towards the ground.

* * * * *

By the time their Ferris wheel carriage had descended, Erik had helped Charles button up his shirt again, and they were respectably decent as they stepped out of the car, grinning in a daze at the surprised couple after them who were waiting their turn. “Sorry!” Charles called out with a laugh as the slack-jawed couple stared after them, along with the curious patrons waiting in line. Erik couldn’t help smirking, his hand firmly claspiong Charles’ as they made their way down the pier. Even though Charles’ shirt was now fully buttoned, Erik couldn’t help being hyper-aware of the ink scrawled across that pale, pinkish chest, branding Charles as his.

“That was so much fun,” Charles said with a satisfied grin. “I never realised how much I liked Ferris wheels.”

Erik noticed a lock of Charles’ hair was tumbling down past his forehead, teased loose by the evening breeze, and he gently tucked it back, earning himself a heated blue gaze. “You make everything more fun, Liebling,” he murmured, leaning in for a peck on the lips.

A sudden flash startled him, and Erik found himself shielding his eyes, blinking. “Looks like they’re right on time.”

Charles giggled, leaning in to whisper into his ear. “What are you going to tell them tonight?” he asked as Erik released his hand to wrap a protective arm around his waist instead. No matter how much more comfortable Erik was with the paparazzi, Charles’ safety would always remain a top priority.

It was becoming a little game of theirs; they would take turns to tell half-truths whenever a pap asked them a stupid question, checking the next day to see which ones made the news cycle. Raven had taken to calling them royal trolls, while Emma just said she was glad he didn’t have a publicist as they would have run screaming for the hills by now. Well, at the very least Seacrest was delighted, even calling Charles to say that he was on to them and would like to buy them dinner for skyrocketing his ratings. Pranks aside, Erik was beginning to see the advantage of having the media wrapped around their finger, and it was also a very powerful weapon to have in their arsenal should they ever find the need to sway the masses. He hardly minded the paparazzi now, the only problem being that he often worried he’d pop a boner when a flash went off in his face, thanks to Charles’ firm belief in positive reinforcement afterwards. Not that he was complaining, of course.

‘Erik! Did you really beat Clooney at golf with your hands behind your back?’

Charles snorted loudly, and Erik turned his face to hide what Raven had identified as his ‘shit-eating grin’ in Charles’ hair. ‘Try not to do that, it makes you look like a raving lunatic in pictures,’ she’d said during one of her merciless teasing sessions, dished out under the guise of ‘PR 101’. Charles recovered first, stroking Erik’s chest as he shot back, “Oh, yes. Gorgeous George was sore about it for days.”

Erik chortled, slipping his hand behind briefly to give Charles’ ass a good pinch. Clooney was never going to forgive them now. “He said the next day that he couldn’t walk straight after going for that round with the both of us,” Erik added with a smirk.

A few of the paps exchanged confused looks and Erik could tell from the way Charles was trembling that he was trying very hard not to laugh. They had gone for a game of golf with Clooney last weekend (Charles and him had indeed won, even treating themselves to a victory make-out session
in the golf cart after.) and the paparazzi had sniffed them out when they were about to leave. Charles had come up with the horrifying idea to outrun them with the golf cart, shaving off a decade of Erik’s life in the process. He really only had himself to blame for that, all Charles had had to do earlier that day was look up at him with his big blue eyes, bat his eyelashes and go, “Please, Erik. This is the only thing I get to drive,” and he was done for, agreeing against his better judgment. The whole fiasco ended when Charles crashed the buggy into a Cadillac in the parking lot, and Erik had had to grab onto Charles to prevent him from getting flung out upon impact. Security had soon come running to chase the vultures away, allowing the two of them to escape in their car.

The near-death experience had led to some fucking amazing sex in the backseat, made even better by terrible puns involving golf clubs and hole-in-one’s, so Erik guessed the paps were forgiven despite the amount they had to pay to cover the damage to Jack Nicholson’s car.

‘Where are you going to now?’ one of the paps shouted as they finally neared their Porsche.

“We’re going to get Erik’s name tattooed across my chest,” Charles replied, eyes dancing with mirth as Erik helped him into the car. Some days Erik thought Charles was even worse than him.

Erik made his way around and hurriedly climbed in while ignoring the bombardment of follow-up questions, locking the doors before they both burst out laughing. “Are we really?” he asked when they had recovered, reaching over to buckle himself in.

Charles twined his fingers around Erik’s free hand, lifting it to his lips to kiss the back of it. “I would love to, darling. But Raven would kill us both if she had to include ‘Tattoo of Erik Lehnsherr’s signature on chest’ in my bio. Dinner?”

Erik nodded, setting the vehicle in motion, glad that the paparazzi had the sense to get out of his way tonight. “Venice Beach?” he suggested as they pulled out of the car park.

Charles twined his fingers around Erik’s free hand, lifting it to his lips to kiss the back of it. “That sounds lovely. We could go to that place with the wonderful margaritas.”

“Of course.” Erik turned to him when they hit Ocean Avenue and winked, smiling sideways as he said, “If you’re drunk enough after, I hear the area is also famous for tattoo shops.”

Erik could think of nothing that brought him more joy than the sound of Charles’ laughter, melodious and beautiful.

* * * * *

Since their remaining time together was quickly running out, Erik took a special pleasure in doing everything he could for Charles, including being his personal chauffeur. He happily ferried Charles to and from the studio, and when he had to work late and wasn’t available to do it, he grudgingly allowed Darwin to take over occasionally. However, sometimes Erik was lucky and got to leave his own set early, which meant he got to watch Charles at work. It still amazed him how professional and talented Charles was as an actor, even if Erik was a little biased. Still, he had worked with many different actors, and none could brighten the room and charm the cameras the way Charles could.

However, Erik was a little annoyed with the bossy Japanese director who did not even hesitate in ordering Charles and the rest of the cast around, and at one point Erik had to forcibly bite his tongue when she started scolding Charles for missing his cue. Charles, ever the peacemaker, generously apologised and got right back to work, and Erik released a breath he didn’t realise he had been holding, unclenching his fists.
Thankfully the director called for a cut and a break, after which Charles instantly bounced over to where Erik was standing behind the DP. “You’re early today,” he said, beaming as he tilted his head up to give Erik a welcome peck on the lips.

“Yup, we finished an important scene in two takes so today wrapped early.” Erik handed Charles the bottle of Fiji he had been saving for him, watching Charles gulp down a bit of water. When he was done, his lips were redder and more moist than ever, and Erik couldn’t help staring. He bent down to lick off a bead of water remaining on Charles’ lower lip, and they exchanged a chaste kiss.

When they pulled apart, Erik saw Scott Summers smirking somewhere behind Charles. “So my brother was right, the two of you can’t keep your hands off each other.”

Charles rolled his eyes, while Erik narrowed his at Scott. “You Summers-es think you’re all so funny,” he muttered, making Scott laugh. Still, some part of Erik couldn’t help wrapping a protective arm around Charles, scooping him into his hold while Erik put on his most fearsome scowl.

Thankfully, it seemed to work as Scott held his hands up in surrender, still smirking. “All right, all right, I get it, you want some alone time for your break. I’ll see you later, Charles.”

“All right.” A relieved Charles winked at Erik. “Really, darling, be nicer to him. It’s not that Scott is a bad person—”

“He is just an ass?” Erik blurted out, making Charles laugh.

“Well, if you say so.” Charles ran a hand down Erik’s chest, his palm warm and gentle. “And even if he is evil, I’m perfectly capable of defending myself.”

Erik raised an eyebrow at him, mouth curling up into a crooked smile. “I see. Come on then, show me your best moves.”

Charles’ eyes were bluer than ever, glittering with amusement. “Right here?”

“Right here.”

Chuckling, Charles released Erik and stepped back, rolling up his sleeves. Erik tried not to ogle, and mostly succeeded. Raising his fists, Charles adopted a fighting stance, and Erik immediately mirrored him, holding his palms up as targets. Charles threw a few mock punches, but he was laughing a little too much to really put any effort into it.

“Come on, Liebling,” Erik said, once it was clear that Charles would be outpunched by a day-old kitten. “I’ll show you how it’s done.” He gestured for Charles to put his palms up now, and Erik took a few swings, his hits precise and swift. He almost caught Charles off-guard with the first ‘punch’, but Charles learned fast and managed to catch the second one.

Erik now paused, unable to help smiling at Charles who was grinning right back. “Okay, watch me,” Erik said, holding still for a long moment before he suddenly struck, making Charles wobble as he caught Erik’s fist with his palm. “Liebling, that was great! Your reflexes are sharper than mine.”

"What is going on here?"

Erik swung around at the sharp voice as Charles’ face fell, turning to face a livid Yuriko who had her hands on her hips. Before Erik could even explain, she was already wagging a perfectly Minxed finger at Charles. “Everyone’s busy re-reading the script and you’re horsing around with your boyfriend on the set?”
Erik’s hackles instantly rose. *No one* yelled at Charles like that. He advanced towards Yuriko, who admirably was one of the very few people who did not shrink back in fear when Erik did this. “What’s the big deal? He’s on break,” Erik said hotly, even as he could feel Charles trying to tug him backwards.

She narrowed her eyes at him. “The big deal? The big deal is that he is at work, and I can’t have *distractions* turning up and making goo-goo eyes at my cast.”

Heat flared up Erik’s spine and he could hear Charles pleading, “Erik, please, let it go,” but Erik kept his glare fixed on her. The rest of the set was deathly quiet, everyone riveted to the spot as they watched the impending quarrel. Even Scott was watching with a kind of wary glee to see what kind of chaos would erupt.

“All we were doing was having a little fun during Charles’ *break,*” Erik snapped at her. “Are you such a slave-driver that you want Charles to work 24/7?”

Her mouth twisted into an ugly grimace. “I am a very fair director, I expect to end on time so my cast and crew can go home to their families. If you feel fooling around is more important than going home on time, you’re welcome to explain that to everyone here.” She made a grand sweeping gesture of the whole set, including a mortified Charles who was stroking Erik’s back in a vain attempt to calm him down.

However, this only served to stoke the rising ball of fury in the pit of Erik’s stomach. “Then you’re overreacting, because it’s not like we held up production for hours. I was just talking to Charles for 5 minutes.”

Scott’s voice piped up from the watching crowd. “Technically, it was 14 minutes—”

“Shut the fuck up, Summers!” Erik turned the full force of his glare onto Scott, who was now holding up his hands in surrender. Out of the corner of his eye, Erik could see Charles ducking his head and hiding his face in Erik’s chest, trying not to laugh.

Yuriko made an impatient, tsk-ing noise as she checked her watch. “Anyway, can we get back to work? This stupid argument is wasting so much time.”

That did it. Erik lowered his voice to a soft, dangerous calm tone which had scared even Shaw on occasion. “This argument is not stupid because it was wrong of you to raise your voice at Charles in front of the entire crew and cast for doing something harmless.” He tilted his head at her, nostrils flaring. “You should respect at least your lead actor who, by the way, has been *very* accommodating and easy-going so far. Not all people are like Charles, though. He may be nice…. But I’m not.”

The silence that followed was so thick with tension that nobody moved at all for the next minute or so. Then Yuriko’s shoulders sagged as she let out a breath, and the angry twist of her mouth relaxed.

Now, Charles’ hesitant but very calming voice seemed welcome. “Yuriko, I’m sorry we held up production for a few minutes. But Erik is right, it is my break and you could have told me nicely.”

It was almost funny to see the way Yuriko’s eyes widened as she stared at Charles in surprise, mouth dropping open. But more gratifyingly, Erik thought he could see a newfound respect for Charles in her eyes, and the way she seemed taken aback by the fact that Charles was standing up for himself.

Finally muttering under her breath something that sounded like, ‘*baka gaijin*’, Yuriko let out a sigh and looked around the set. “Okay, I want everybody back to work right now! You heard me!”
Erik was indignant as she walked away. “What, no apology to Charles?”

Scott shrugged. “Hey, that was as good an apology as you’re ever going to get. Yuriko never backs off.”

Erik narrowed his eyes at him. “Why are you still here?”

Scott wisely decided to stop being a glutton for punishment and wandered off to the other end of the set, where Yuriko was now standing. As Erik sighed and turned back to Charles, expecting disappointment or even embarrassment, he was surprised to see Charles biting his lip and staring adoringly at Erik, his cheeks flushed.

“So, um, I take it you’re not mad at me for yelling at your director in front of everyone?” Erik ventured, reaching out and brushing against the curve of Charles’ bottom lip with his thumb. He got his answer when Charles’ lips parted, wetting Erik’s thumb and letting it slide into his mouth a little.

“The only thing I’m angry about is that we don’t have time now for me to drag you somewhere and ride you until our brains have turned to mush,” he said around Erik’s thumb, before sliding it out and kissing his fingers. “Raincheck?”

Erik could see Yuriko already frowning and craning her neck to look at them, and he reluctantly sighed, giving Charles a quick kiss goodbye. “Raincheck, then.”

Filming was a lot smoother after that.

* * * * *

No matter how fervently Erik had ignored his calendar for the past few weeks, there was no escaping the fact that his flight to Hong Kong was tomorrow morning. He planned to spend his entire last day in LA with Charles, so it would be just the two of them right up until the airport. He refused to think beyond that, determined to enjoy his last remaining twenty-four hours with Charles.

They started the day with breakfast in bed, Erik bringing Charles a stack of pancakes and some strawberry syrup which made his lips even redder and sweeter, and Erik allowed himself to plunder that luscious bow of a mouth as much as he wanted since he wasn’t going to be able to soon. They laid in bed together for a while more, just holding hands and talking softly about what they were going to do once their respective projects were over.

Charles then helped Erik to pack, even though Erik could see the tiny frown between his eyebrows, and his hands were slow and a little shaky as he reluctantly placed Erik’s clothes into his suitcase. When they were done packing, there was still one more item Erik wanted, but he had to ask Charles’ permission for that.

Erik walked over to their shared wardrobe, then took down the beloved dark blue cardigan that was hanging over at Charles’ end. He held it up as Charles stared quizzically at him. “Liebling, can I take this with me, please?”

Charles’ lips parted in surprise. “You want to take that with you?”

Erik was a little too embarrassed to explain that he wanted something with Charles’ scent to help him sleep at night, so he simply nodded, hoping that Charles would understand.

Charles just looked at him steadily, then took a deep, considering breath. “You can have it, on one condition.”
“What is it?”

Charles stepped forward, brushing his hand down Erik’s chest. “Give me one of your turtlenecks, and then we’ll call it an even trade.”

Erik let out a breath he didn’t even know he had been holding. “Sounds like a fair trade to me.” He tangled his fingers in Charles’ wavy hair, stroking it back and wondering how long (or short) it was going to be the next time he got to see Charles in person. Charles was now standing on his tiptoes, lips enticingly parted and Erik gladly met him halfway, the kiss soft and sweet.

Once Erik was done packing, they spent the rest of the day like they would in a typical Westchester day: they huddled together on the couch and watched old movies, they cooked in the kitchen and fed each other and laughed, and after dinner, they slow-danced on the balcony in the chilly LA night air under the stars (even if they were not very visible, so different from his beloved Westchester sky).

Charles was shivering a little when they finally came inside, and Erik pulled him close, rubbing up and down those pale, freckled arms which were starting to warm under his touch. Erik’s hands slowed down when he realised Charles had stopped shivering, and now his skin was pink and warm. Erik let the pads of his fingers skate over the familiar expanse of smooth pale skin, his touch now gentle, exploratory. He could feel Charles’ gaze burning into him and he looked up, entranced by those clear blue eyes.

He leaned forward ever so slowly, just brushing his lips against the soft red moue of Charles’ mouth. A visible shiver - not from cold this time - ran through Charles, making him swallow as Erik sifted his fingers through Charles’ hair. Their lips brushed again, firmer this time, and Erik felt a pang in his chest at the thought of not having Charles in his arms like this for the next few months.

Erik felt himself being pushed backwards, Charles’ palms firm on his chest. Erik backed up until he hit the edge of a desk, then propped himself against it as he wrapped his arms around Charles, linking his hands just at the curve of the small of Charles’ back. It felt like that little dip was made just for him to rest his hands there, and Erik nuzzled against Charles’ cheek, feeling more than hearing him sigh.

“I really wish I could go with you,” Charles said quietly, and Erik could feel him stroking up and down his hip, the heat of his palm burning through the fabric. Erik said nothing, simply tightening his arms around Charles and just appreciating the moment, here and now. They were together. The most important thing was that he had Charles, and Charles wanted to be with him. In that respect, he was already the luckiest man on the planet.

“We still have tonight,” Erik whispered back, before burying his nose in the crook of Charles’ neck where it met his shoulder. There, Charles smelled like soap and cologne, and Erik took in a deep whiff of him, as if to memorise the scent.

“Take me to the bedroom.” Charles’ voice was low and urgent, his fingers tracing the curve of Erik’s sensitive ears. “Please, Erik.”

“My pleasure, Liebling.” Erik started mouthing that spot on his neck, using his teeth when Charles let out a soft, broken moan, going completely pliant in Erik’s hands. He could feel Charles untucking his shirt, then slipping his hands underneath to caress his stomach, trailing his fingers over the lines of his abs. Erik couldn’t stop himself from biting down, hard, and this made Charles arch up against him, making a series of indecent sounds as though he was already being fucked.

“Hgh, god, Erik--” Charles was gasping, and Erik lifted his head to see Charles’ half-parted mouth, which he immediately possessed, tongueing the soft line of his bottom lip before sucking it into his
mouth. The drugged, low sound Charles made went straight to Erik’s cock, and he allowed a hand to palm Charles’ tight, beautiful ass, feeling Charles writhing under his touch. Oh yeah, Charles really wanted it bad tonight. Erik released his bottom lip, grinning as Charles blinked at him in a daze.

“Let me guess, bed?” Erik asked with a smirk, and Charles only replied by wrapping his arms around Erik’s neck and giving him an extremely indecent kiss, one that left Erik quite weak in the knees. It didn’t help when Charles slid a hand into his boxer briefs, palming the curve of his quickly growing erection and making Erik squeeze his eyes shut, gasping for air as he tugged at his own hair. They were both getting desperate now, fumbling urgently and uselessly at each other’s clothes.

Needing Charles right now, pinned down under him in their bed, Erik realised with a frustrated huff that they were both getting nowhere. “Wait,” Erik commanded, even as Charles was trying to climb him like a tree. He placed his mouth against Charles’ neck, making him groan. “When I say ‘up’, you jump on me, okay?”

There was an amused huff of laughter, but he could hear Charles’ faint, whispery, “Yes.”

Erik reached down and gripped Charles’ thighs, murmuring, “Up,” before Charles obeyed and leapt onto Erik, bracing himself on Erik’s shoulders. Carrying Charles in his arms, Erik tottered down the corridor and tumbled into the master bedroom, flinging Charles onto the bed. Charles let out a laugh, his cheeks flushed pink with arousal, lips bitten red, pupils blown so wide that Erik could only see a thin ring of blue. Charles was the sum of his fantasies personified, squirming on the bed as he tried to rip off his own shirt.

“Let me,” Erik purred as he crawled on top of Charles, both of them hissing when their crotches were lined up together. Charles was already hard, the hot line of his cock trapped in his trousers burning against Erik’s own, and Erik couldn’t resist a hard thrust, causing the bed to shake. Charles bit his lip, eyes half-lidded as he tugged Erik down and started nipping at his mouth. This turned into a rather vicious kiss, and Erik loved this needy, demanding side of Charles that he didn’t see quite so often, a Charles who needed Erik’s cock inside him right now.

Charles pulled away from his mouth, his moist lips trailing up to Erik’s ear before whispering, “I want you so bad. Give it to me, Erik, please.”

“Believe me, it’s my pleasure.” Erik grinned against Charles’ cheek, hands fumbling at the buttons of Charles’ shirt but they were stubbornly not cooperating. As Charles wriggled wantonly under him even more, Erik lost patience with the shirt and ripped it open, buttons flying everywhere.

Charles let out a surprised laugh, eyes glowing with amusement and frank desire as Erik quickly peeled off the remnants of his shirt and tossed it aside. “Darling, I had no idea you wanted me this badly,” he purred, hooking his legs around Erik’s waist and grinding up against him.

“Of course I do.” Erik cradled Charles’ head in his hands, sifting his fingers through the fine, dark hair. Now he was licking a trail down to Charles’ collarbones, pausing every now and then to suck a hickey onto that pale, beautiful skin. “I’d always, always want you, even if you were wearing a potato sack.”

Charles’ laughter was rich and amused. “Glad to see I am that irresistible,” he said fondly, rearranging himself under Erik so that their chests were lined up together, and Erik could feel the soft beating of his heart, almost in sync with his own.

Erik took Charles’ hand and brought it to his mouth, kissing his fingers. “You’re beautiful,” Erik said seriously, getting sucked into those electric blue eyes. “And fucking sexy, and I can’t believe my
luck every day that you’re with me.”

Charles only blinked at him, the silence stretching between them for a long moment, and then suddenly Erik’s turtleneck was being yanked off him and Charles’ hands were frantically trying to undo his belt. Erik eagerly helped him, and in a minute they were both finally naked, Charles’ skin warm against his own.

“Erik?”

Charles was looking up at him, biting his lip, and Erik was tempted to swoop down and release that luscious lower lip from his teeth and suck on it again. “Yes, Charles?”

“I really want to feel you tonight,” Charles said quietly. “I want to feel you tomorrow, even after you’re gone.”

The soft sadness in those eyes were making something in Erik’s heart unravel, and he blinked away the sting in his eyes. He brought Charles’ hand to his mouth, brushing his lips against the soft, fine skin. “A piece of me will always be with you no matter where you go in the world, watching over you. You know that, right?”

Now it was Charles’ turn to blink rapidly. “Come here,” he huffed, dragging Erik down and then they were kissing and kissing, Charles’ hands roaming all over his back. In his haze he managed to open the nearby bedside drawer and fumble for the half-empty tube of lubricant, and then Charles was taking it from him and spreading it on his own fingers, shooting Erik a rather impish grin.

“Just watch.” Charles winked at him before reaching down between his legs, and Erik did watch, mouth dropping open as Charles slid his fingers into himself with a moan, getting himself ready for Erik. He couldn’t resist nuzzling against Charles’ parted lips as he watched, entranced by the emotion in those electric blue eyes. It pained him to remember that this would be their last night together in a long time, and he wanted to memorise every moment so on lonely nights he could recall the way Charles looked, pinned below him like this, breathing Erik’s name against his lips.

“I love you,” Erik whispered as he nuzzled back, taking away Charles’ hand and replacing it with his own fingers, relishing the always tight, welcoming heat of Charles around him. He stroked Charles, swallowing the hot, needy little noises Charles was making, and when Charles was slick enough and panting wildly, Erik guided himself inside and slid in to the hilt. They both let out wordless, amazed groans, and Erik never failed to be astounded at the one moment they always shared whenever they first realised they were joined together.

And then Charles’ fingers were slipping through his own, twining with his and squeezing his hands. Erik squeezed back, blotting kisses all over Charles’ face and thinking, I will always remember what you look like tonight. Charles leaned up and cleverly captured his mouth, and Erik’s brain lost focus again as he sunk into the kiss, hips rolling forward in a slow thrust and making Charles gasp.

“Oh, Erik, my darling,” Charles whispered, and Erik thrust even harder this time, bunching up the sheets. Charles was smiling up at him, electric blue eyes glow, the white line of his teeth reminding Erik that he wanted Charles to mark him. But before he could even ask, Charles seemed to exactly what he wanted and was kissing down his throat, deceptively gentle before Erik felt the sharp edges of Charles’ teeth scraping against his neck, sucking hard.

“God,” Erik groaned, head dropping down so that his hair was curtaining his face. Charles only sunk his teeth in deeper, and this made Erik shout, hips thrusting in even harder this time, drawing a deep moan from Charles, muffled against his skin. “Bite harder, Liebling, I want your marks to last for weeks and weeks.”
He felt the blunt edge of Charles’ teeth clamping down harder on his skin, making him emit a long, dragged out moan. Erik let his head drop down so that the side of it rested against Charles’, his thumb sweeping over Charles’ knuckles. Erik had to pause, filled with a swirl of conflicting emotions that made him tremble. He was losing Charles tomorrow, and they were going to be apart for months on end.

“Erik?” Charles’ questioning tone made him lift his head, and now Charles was staring up at him, cupping his cheek. “Erik, don’t be sad, my darling.”

Erik blinked, his eyes moist. “I just found you,” he said, his voice hoarse and thick with emotion. “I can’t lose you again.”

Charles bit his lip, lacing his fingers behind Erik’s head and pulling him down. “You’re not going to lose me,” he promised, his voice low and soft. “I’m always yours, Erik. Always. Do you understand?”

Erik stifled the sob burning in his chest, nodding instead and swallowing around the lump in his throat.

Charles gave him a shaky, watery smile. “Now give me something to remember you by when I’m lonely at night and missing you so much that my heart can’t take it.”

Erik bent down and kissed him, resuming his thrusts slowly and tentatively. He could taste faint traces of bitter salt, and he wondered which of them was tearing up, or maybe it was both. He folded Charles into his arms, burying his face in Charles’ throat and sucking on the sweet patch of skin there, desperate to mark Charles as his so that no matter where Charles went in the world, everyone would see the marks on him and know that he belonged solely to Erik.

“Harder, Erik. Please, my love—” Charles whispered, and Erik, not wanting Charles to see what a needy, crying mess he had become, faithfully started thrusting harder and harder, his hips slapping against Charles and making him cry out for Erik, his hands clawing at Erik’s back. He could hear Charles’ breath hitching in little sobs now, and he didn’t know if it was from pleasure or the sadness of their impending separation. But he could feel Charles’ lips against the shell of his ear, whispering ‘love’ and ‘miss you’ and ‘you’re everything’ and Erik began to tremble, squeezing his eyes shut.

Erik shifted his head down so he left a row of kisses across Charles’ collarbone, then bit on the end, making Charles gasp loudly. Charles was so hot, so tight and Erik was drowning in the feel of him, in the expanse of pale skin and red lips and sky blue eyes that seemed to see right into him and the deepest recesses of his heart, and Erik wanted to offer it all to Charles, to give him every last shred of himself, even his life.

Erik felt Charles’ legs wrapped around his waist and knew it was time. He reached between their bellies, stroking Charles and watching as his mouth fell open, breathing out Erik’s name. His eyes were closed, but Erik saw the tear streaming down his temple and he knew Charles was just as wrecked as he was.

“Charles.” Erik wiped the tear away with his thumb, and now he was looking into Charles’ reddened, moist eyes. “I love you so much.”

Charles leaned up so that their foreheads were touching. “I want to feel you come inside me,” he begged, another tear tracking down his pink cheek. “Please, Erik...”

Erik hated being the reason that Charles was crying. He had sworn to himself that if anyone ever hurt Charles, he would hunt them down and break their bones. He couldn’t keep away from that beautiful
red mouth, nudging Charles’ thighs further apart, his thrusts getting erratic. He was stroking Charles as well, and Charles let out a broken sob as he spurted all over Erik’s hand and stomach, toes curling against Erik’s back. Erik blotted kisses against Charles’ mouth, his heart feeling like it was about to burst.

He wanted to say, ‘I love you’, but one look at Charles’ grief-stricken face and it was all he could do to hold in his own sadness, and there was one last thrust before he came inside Charles, their hands locked together as Erik made a desperate, anguished sound against Charles’ neck. They were both still clinging to each other, sweat and semen and tears drying on their skin, but still Erik refused to let go or to even pull out of Charles, and Charles seemed to have the same mentality, clinging onto Erik tightly with shaking hands.

“Don’t leave me yet,” Charles whispered against his temple, and Erik only nodded, taking his hand and twining their fingers together, listening to the thundering beat of Charles’ heart in his chest.

He would not let go of Charles tonight, not at all, if he could help it.

* * * * *

Charles sat in the backseat with Erik, their arms locked around each other while Darwin drove, pretending not to notice them in the rear view mirror. Raven was in the passenger’s seat, texting Hank. Charles knew he looked like an absolute wreck: his skin bore the unnatural pallor of one who had not had any sleep, making the bites Erik had left all over his body even more obvious, and his eyes were reddened and bruised. Erik was not much better off, heavy bags under his own eyes, hair tousled and unruly. Charles burrowed further into his embrace, dreading the passing minutes that would eventually lead up to Erik leaving. He could feel Erik burying his nose in his hair, and Charles let out a low sigh.

They had spent the entire night clinging together in desperation, as though if they could just wrap their arms around each other that much tighter, or plunge into each other just a little deeper, then perhaps two halves could be fused as one, and nothing could ever take Erik away from him. Charles had whimpered when the bedroom had brightened up with the first light of dawn, had grabbed Erik by the hair and kissed him brutally, begged him to make love to him one last time, please. Just one last time.

“But you’re so raw,” Erik had said, hands trembling.

And Charles had pleaded, sworn up and down that he could take it, made Erik look him in the eye and promise to give it to him hard enough that he would still be able to feel it for days to come. If everything else was sore, perhaps the gaping wound in his chest right beneath the last traces of Erik’s calligraphy would hurt a little less in comparison. It had been unfair to ask that of Erik, of course. Charles himself had been gentle when he had taken Erik once that night at his behest, tender and slow because that was the only way he knew how. But Erik had agreed in the end, sucked one final parting gift at the crease where Charles’ right thigh met his groin and hooked both legs over his shoulders, driven into him so hard that Charles was bent in half, screaming himself hoarse as he once again orgasmed dry.

After, when Charles had his boneless legs back around Erik’s waist and with Erik still inside him, arms circled around Erik’s broad chest, holding him in every possible way, he had whispered against Erik’s temple, declarations like ‘I love you’ and ‘I’m going to miss you so terribly’ and finally, in the depths of despair, had uttered, “Erik, I beg of you, please stay.”

They both wept.
He could feel Erik’s arm tightening around him when LAX came into view, and Darwin started turning in towards the Tom Bradley terminal. Charles closed his eyes, taking in a deep breath of Erik’s cologne. He knew this moment had been coming, but he hadn’t realised just how painful it would actually be. It was like a deep, physical ache in his bones, the ache exacerbated by the long, sleepless night they had spent together in the throes of passion. There was no mistaking the soft press of Erik’s lips to the crown of his head, and Charles reciprocated fittingly by pressing his lips against the curve of Erik’s exposed collarbone.

It wasn’t long before the car engine died and Darwin said, “We’re here, guys.” Charles reluctantly opened his eyes to find both his assistant and Raven turned around in their seats, staring sympathetically at both him and Erik. As much as he wanted to keep Erik to himself as long as he could, it was time to go.

The four of them trudged out of the parking lot and up into the Departure Hall, which was already filled with many of the ‘Rule of Capture’ cast and crew chatting amongst themselves and saying goodbye to their families. All the tearful hugging and farewells just made Charles even more depressed, and he plastered himself against the side of Erik’s body, sliding an arm around Erik’s waist. Erik squeezed him back.

“I’m going to check-in, then hand everything over to Remy so I can say goodbye, okay?” he said in a soft voice, taking Charles’ hand and squeezing it. It didn’t help that Erik’s own hands were shaking.

Not trusting his voice, Charles only nodded and tiptoed to kiss Erik on the lips before urging him towards a sympathetic Remy who was waiting by the first class Cathay Pacific check-in counter.

“Hey,” Raven said, rubbing his shoulders. “When Erik comes back, Darwin and I are going to grab some coffee or something. We’ll meet you at the parking lot?”

Charles was grateful that both his friends recognised that he wanted to say his final goodbyes to Erik in private. “That would be great.” His voice was hoarse and scratchy, and he quickly cleared his throat when he saw the flash of concern on Raven’s face. “Don’t worry, my dear. I’m fine.”

“Rrrright.” Raven’s tone was heavy with scepticism, but she must have really looked like a wreck because she actually dropped it and didn’t pursue the matter. Instead, she continued to rub his back, exchanging a pointed look with Darwin who only shrugged.

It was barely a minute before Erik was back, eyes reddened. “If you two don’t mind..” he began, addressing Raven and Darwin.

Raven waved dismissively at him. “We know, we know, we’re getting lost now.” She reached up to hug Erik, giving him a tight squeeze. “I’ll see you in a few months, Erik.”

Erik only nodded stoically, gently rubbing her back. Then a respectful handshake with Darwin, before the two of them headed off for the nearest Starbucks, waving at Erik one last time. Charles didn’t bother watching them go, keeping his eyes sadly fixed on Erik, whose jaw was working as though he were trying to contain his emotions.

“I have another ten minutes before we have to go in,” Erik said quietly, his fingers sifting through Charles’ hair. “Stay with me until I have to go?”

Charles smiled wanly at him. “You’ll have difficulty prying me out of your arms.” He let his smile fade as Erik pulled him closer, his ear pressed to Erik’s chest. Charles closed his eyes, listening to the sound of Erik’s heartbeat, comforting and familiar. There were people milling around them, of course
- this was LAX after all - and Charles could hear soft whispers of, 'Hey, isn’t that...' but he shut them all out, focusing on having Erik all to himself for the next ten minutes.

“This is the hardest thing I’ve ever had to do,” Erik said, his voice low and scratchy as well.

Charles squeezed Erik tighter, breathing him in before letting out a heavy sigh. “Me too.” He could feel some of the stress melt away when Erik began stroking his hair, long fingers kneading into his scalp tenderly. He tried his best to relax into Erik’s touch, wanting to savour it for as long as he could, every passing second bringing them closer to their last.

“Promise me you won’t do any of your own stunts,” Erik whispered after a while, and Charles pulled back a little so he could look up at Erik, one hand rubbing Erik’s back as he waited for him to go on. “I won’t be able to sleep at night if I keep waiting for a call from the hospital.”

Charles chewed on his lower lip, eyebrows furrowed. “But you’re doing yours, and they’re a thousand times worse than anything I might have to do.” Really, the most dangerous thing he could think of was perhaps hopping across some pedestals at a temple, surely even a child could do that. Erik’s expression fell, and Charles instantly pushed aside whatever he was going to say. “Yes, all right, I won’t do anything on my own,” Charles reassured him, hands reaching up to cup Erik’s face as he tiptoed to kiss him, smiling against Erik’s lips when he felt him calm down. He peppered a few more kisses to the corner of Erik’s mouth and along his jaw before pulling away. “I really worry for your blood pressure, darling.”

Erik laughed, just a little, and Charles grinned despite himself, glad that he was still able to coax it out of Erik. Erik pressed his forehead against Charles’, and Charles found himself lost in his gaze, trying to commit every speck of blue and green in his irises to memory. “I’ll fly over to Tokyo whenever I can,” Erik promised, taking his hand and running his thumb over his knuckles. For the first time ever, Erik’s fingers felt cold.

“Call me once you land?” Charles asked, forcing a smile.

Erik nodded. “Of course.”

“I’ll call you whenever Yuriko gives us a break. You’re going to be so sick of my voice in your ear.” Charles tried his best to laugh, but it ended up sounding hollow and much more like a choked sob.

Erik shook his head profusely, bundling Charles in his arms, their cheeks pressed together. “Never.”

That did it. His vision blurred, and Charles felt the first drops of tears rolling down the sides of his face. He clawed at the soft cotton of Erik’s shirt, heart clenching when Erik buried his own wet face in his neck. *Just breathe, just breathe,* he kept repeating to himself, taking deep lungfuls of air through his mouth and trying to stay strong for the both of them. Charles clung to Erik’s chest with all his might, like a drowning man who was about to die.

He heard someone clear his throat off to the side, then the sound of Remy’s voice as he said tentatively, “I am sorry, mon ami. It is time to go.”

Remy stroked his back soothingly, feeling a bit better when he reminded
himself that Erik had a very capable assistant looking after him. “Thank you, Remy. Make sure he eats well?”

Remy nodded, smiling kindly before grabbing Erik’s cabin cruiser and heading towards security. Erik took his hand, and they made the short walk to the end of the Departure Hall together in fragile silence. Right from the beginning, he had always known that there would come a day when Erik would leave him. They had obligations they had to keep, roles they had to play, and their commitment to their profession would always be an obstacle that kept them apart. And yet, Charles had tried to love him the best he could, loved him knowing that his affection would only make it that much harder when they inevitably had to part, that no amount of love could make him stay.

They stopped at the entrance to airport security and Charles threw his arms around Erik one last time, wondering when he would be able to hold Erik close to his chest again, whether he would still be the same person the next time they met. “I’m sorry I can’t go with you,” Charles whispered as he squeezed his eyes shut, voice breaking.

Erik shook his head, embracing him tighter as he kissed his neck. “I’m sorry I can’t stay.”

Raking his fingers through the soft hair on the back of Erik’s head, Charles refused to feel ashamed of his tears, pressing a reciprocatory kiss to Erik’s temple and then decided it wasn’t enough. He tugged on Erik’s hair, making him lift his head and when Erik stared at him, hollow-eyed and broken-hearted, Charles closed the minute gap between them and claimed Erik’s lips, channelling everything he felt into the rough strokes of his tongue, putting all his pain in the desperate licks into Erik’s mouth. If something happened to Erik and he never saw him again, this was a kiss he would want to remember, something to rival their first and their best.

Erik made a desperate, keening, muffled noise into Charles’ mouth, which Charles eagerly swallowed, trapping Erik’s bottom lip under the curve of his teeth. He could feel Erik’s arm sliding possessively around his waist, and then Erik was hitching Charles up a few more inches to make up for the height difference, hand splayed over the small of his back to balance him. Charles completely went limp in Erik’s half-embrace, melting into the drugging kiss where Erik seemed determined to let Charles know just who he belonged to, something to last him until they finally reunited.

Even when they pulled away, gasping for breath, Erik pressed his forehead against Charles’, stealing little kisses between every word. “I love you so much,” Charles murmured, even as Erik brushed away the moisture on his lashes with his thumb. “I love you, too. Goodbye, Liebling.”

The tears must have been contagious, for Charles could see the wet tracks down Erik’s cheeks, his gaze reddened and heart-wrenching. Charles couldn’t help brushing away the dampness with his thumbs. “I swear I will think of nothing else.” Erik sealed this oath with a chaste, soft kiss. “I love you, too. Goodbye, Liebling.”

“Goodbye,” Charles murmured against Erik’s skin before brushing their lips together for the final time.

For a long moment Erik still refused to move, but the last call for boarding was currently echoing over the speakers, and Charles could hear Remy’s low, urgent, “Come on, mon ami.” Erik’s arms around Charles sagged, and with forceful reluctance he let his arms drop, pressing a final kiss to Charles’ hair.

“Ich liebe Dich.” Erik blinked rapidly before turning away and trudging in the direction Remy was practically pulling him in, and Charles had to bite his tongue before he started begging for Erik to stay again. He bit on his fist as he watched Erik stumble away, the sad, slumped line of his shoulders visible even from a distance. Remy handed over both their passports to security control, and Erik
turned back one last time to stare sadly at Charles, his mouth twisted in agony.

*I’ll always love you,* Charles mouthed to him, a tear slipping out despite his best intentions, and Erik placed his hand over his heart, nodding.

Charles watched until Erik disappeared from view, each breath getting more laboured than the last. After spending months completely wrapped up in each other, Erik’s presence permeating every aspect of his life, there to share every thought, exchange every touch, having Erik suddenly ripped from him was akin to inflicting trauma to his very soul. There was an all-consuming void, like he had lost one of his senses, and the world was now so much duller, smaller, emptier. It felt as though Erik had taken half of himself with him, leaving behind a numbness that cut him straight through the middle. Charles let the tears flow freely at last, now that Erik was no longer there to see them, shed them for a man that they could never bring back.

* * * * *

Raven checked her watch, then squinted up at the board announcing the departing flights. It was already past the last call for Erik’s flight and by all rights, Charles should have come to look for her and Darwin by now. “Did you see him?” she asked Darwin, who shrugged, looking just as worried as she felt.

“He’s not answering his calls or texts either.” Darwin stood up, sliding his phone into his pocket. “I’ll go look that way, you go and see if he’s still at the security checkpoint?”

“Gotta.” Raven got up quickly and grabbed her purse, heading towards where they had left Charles and Erik earlier. Neither of them were still there, and none of the crew for ‘Rule of Capture’ were there, either. Everyone must have already gone in.

Raven was about to try and call Charles again when she heard a babble of voices somewhere further south, accompanied by the constant clicking of camera shutters and flashes going off like lightning. Paparazzi. Cursing to herself, she quickly ran over to the group of paparazzi who were currently hounding someone, and her heart sank when she spotted Charles’ dark head in the middle of the chaos, bowed and subdued.

She began to elbow herself in, ignoring the shouts of the paps. ‘*Charles! Aren’t you following Erik to Hong Kong?*’ ‘*Charles, are you going to start seeing Moira again now that Erik is gone?’* Angered, Raven used this opportunity to dig the heel of her Christian Louboutin pumps into the foot of the offending paparazzi in question, smirking as they let out a pained yell and dropped their camera with a clatter. She finally spotted Charles in the middle, clutching onto his bag and shielded by his shades, which still couldn’t hide the fact that he was crying into his hand.

“Dammit, Charles,” she shouted, grabbing his arm and yanking him out of the chaos, beating away another persistent pap with her LV purse. He stumbled forward into her arms and she quickly bundled him away from the mob, the two of them hurrying for the exit. “What the hell happened?” she asked incredulously as she dug out her phone to call Darwin and get the car ready.

“I just...Erik...” Charles now shook his head, pinching his nose as if to hold in more tears, and Raven just felt sorry for him. She slung a protective arm over his shoulders, guiding him out of the Departure Hall and towards the parking lot.

Thankfully, Darwin pulled up not long after, waving for them to get in. Raven quickly bundled Charles into the car, spotting some paps running over. She waved her fist angrily at them, then got in herself, slamming the door right as Darwin tore out of the parking lot, whizzing past the shouting paps. Having taken off his shades, Charles was wiping his eyes with the back of one hand, while
staring down at something he was holding in the other. Raven took a peek, then sighed; predictably, Charles was gazing down miserably at a photo of a smiling Erik taken on his phone.

Raven reminded herself to be compassionate. After all, soon she would have to be apart from Hank as well. She tugged Charles closer, wrapping her arms around her sniffling friend. “You’ll see him during visits, and talk to him on the phone,” she said gently. “You know he’s probably taking this even worse than you are, he loves you so much.”

Apparently that didn’t help, judging from the fresh tears she saw leaking from the corners of Charles’ eyes. Darwin shot her a ‘WTF?’ glare in the rearview mirror, and Raven hurriedly tried to think of something better to say. “Anyway, for what it’s worth, you’ll always have me,” she said kindly, kissing his temple. “I’m not going anywhere, I’m afraid you’re stuck with me.”

At least Charles was now wiping away his tears. “How unfortunate,” he muttered, even though his voice - and his smile - was still shaky.

Raven nudged him with her shoulder, but her smile softened as she folded her arms around her oldest and dearest friend. Whatever he was going through, she would be with him every single step of the way.
Can true love last the separation?

Actor Charles Xavier was seen at LAX yesterday sending off his boyfriend, Erik Lehnsherr, who landed in Hong Kong today to work on a new film. The young star avoided talking to anyone when he left, but not before shedding some tears (and sporting an impressive amount of hickeys!).

Disclaimer: Fake article and watermarks. The characters are owned by Marvel, Splash owns the website. No profit or harm intended, this is created for fun.

Notes:
1. The title of this chapter is a quote from 'Romeo & Juliet'.
2. Charles’ new movie is somewhat like ‘Lost in Translation’.
3. Kiro was Lady Deathstrike’s lover in the comics.
4. Johnny Martin was the name of James McAvoy’s character in 'Penelope'.
5. The Santa Monica pier at sunset.
6. “I am very fond of sunsets.” is a quote from ‘The Little Prince’ and “When the sun has set, no candle can replace it.” is a quote from ‘A Song Of Ice and Fire’. 
7. George Clooney joking at the 2012 Golden Globes that Erik Michael Fassbender can play golf with his hands behind his back.
8. The two versions of the **golf cart incident** told by James McAvoy and Michael Fassbender.
9. Michael Fassbender and James McAvoy *fooling around on the set.*
You Cannot Read 'Loss', Only Feel It

Chapter Summary

Charles and Erik try to maintain their relationship over thousands of miles, and Charles lives it up with Raven in Tokyo while Erik is subjected to gastronomical torture in Hong Kong. Also, there are conjugal visits.

Chapter Notes

We are so, so sorry that this took so long! We were busy with work, academia and travel... Anyway, hopefully this extra-long chapter will make up for the wait. Unfortunately, we’ll be taking a short hiatus in June to deal with real-life stuff, so it will be a while before the next update. We apologise in advance! Our endless gratitude to xsilverdreamsx for making the video!

Soundtrack: Lana Del Rey - ‘Without You’

The flight to Hong Kong was one of the worst flights Erik had ever experienced. Although he and Remy were very comfortable in first class, Erik couldn’t stop thinking about Charles and the complete misery in his eyes, as well as the way he had clung to Erik up till the very last moment. Instead of watching the in-flight entertainment or flirting with the stewardesses like what Remy was currently doing, Erik spent most of the flight sadly going through the several pictures of Charles he kept on his phone. He couldn’t help going back to one he had taken in Paris where Charles had been leaning on the hotel balcony railing and shooting Erik a rather naughty sideways smile, the wind ruffling his hair, the orange sunset backlighting him. Erik had snapped that photo with his phone right before Charles had tackled him with a kiss, and it would always be one of his favourite pictures.

Erik stared at the picture for the longest time before letting out a deep sigh and closing it. He wrapped himself in the airline blankets, putting on his earphones and listening to ‘Der Weg’ on repeat. He closed his eyes, but no matter what, sleep remained elusive.

Remy started poking him as they were about to land, and Erik had never been more exhausted in his life, not even when he had spent 16-hour workdays shooting ‘Cyborg Cop’. Shuffling through Immigration like a zombie, he barely managed a smile for the customs officer before following a chatty Remy to baggage claim. Erik only listened quietly, feeling like his body was in Hong Kong but his heart remained chained to Los Angeles, safe in the hands of the only person he had ever wanted to give it to.

“Erik.” The urgency in Remy’s tone made Erik snap out of his Charles-induced daze and blink at his assistant, who was currently staring outside with a very worried expression. Sure enough, there was an entire fleet of paparazzi on their motorcycles waiting outside the terminal, armed with their cameras and microphones. Erik felt too tired to entertain even the slight flicker of irritation in him, and he turned away in disgust, facing a woman who had been on the same flight as them, browsing
through her iPad while she waited for her luggage. His eyes widened when he spotted images of Charles scattered all over the website she was browsing, and something twisted in his heart when he realised the pictures were familiar because they were of Charles crying. *Fuck.*

"*Mon ami.*" The concerned, wary tone of Remy’s voice as well as his hand on Erik’s shoulder was an indication that Remy had seen the photos too. “Calm down—”

“They took pictures of Charles crying after I left, and for what? For *profit.*” Erik was so furious that everyone at the luggage belt was staring at him, not that he cared. “I need to call Charles. Now.”

Remy frowned. “Erik, I don’t think—”

“Move it, you pretty-boy moron.” Erik ignored the way Remy’s eyebrows jumped as he started walking away, taking out his phone and waiting for the signal from the local network. Once he saw a few bars of reception he immediately started dialling Charles’ number, waiting anxiously until he heard that beloved, familiar voice, filled with warmth and joy. “Erik! You just landed?”

Immediately Erik was filled with a sense of calm, listening to Charles’ voice. “Yes, just waiting to get my luggage.” He lowered his voice, rubbing his eyes tiredly. “Did the paps hurt you after my plane left?”

Charles sounded taken aback. “What? No, darling, don’t worry. They caught me sniffling at the airport but Raven definitely gave me a hand.”

Erik’s curiosity was piqued, his anger temporarily forgotten now that Charles was okay. “What did she do?”

There was a very cute chortle on Charles’ end of the line which made Erik smile. “She stomped on some poor paparazzo’s foot with her high heels. How lucky am I to have the best agent in Hollywood?”

“She is the best,” Erik agreed immediately, before adding, “Don’t tell Emma I said that.”

Charles’ laughter rang pleasantly in his ears, making Erik forget his foul mood earlier. “Then you’ll just have to bribe me with various sexual favours, won’t you?”

Before he could help it, Erik was already grinning. “Do you want me to make a list of things I can do with my hands, my mouth and...*other* body parts?”

Charles’ voice was pure silk. “Of course, my darling.”

Erik’s good mood instantly vanished when a hand waved in front of his face, and he found himself glaring at an impatient Remy who was tapping on his watch and pointing at the waiting car outside the airport. “*Liebling,* I’m so sorry but I have to run. I’ll call you later when I’m all settled in?”

The disappointment in Charles’ voice was evident. “All right, take care. I miss you so much.”

“I miss you, too,” Erik said, lowering his voice to an intimate hush. “I love you.”

“Love you, too.”

There was hardly time to feel sad before Remy steered him out of the arrival hall and towards the car, and Erik was irritated when they were immediately swarmed by the waiting paps who were shouting questions in English and Cantonese, which he didn’t even understand. He could see Remy was doing his best to fend them off, but even the poor guy was overwhelmed when the paps simply
shoved him aside and continued yelling Erik’s name right in his face. Erik was tempted to shove back, especially when he remembered Charles’ tear-stained face splashed all over that website, but then Charles would be disappointed in him for lapsing after finally cultivating a better relationship with the media.

To his surprise, he could hear someone else shouting at the paps to get back. “Stop crowding the man, let him have some space!” Remy was now pushing his way to the front of the mob, uncharacteristically angry for once. “I said move back, or I am calling the police!”

There was a dull, sullen hush as the sea of paparazzi parted to let Remy through, and he glared at them all before sliding an arm protectively around a stunned Erik. “How did you do that?” Erik asked, more amazed than anything else as he let Remy lead him towards the waiting hired car.

“Oh, the mention of the police is always effective,” Remy said airily as he bundled Erik into the car, then slid in beside him. The driver started pulling away from the curb, muttering under his breath in Cantonese at the mob of paparazzi that still continued to mill around the car. Erik relaxed into the seat, still amazed at how his assistant had actually bothered to stand up for him.

“Another question,” Erik said, turning to face Remy who now looked amused. “Why did you do that for me?”

Remy bit his lip here, staring down at his lap. “I got angry when I saw the pictures of Charles crying,” he admitted. “Sometimes the press can be too much, oui?”

Hearing that from someone else who wasn’t also an actor was strangely gratifying. Erik had always been worried that he sounded too privileged whenever he complained about the constant media hounding, but Remy’s statement was simply an affirmation that sometimes it was all a little too much. He patted Remy on the shoulder in gratitude, and they sat together in silence for the rest of the ride.

* * * * *

Erik rested his elbows on the desk in his trailer, head bent forward as he massaged his temples with the heels of his hands. Shooting had been grueling that morning, consisting of a meticulously choreographed foot chase through the Sheung Wan district, and Erik had to admit that constantly sprinting up the slopes of Hong Kong Island was taking a toll on him. He would have been better able to handle the physical strain under normal conditions, but he was still suffering from jet lag, and there was that ever-present ache that came from having Charles half a world away from him. Erik let out a sigh as thoughts of Charles filled his mind. He had spent most of last night texting Charles, who had been busy filming his final studio scenes before production packed up for Tokyo. Erik pulled out his phone to look at the messages, finding some comfort imagining the words in Charles’ voice.

He smiled when he reached the one that read, ‘Tell me how the future looks like from where you are.’ Erik had replied saying, ‘Warm and partly cloudy. Someone will say that he misses you, and that he loves you very much.’ Charles had been very amused, even calling him his personal fortune cookie. However, Charles had said that Yuriko was giving him death glares soon after and that he had to go if he wanted to keep his phone, bidding him to get some sleep. Sleep had been difficult to come by, despite it being already close to 3 A.M., and Erik barely got two hours’ worth before Remy had given him a raucous morning call.

He was about to try his luck and dial Charles’ number when he heard a loud banging on his trailer door. “Mon ami! Let us go for lunch!”

Speak of the devil. “Go away, Remy. I’m not hungry,” Erik shot back but it had been in vain as Remy was soon barging in, grinning in an annoyingly upbeat manner.
“I found a *magnifique* restaurant just two streets away. Come, I have already made us a reservation,” Remy announced as he hauled Erik up from his seat and out the door. Erik considered struggling and putting up a fight, but he was frankly about ready to collapse and hardly managed a grunt as he allowed Remy to drag him past the ginseng and souvenir shops, making their way to Remy’s destination.

It turned out to be a quaint *dim sum* restaurant packed with the lunchtime crowd, and the hostess cheerfully showed them to their booth after exchanging a few words with Remy. Erik noticed many of the patrons nudging one another as he and Remy were being escorted, some going so far as to start pointing rudely at him in the middle of their conversations, and for once he was glad that he didn’t understand a word of what anyone was saying.

“What would you like to try? The reviews say that the bird’s nest here is delicious,” Remy began, pulling out the menu.

Erik glanced down and frowned when he saw the Chinese characters, already feeling a headache coming on. “Just point to the pictures you can make out… Anything but pig’s brain,” Erik instructed as he pushed the menu away. He fished out his phone and dialed Charles’ number as Remy pored over the laminated pages, but it looked like he was out of luck as Charles usually picked immediately and all Erik could hear was the dreaded dial-tone. He held the line a little longer, until he got to listen to Charles’ voice cheerfully asking him to leave a message, sighing when he finally hung up at the ‘beep’.

“Are you ready to order?” Erik asked in mild irritation when he looked back over to Remy, who was still flipping back and forth through the pages.

“*Oui.*” Remy nodded, and Erik was quite horrified when he wolf-whistled for the nearest waitress, winking when he got her attention. One day, Remy was going to get charged with sexual harassment and Erik would be the one to have to bail him out.

Erik fidgeted with his sleeve as Remy flirted shamelessly with the waitress, though he thankfully remembered to place their order at the end. “Hong Kong is not so bad, yes?” Remy asked when she’d left, turning the smile he had directed at her to Erik.

Erik shrugged, taking a sip from his tiny cup of Chinese tea and finding that he desperately missed the aroma of Earl Grey. “I think it’s too crowded.” Nothing made him feel more alone than being adrift in a sea of vacant faces, knowing that none of them understood him at all, that none of them was Charles.

“Ah, you will hear no complaints from *moi* about being surrounded by pretty girls,” Remy grinned, picking up his chopsticks as the first round of dishes was served.

Erik’s eyes darted around the table as steamer after steamer was opened to unveil all types of strange dishes, a couple of which Erik identified as chicken claw in what looked like black bean sauce, and marinated duck’s tongue, followed by claypot dishes and mini-woks of cooked meat, and he found himself wondering how they were ever going to finish all that food. Erik picked up a pale, gelatinous piece of stir-fried *something*, eyeing it suspiciously. “What is this?”

“It is a delicacy. Fish, eh, what is that word? *Vessie.*” Remy reached over and popped one into his mouth, nodding in approval.

“*Fish bladder*?” Erik raised an eyebrow and put his piece down on his plate. The waitress returned before he could voice any further objections, placing a small bowl in front of him and removing the lid to present a steaming hot serving of shark’s fin soup, the cartilage floating around in large,
disturbing chunks. Erik pictured the animated shark he’d voiced a couple of years back for that Pixar movie Emma had made him do to “soften his image”, and had a terrible feeling he was going to be sick. “Remy, couldn’t you have ordered some more normal things? Like chicken wings?”

“Excusez-moi? I come from a country where we have snails as appetisers, this is like meat and potatoes,” Remy replied with an amused grin. “But there are prawn paste chicken wings coming up.” Remy bent over and unceremoniously dumped a chicken claw on Erik’s plate, gesturing with his chopsticks, “Bon appétit. Eat, eat. Lots of collagen, it is good for your skin, no need for botox.”

Erik shook his head, pushing the porcelain aside. “It’s fine, I’ll just grab a sandwich on the way back.”

Remy narrowed his eyes, placing his chopsticks down on the table. “Listen, mon ami. I could be talking to that beautiful Asian girl over there, but non! Instead, I am having a lunch date with my very grumpy boss. You know why? Because I promised Charles I will make sure you eat, and Remy LeBeau always keeps his promise. Charles will give you his big, sad eyes when he sees that you are losing weight, and I am sure you do not want Charles sad, oui?” Remy paused and Erik let out a long sigh, shaking his head. Remy smiled like a man who knew that he had already won. “Good! Now eat that piece of chicken claw before I tell Charles.”

Erik took a reluctant bite and chewed, and was surprised when it actually tasted really good.

* * * * *

It had taken Erik a long time to set up Skype and FaceTime for both his and Charles’ phones and laptops, but it was completely worth it for being able to see Charles in some way again. Erik found himself wondering how couples in the past coped without having Internet or at least long-distance phone calls. He had done a Civil War movie before where the main character kept sending letters to his wife and family, and Erik didn’t think he would be able to survive on just sending and receiving letters from Charles. It wouldn’t be quite the same as hearing Charles’ familiar, low chuckle on the phone, or seeing the way his eyes would simply light up with just a smile.

Erik was early, so he took an extra long shower before slipping into a comfortable silk robe from the hotel (which had a dragon motif emblazoned across the back) and slid into bed with his laptop and protein shake. His appetite had waned ever since being separated from Charles, and Erik was very afraid to ask Remy out for dinner lest the man bring him to some weird restaurant again. He was almost halfway through his protein shake when the little Skype icon popped up, telling him Charles was calling. Erik sat up excitedly, balancing the laptop on his knees before clicking the ‘Yes’ icon.

Erik broke into an embarrassingly huge grin as a close-up image of Charles’ wide blue eyes suddenly filled his screen. It seemed like Charles was peering at his webcam, trying to adjust it. “Liebling?”

Erik said, trying not to laugh.

“Sorry, darling, it’s just the bloody--” Charles mumbled a curse under his breath before adjusting the camera one last time, then sitting back with a sigh. “Can you see me clearly?”

“Oh, very much so.” Erik couldn’t stop smiling; this was the happiest he’d been in days. Thank goodness that Charles had flown into Tokyo so they were finally in the same time zone and could chat the whole night away at length. Erik relaxed, letting his gaze roam over every inch of Charles he could see on the screen. “You’re certainly a sight for sore eyes,” he said with a slow, easy smile.

The way Charles’ eyes lit up was phenomenal. “So are you,” he said with a wink, those red lips quirking up into a mischievous little smile. “That’s a nice bathrobe you’re wearing. It’ll look better on my floor.”
Erik laughed, plucking at the silk. “This old thing?” He held Charles’ gaze as he undid the belt, then shrugged it off his shoulders. The way the soft, smooth fabric brushed against his skin felt like a caress of Charles’ fingers, and Erik craved for his touch, more than ever.

Well, this would have to be the next best thing.

Charles took in a deep breath as he watched Erik undress, his pink tongue running over his bottom lip. “I want to get into your bed right now.” His voice was lower, hoarse. “Oh Erik, I miss you so much. God, the things I want to do to you....”

Erik leaned back against the headboard, smirking as he placed the laptop beside him, so that his thighs were free and he could move. “Oh? Like what?” Erik gave Charles a languid smile, running a hand through his hair and feeling like a lazy cat. “Describe them to me. In detail, please.”

He could see Charles squirming in his seat, absently undoing the first button of his shirt. His cheeks were turning that lovely shade of pink again like they always did whenever Charles was embarrassed or aroused. Erik wanted to kiss them so badly, to feel the faint heat of Charles’ skin against his lips.

“I want to kiss you,” Charles said with a sigh, his gaze fixated on Erik’s mouth. “I want to take your mouth and suck on your tongue until your knees are weak.”

_Fuck._ Erik let out a soft ‘mmm’, his lips parted as he imagined Charles plundering his mouth. “Love it when you kiss me,” Erik breathed out, spreading his legs as he felt himself beginning to harden. “You make these sweet little noises that make me want to bend you over the nearest flat surface and have you there and then.”

Charles was now grinning, his lip tucked beneath the straight white crescent of his teeth. “And you have, many times.” More buttons of his shirt were being undone now a little more hastily. “I can’t count the number of times you’ve bent me over the counter or a desk or the dining table and just taken me because we both needed it so badly.”

“I always need you so badly,” Erik said immediately, eyes travelling over the milky-white skin that was being slowly exposed. “Take off your clothes, _Liebling._”

It was a good thing Charles’ shirt was already halfway undone, because it meant that he took less than 30 seconds to finally get the rest of his clothes off. Charles was grinning as he hopped back into bed, and Erik wanted nothing more than to press him down into the sheets and smell his skin.

“Fast enough for you?” Charles asked with a smirk, deliberately licking his lips again and making them wet.

“You’re terrible,” Erik murmured, letting a hand slide down his stomach and imagining it was Charles’ hand instead. “You’re doing that on purpose because you want to make me think about your mouth on my cock.”

Charles laughed heartily, adjusting the laptop so he could, presumably, stroke himself too. “Me? Why would I do such a thing?” Charles leaned in a little closer, lips pursed in an all-too-innocent pout. “Who says I can’t stop thinking about having you in my mouth?”

“You tease,” Erik growled, before finally allowing himself to fist his cock, which was already begging for the sweet, smooth warmth of Charles’ mouth. “You know what that does to me.”

Charles was greedily watching him stroke himself, mouth enticingly open. “You have no idea how much I want to suck you,” he said softly, all playfulness gone. “Let me see you Erik, let me see what I’m dying to wrap my lips around.”
Erik obliged with a low moan, tugging away the sheets so that he was fully exposed to Charles. He could hear the soft hitch of Charles’ breath, and already Erik was thinking about their last night together, wrapped up in soft white sheets, Erik thrusting so hard into Charles that he had cried out each time he snapped his hips.

Charles’ eyes were a dark stormy blue now as they lingered over Erik’s groin. “Oh hello, I’ve missed you.”

Erik gave himself a long, especially slow stroke. “And it’s missed you as well.”

Charles’ mouth quirked up in a naughty smile, and Erik ached to kiss him again. “I want you to imagine it’s my hand, stroking you and getting you ready to fuck me,” Charles instructed, his breathing getting shallower. “Can you feel me, Erik, getting you hard?”

Erik threw back his head with a low moan, exposing his neck. “I’m always hard around you,” he replied through his teeth, imagining Charles straddling him and kissing his neck while stroking him expertly. “You know that?”

“Oh, indeed I do.” Charles slid a hand down his chest, and now Erik could hear the rustle of sheets on the webcam. Charles closed his eyes, letting out a tortured, breathless moan. “Oh Erik, I need you inside me so badly, please...”

Erik allowed himself a few slow, deliberate strokes, thinking about how tight Charles always was around him, how he’d bite his lip and moan Erik’s name while his nails dragged down Erik’s back. Those familiar blue eyes would be dark and half-lidded, full of lust and want and, most importantly, love. Charles loved him unconditionally, without a doubt, and Erik was convinced that it was this love which made the sex mindblowingly good.

A soft, bitten-off moan from the speakers made Erik’s eyes fly open - when had they closed? - and his jaw dropped at the lovely sight of a naked, flushed Charles stroking himself, biting his lip and making those wonderful hitching noises just like whenever Erik was fucking him silly. Erik could see Charles’ other hand reaching down and circling his own entrance, teasing himself with a finger. Erik made some kind of strangled, whimpering noise, dying to see more. “Finger yourself, Liebling. Imagine it’s me getting you ready for the fucking of your life.”

Charles let out a helpless chuckle, spreading his legs even wider. “I’m imagining it’s your long, sexy fingers,” he said, panting slightly. “And while you’re working me open, you’re looking at me like you can barely wait to fuck me, hard.”

Erik’s hand stilled on his cock before he came too fast, taking in deep breaths. Now he was imagining how tight Charles would be around him. “Fuck, I need you,” Erik blurted out, his free hand touching the screen. “I can’t stop thinking about how tight you are, the way you touch me...fuck Charles, so good--”

Charles gave him a saucy grin before biting down on his lip. “I’ve missed you Erik, missed your eyes, your smile, your cock...”

Erik started stroking again, feeling his imminent orgasm pooling at the base of his spine and thinking about Charles’ legs wrapped around his waist, clinging on for dear life as Erik fucked him halfway across the bed. “Going crazy from not having you,” Erik huffed out, grabbing the headboard with one hand and speeding up his strokes. “Oh God, Charles...”

Charles made a high, keening noise before his back arched up, and he came all over that lovely pale stomach Erik loved to nuzzle, as well as his hands and thighs. “Fuck, Erik, oh Erik, so good inside
“My God,” he could hear Charles over the speakers, and when Erik opened his eyes again, it was to the sight of Charles’ appreciative, sated gaze roving over Erik’s body. “That was the show of a lifetime.”

Erik grinned at him, trying to catch his breath. “Care to come back for the later show? Tickets are available, but only for an audience of one.”

Charles’ laughter was rich and beautiful.

* * * * *

Raven lay sprawled on her hotel bed bundled up in blankets, surfing through the few English channels available on the television. It was too early to call Hank as he was probably still asleep (damn time zones), and she was about to climb out of bed and grab a bottle of wine for company when there was a gentle knock on her door.

“Who is it?” she called as she made her way towards the entrance of her suite, tightening her bathrobe around her.

“It’s just me,” came Charles’ voice from outside the door, and Raven smiled as she swung it open, glad that he was here.

Charles had changed out of what he had on earlier, now looking very dashing in a navy blue dinner dress shirt. It really was no wonder that women all over the world ate his films up with a spoon. She grinned when Charles pulled a single large sunflower out from behind him, presenting it to her enthusiastically. “I spent such a long time choosing what to get you. A dozen roses seemed rather inappropriate, and lilies smell lovely but are somewhat morbid, don’t you think? So I decided on a sunflower in the end, since it’s radiant and cheerful, just like you. May I come in?”

Raven laughed, kissing his cheek. “Thank you, Charles. It’s perfect. And you know you’re always welcome over.”

Charles hooked an arm around hers, pulling her along with him towards the vanity. “Let’s go out tonight, just you and me. It’s been so long since we’ve had Raven Time. Come on, let’s get you ready.”

“All you here to make me look pretty?” Raven teased as Charles hurried off to raid her closet, smiling as she picked up her hairbrush.

Charles returned with the white mini-dress he’d bought her from Max Azria on one of their shopping trips last year, holding it up for her approval. “You don’t need my help for that. You’re stunning.”

“Charles, always the charmer.” Raven took the dress and went into the bathroom to change quickly, talking through the door as she zipped the garment up, “Would you date me? I mean, if you weren’t as gay as a unicorn dancing under a rainbow.”

She heard Charles giggling loudly from outside and smiled wistfully. She’d missed this; spending time with Charles - just the two of them. It used to feel like it was Charles and her against the world, back when Charles was first starting out, and she almost felt a little jealous of Erik for stealing Charles away. At least she had Charles back with her for now, and she always loved his company infinitely better than Darwin’s. Besides, Darwin was off gallivanting with Alex, who had flown out
with them and was happily sponging off his big brother, Scott.

Charles replied then, still struggling to hold in his laughter, “Of course I would, every young man would be lucky to have you. And you know you’ll always be my leading lady.”

Raven stepped back into the suite, smiling broadly. “You’re being awfully sweet today.”

“Are you saying I’m not like this every day?” Charles pretended to pout miserably. He grinned while walking over, taking her hand and twirling her around to admire the dress. “It looks very nice on you. And speaking of young men, how has Hank been treating you? Should I give him The Talk?”

Raven laughed, shaking her head adamantly. She knew the gist of what that involved, and that it culminated in Charles reminding the poor soul that he was a very powerful man who could bring the wrath of Hollywood if whoever she was seeing hurt her in any way. It was all quite gallant, really. Raven hugged him, kissing his cheek. “Please, no. Hank would never survive it.”

“It’s just that I feel responsible for you. But you’re right, I should be telling you to be nice instead,” Charles teased, chuckling when Raven smacked his arm. “Okay, enough dilly-dallying. Shall we make a move?”

Raven nodded and soon they were taking the elevator down to the lobby, her arm locked around Charles’ as they made their way past reception and towards the entrance. The doorman bowed to them, and Raven laughed when Charles returned the bow enthusiastically, which then earned Charles a deeper bow in return. Charles was grinning and about to have another go at it when Raven cut in with a hand on his chest, giggling. “Charles, if you keep this up, you’re going to have your ass up in the air for the world to see, and Erik will have a stroke when the pictures get splashed all over the Internet.”

Charles chuckled in amusement. “Raven, don’t be silly.” He turned and offered a “Konbanwa, my good chap!” to the pleased doorman, before they stepped out of the double doors of Hotel Seiyo and onto the brightly lit streets of Ginza. Raven had always loved the pulse of the city life in Tokyo, captivated by the millions of faces around her that metamorphosized each time she came back, an entire society made up of myriads of individuals that painted their faces like masks, adapting to each change in the trends seamlessly, as though they were simply shedding a layer of old skin. It had always been something that Raven could relate to completely. However, one thing that remained constant was their undying love for Charles and, although she still had not spotted any throngs of schoolgirls, she was not about to take her chances by having Charles standing on the boulevard like a sitting duck. Raven dragged him into the first boutique that struck her fancy, which happened to be the Chanel flagship store just a couple of blocks down the road.

It was always a lot of fun shopping with Charles. He gave compliments freely and effusively; her legs looked stunning in that dress and this blouse brought out the colour of her eyes, and Raven guessed that Charles was dishing them out relentlessly now in an effort to get her to smile more. It was working marvellously and, five boutiques and a dozen purchases on Charles’ card later, Raven felt almost like her former self again.

She giggled loudly when she caught sight of the large billboard of Charles on the storefront of Burberry, grabbing onto him when he attempted to steer them away. “We should go in and get you some free clothes.”

“Raven, stop making me sound like a charity case,” Charles responded dryly as he cracked a smile, sighing in defeat when they walked in. Charles never liked going into the stores for the brands that he was a spokesperson of, always saying he felt bad for the poor sales assistants who would look like they were about to have a panic attack whenever he popped in unannounced. That, and the fact that
Charles actually felt guilty walking out with sponsored suits, always insisting that he could very well afford to pay for the clothes on his back, thank you very much, while Raven rolled her eyes and told him that he was missing the whole point of celebrity endorsements.

Sure enough, the wide-eyed sales assistants had barely finished greeting them when she and Charles entered before the store manager took a quick disbelieving glance at Charles posing on the cover of their catalogue and back at the genuine article, then hurried over as fast as his feet could carry him. “Good evening, Mr. Xavier. How may I assist you?”

“Charles would like to try on some of your new arrivals,” Raven cut in before Charles could protest, shoving him towards their extensive collection of suits and grinning smugly when he shot her a helpless look. She occupied herself browsing their Blue Label line while Charles got fussed over by every available sales assistant in the boutique, and had just picked out a sling bag for herself when she heard Charles calling her over from the dressing room.

“Raven, what do you think?” he asked tentatively, modeling a superbly tailored charcoal grey three-piece suit while the Burberry staff gushed from the sides.

Raven whistled, going over to adjust his tie and admiring the suit in the process. Waistcoats always looked good on him. “That depends. Do you want Erik to rip your clothes off? I’d highly recommend this if you do.”

Charles chortled, a slight flush pinking his cheeks when he turned to the sales manager. “Would you mind giving this to me in Oxford blue as well?”

They were back on the street after Charles was done signing autographs and posing for pictures with everyone in the store, and had only been walking for a few minutes before the brightly lit pearly white façade of Matsuya Ginza caught Raven’s eye. They decided to head in to escape the dipping temperatures and Raven was already on her way towards the Louis Vuitton boutique when she noticed the absence of a certain British-accented voice in her ear. She spun around and scanned the area, only to find the saphead pawing at an LED TV playing a commercial featuring Erik spread out across the sheets like a piece of meat.

[Raven marched over, torn between whipping out her phone to take a picture for future blackmail or feeling embarrassed for the both of them. “Charles, contain yourself!” she finally squeaked, unable to suppress her laughter at the sight of her dearest friend mooning over an inanimate object.

Charles dismissed her with an absent wave of his hand, his attention focused solely on the screen as he stared starry-eyed at a practically naked Erik, the dopiest smile plastered across his face. “Shut up, Raven. He’s gorgeous.”

Raven snorted when she heard a moan coming from the speakers and was just thankful that it hadn’t been from Charles. “What is he even advertising for? It sounds like a porno.”]
“It’s for the mattress. Shush, you’re distracting me,” Charles said, wriggling playfully when Raven wrapped her arms around his chest and tried to haul him away.

Raven giggled as she tugged with all her might, knowing for sure that she was the only thing that stood between Charles and a full-on public make out session with a flat-screen.

* * * * *

Spending time with Raven, as always, was comfortable and familiar. Charles spoiled her relentlessly, buying her anything she fancied and feeling his spirits lifted at her excitement and gratitude. It was the least he could do for her, as she had stood with him for years and years through thick and thin, even when he had been a skinny unknown actor fumbling through Hollywood and had no one in his life except for her, his distant family and an even more distant actor - Erik - whom he had been half in love with. It seemed unreal, now, to think that Erik was now by his side, and as a result, Charles had gained another set of parents and friends vicariously through Erik. Life was good, more than good.

Charles’ smile faltered a little as he remembered that, well, maybe it wasn’t exactly all good at the moment. Erik was thousands of kilometres away in another country, and Charles keenly felt his absence during every waking moment, even with Raven right beside him. He remained silent as she chattered on about her new pair of Jimmy Choo stilettos that she had just purchased at a discount. It was tempting to call Erik now, but he knew Erik was shooting late, filming a night scene in Mongkok. Checking his Facebook feed on his phone, Charles was very amused to see Remy’s status update which included a string of French exclamations, followed by ‘So many belles here!’ and an enthusiastic smiley face. He chuckled, wondering how Erik was dealing with his amorous assistant.

“What’s so funny?” Raven was peering over at his phone, and really they were going to have to talk about personal boundaries, because what if Charles had been perving over his private stash of photos of Erik?

“Nothing, just Remy drooling over girls while Erik works his arse off,” he said, before rubbing her arm with a smile. “Anyway, where do you want to go now?”

Raven’s gaze followed a pair of Gothic Lolitas walking down the street, holding hands and sharing a black parasol. “Let’s go down that way,” she suggested, gesturing towards the girls with her shopping bag.

“Deal.” Although Charles was carrying the majority of the bags, he didn’t mind the walk. Anything was better than sitting in his hotel suite and moping over Erik’s absence. They were walking past an antiques store when Charles paused by the shop window, drawn by the vintage records on display. There were all sorts of records by a variety of artists, from Hank Williams to some Japanese singer with an Elvis hairdo. Charles was delighted; although his father’s vinyl collection was quite extensive, it could do with a fresh infusion of records. Instinctively he turned to ask Erik if he wanted to go in, but his smile faded when he remembered that Erik wasn’t here.


“Nothing’s wrong.” Charles swallowed the lump in his throat, shaking his head. Was he so used to Erik’s presence that he had reflexively turned to his side, expecting to see him right there? He supposed that was the downside of falling for someone to such an extent that their absence felt like a soul-crushing void, and ached like the loss of a phantom limb.

“Oh geez, not this again,” Raven said with a deep sigh. “Charles, you’ll see your beloved grouch tonight via webcam. It’s not like World War II where you don’t see each other for years and years.”
Charles quirked his mouth in an amused, rather wry smile. “Raven, a computer screen and the real thing are very different.” He was about to launch into a detailed elaboration that would surely earn him an eye roll when he felt his phone buzzing in his pocket, and he beamed like an idiot when he saw it was Erik’s number. “Erik!”

There was a surprising amount of static on the line, but he could still make out Erik’s voice amidst the white noise. “Charles, can you hear me?”

“Yes, but you sound a little fuzzy.” Charles ignored Raven’s epic eyeroll, clamping a hand over his other ear so he could hear Erik better. “Where are you?”

“.... alley in Mongkok. The reception is terrible.” And then the line went silent for a few seconds, making Charles frown.

“Erik? Erik!” Charles stared at his phone in dismay, but the screen showed that the connection was still active. Charles placed it against his ear again, and was very relieved to hear Erik’s voice once more.

“This stupid verdammt phone, I swear to God,” Erik said wearily, but at least his voice was a lot clearer this time. “Liebling, can you hear me?”

“Yes, Erik. Whatever you’re doing, keep doing it, it’s starting to work,” Charles said in relief, slumping against the store window. “What time do you think you’ll finish shooting tonight?”

“Soon I hope, I just want to see...” There was silence again, much longer this time, and Charles despaired of ever having a proper conversation with Erik today. When he checked his phone again, he sighed deeply when he realised Erik had been cut off. He tried dialling Erik’s number again, but it only went straight to his voicemail, which was a curt, “If you’re Charles or my parents, leave a message. Everyone else, don’t bother. *beep*.”

Raven was waiting with raised eyebrows when Charles finally gave up and went to join her. “That was oddly quick,” she said sarcastically. “Don’t you guys normally say ‘I love you’ a thousand times before you actually hang up?”

“He’s gone,” Charles said with a sigh. “I can’t communicate with him for now, so we’ll just have to wait.”

Raven’s mouth twisted in sympathy. “Are you gonna be okay?”

Charles shrugged, before linking his arm in hers again decidedlly. “Well, I will be. I have my best girl with me,” he said with a grin, and the resulting smile on her face was pure sunshine.

They walked for a while longer, and Charles could see that Raven was looking for something in particular, but she declined to enter any shop he suggested. Finally, he could feel her slowing to a stop outside a strange shop that seemed to sell oddly shaped pillows and toys. “Wait here,” she instructed, and he obeyed, checking his phone while she was inside, in case Erik had tried to call again. Still nothing, so he sighed and left a text in case those could get through.

He waited for a good twenty minutes before Raven finally emerged from the shop, carrying a human-sized pillow over her shoulder. Charles rushed forward to help her, laughing in surprise. “My dear, what on earth did you buy?”

Raven had the most mischievous smile on her face. “Well, I was going to wait until we got back to the hotel, but...” She unwrapped the top half of the human-sized pillow, and Charles started laughing in earnest when he saw what it was. It was one of those boyfriend pillows he had heard so much
about, purchased by single Japanese women who wanted to go to sleep feeling like they were being hugged by someone.

“Here, you can put a turtleneck on it and imagine it’s someone,” Raven said with a chuckle, handing it to him. “I can’t imagine who, though.”

Charles arranged it so that the body pillow had its cushioned ‘arm’ around him. Definitely not the same as falling asleep in Erik’s safe, strong grip, but it would do in a pinch on lonely nights. “Thank you, my dear,” he said to her, squeezing her hand, and she grinned as she squeezed right back before they continued down the streets of Tokyo with the odd-shaped contraption.

* * * * *

They ended up back in Ginza at a nightspot with a very cute name, ‘Bar Tender’. Raven picked it because it was a drinking hole tucked away in a quiet building, decreasing the likelihood of the paparazzi hanging around and snapping their every move, and Charles liked it because the name reminded him of Erik’s old job. The bar was tiny, compared to their regular hangouts in L.A. and New York, but it was also neat and meticulously clean. Behind the counter, a serious-looking Japanese man in his forties was wiping down the bar, looking smart and sophisticated in a cream suit with a black bow tie. He bowed deeply when Charles and Raven walked in, and a younger waiter showed them to the two remaining high stools by the bar.

“Very fancy,” Raven said with a low whistle as she perched herself on top of the seat, placing the shopping bags under her chair. “Are you okay with this place?”

To be honest, Charles would have been happy with any place that would allow him to get so pissed drunk that he would forget how much he was missing Erik. “Here is fine, my dear,” he said, giving her a smile as he patted her hand. “It’s lovely of you to try to take me out and cheer me up.”

Raven’s mouth was now in a sympathetic twist. “I know you’re trying very hard not to miss Erik. I understand how you feel.”

Charles let out a sigh, tugging her forward and hugging her tightly. “Did you manage to call Hank today?” he asked softly, brushing her curls over her shoulder.

Nodding, it was Raven’s turn to sigh as she picked up the bar menu. “He couldn’t talk for long, but I did manage to get a couple of words in earlier before he went to bed.”

Charles couldn’t help thinking of the two hour-long webchat he had enjoyed with Erik over lunch earlier today, Erik teasing him because he was bad with chopsticks. Hank probably didn’t have the luxury of such a long and private lunch break, and he was 16 hours behind Raven as well. Charles genuinely felt bad for her. “You can call him when you get back, right?” Charles said, squeezing her hand. “He should be awake by then.”

“I hope so, too.” She gave him a small smile, before nodding towards the menu. “I think we owe it to ourselves to get completely wasted so we can forget how much we miss those goons of ours.”

Charles chuckled, picking up his menu as well. “Erik is not going to like being called a goon, my dear.”

Raven simply rolled her eyes. “Oh please, have you seen the way he looks at you as though you invented the car or the lightbulb? I would definitely call that a ‘goonlike’ face.”

Charles only shook his head with a grin, even though he found himself wondering what others saw when he and Erik were together, usually lost in their own little world. Erik was always smiling at
him, brushing his hair back or running his fingers over the curve of Charles’ ear, usually touching them in some way. Maybe Raven was right and they both did have silly, lovelorn expressions on their faces whenever they were looking at each other.

They placed their orders with the head bartender, watching with awe as he started mixing their drinks with deliberate, precise measurements and movements. It was interesting to watch, but Charles couldn’t help comparing it to the wonderful flair and skill Erik had demonstrated as a bartender back on that fateful night in Hollywood. He smiled softly to himself, revisiting the treasured memory of Erik giving him a shot of Chartreuse in the mouth.

He couldn’t hold back his laughter at the naughty thought that since then, Erik had certainly given him many more ‘shots’ in the mouth.

“What’s so funny?” Raven poked him as their drinks arrived on the counter.

Charles waved her away as he picked up his martini glass. “You wouldn’t want to know. Come on, love, cheers.”

Raven clinked her glass against his. “To both of us finally finding true love.”

“Hear hear,” Charles said with a grin as he sipped his drink. The martini was cold and excellent, and half of it was gone by the time Charles set his glass down again. He gave the head bartender a brilliant smile. “That was the second best martini anyone’s ever made for me.”

As the bartender bowed, Raven arched an eyebrow at him. “Who’s the best? Paolo from Drai’s?”

Charles shook his head. “Erik, of course.”

This caused another epic eye roll from Raven. “Duh, how could I have forgotten your beloved Cyborg Cop used to be a bartender? Anyway, I forbid any more talk about Erik or Hank. Tonight, we drink.”

“Fine, fine, let’s just let our hair down,” Charles conceded with a sigh. They drank the rest of the martinis and ordered a few more drinks, talking about the shoot and how wonderful everything had been in Japan so far. Although Charles could feel his head getting fuzzy - the drinks were deceptively potent - he couldn’t stop thinking about Erik whenever he glanced down at the watch Erik had given him that he wore always, wondering how delayed his shoot was going to be.

As the night wore on, Charles would catch himself remembering Erik’s smile, or his slender, elegant hands, or the way he liked to kiss Charles on that sensitive spot just below his right ear. Raven was talking excitedly about something, and Charles forced himself to pay attention, but every now and then he would find himself drifting off and thinking about something funny Erik had once said, or how Erik would have reacted to trying out sea urchin sashimi, or just how Erik would give him a footrub after a tiring day when they had been shooting ‘First Class’. Charles missed it all, and the alcohol was not helping. It just exacerbated his loneliness, reminding him of the empty space beside him that would have been occupied by a pair of strong arms and a firm, warm chest cradling his back.

“...and then Darwin just threw the whole thing away,” Raven said, shaking her head as she tipped back the last of her sixth drink. Her face was flushed red, a telltale sign that she was well on her way to being sloshed. “Can you believe that?”

“Nope, not at all,” Charles said absently, raising his hand for yet more drinks. The bartender obediently brought them over, and Charles drank these a lot faster, desperate for his yearning for Erik
to go away. The drinking helped, a little, but at the end of the day he was still in a foreign country, kilometres away from the man he loved. Maybe this was why his mother was in a perpetual stupor, since his father was away for work most of the time. Charles felt a rare and acute pang of sympathy for her, wondering if she missed her husband the way he was now missing Erik, and decided that he would call her in the morning.

Now he could feel Raven clumsily patting him on the back. “You’re doing it again,” she said accusingly.

“Doing what?”

“Thinking about Erik.” Raven slumped against the counter, blinking sleepily. “You’re not allowed. No Erik. Just more alcohol.”

Charles was just slightly sober enough to know that if they continued drinking, they would be in no state to stumble back to the hotel. Oh well, the need to drown his sorrows wasn’t something that the minibar couldn’t rectify. “All right, one more drink and we’re heading back.”

Raven’s frown deepened. “But why?”

“Don’t you want to remain sober enough to call Hank?” Charles knew it worked the moment Raven sat upright, pushing away her last half-filled glass, and he hid his grin. “That’s my girl.”

“No, ’m Hank’s girl,” she corrected him, before slipping off her stool and wobbling a little, making Charles chuckle and call for the bill.

They got back to the hotel a little past midnight, Raven pleasantly flushed and leaning on him a lot more than necessary. Gratefully passing their shopping bags to a helpful bellboy, Charles made his way to the counter, where two of the staff were chatting. Even though they spotted him, they ignored him and continued talking. “Hi, excuse me?” Charles said, taking care to balance Raven against him when she wobbled. “I just wanted to check if there are any messages for Suite 2001.”

One of the employees, a rather arrogant-looking Japanese chap with plucked eyebrows and blonde highlights, only gave him a cursory glance. “Sorry, no”, he said abruptly before returning to the conversation with his colleague.

Charles wasn’t in the mood for this. “Excuse me, but you didn’t even check,” he said with a frown. The front desk officer made an impatient sound between his teeth, complaining in Japanese to his colleague and now Charles was certain that they were saying something derogatory about him. He kept a check on his rising temper, watching as the hotel employee perfunctorily flipped through a stack of envelopes before rudely saying, “No,” to Charles and turning back to his friend.

No one was more surprised than Charles when he found himself slamming his fist on the counter, making everyone jump, including a bleary Raven. “Look, my good chap, all I’m asking is that you check and see whether I have any messages from someone I care very much about whom I have not seen in weeks,” Charles snapped. “I apologise for interrupting your oh-so-important conversation but if you could do your job for five minutes, I would be most delighted.”

“Charles, whu-- What happened?” Raven asked, blinking. The hotel employees were now staring at Charles with wide eyes, and the man who had been rude to Charles was now hurriedly rifling through the envelopes again, more than a little sheepish now. Eventually he retrieved an envelope and read out the name. “Mr. Francis Eisenhardt?”

Charles let out a disapproving huff. “Yes, that’s me. I shudder to think what would have happened if
I had taken your word for it,” he said, taking the envelope from the employee. “Come on, Raven, my dear. Let’s get you to bed.”

Raven blinked before following him, staring at him with a smile. “Wow, Charles... Now I know not to tick you off.”

Charles simply flashed her a tired smile. He wasn’t exactly proud of his earlier behaviour, but he was sick of people taking advantage of his niceness, and it was also very tempting to blame some of it on all the alcohol in his system. “I think we both need a good night’s sleep.”

Raven rested her head on his shoulder as they stepped into the hotel lift, yawning. “I very much agree.”

* * * * *

Although Remy had been working for Erik for only a few months, he had already learned how to read his boss exceptionally well. Despite his fame and wealth, Erik was a simple man with simple tastes, and it took very little to make him happy: Charles, fast cars, the Bundesliga and a good, hearty beer. Well, mostly Charles. This usually meant Remy’s job was easy, because Erik never gave him a hard time as long as Charles was happy.

However, now that Charles was no longer around, Remy quickly found his job turning to sheer hell. Now nothing could make Erik happy, except for a phone call or text from Charles. Otherwise, Erik was the biggest grouch in the world, sitting moodily around the film set or, after work, sitting moodily in the hotel room and refusing to go out, wanting to stay in his suite just in case Charles called or wanted to video-conference. Remy tried pleading, begging, bribing and just plain threatening, but it didn’t work. It was a miracle that Erik even allowed Remy to drag him out for lunch every day, and Remy counted that as a major victory in itself.

Unfortunately, even that didn’t last long. Erik soon started skipping their lunch appointments, often disappearing for long periods of time before he reported back to the set after lunch, happy and contented. Remy was immediately suspicious, and it didn’t help that Erik evaded all his questions and always changed the subject whenever Remy asked him where he went.

He started keeping a sharp eye on Erik’s whereabouts right before - and during - lunch, and he noticed that his boss would always sneak back to his trailer, spending one or two hours inside before emerging with a huge smile and, sometimes, flushed cheeks. Remy felt a sick pang in his chest: he hadn’t figured Erik would ever cheat on Charles, but then he had also seen too many happy couples wrecked by infidelity. He tucked it away as one of the main possibilities for Erik’s sudden recent good mood, but he secretly hoped that there would be another explanation.

Remy got his opportunity one day when he spotted Erik sneaking into his trailer, but forgetting to lock the door this time. Tiptoeing up to hide beside the window, he could hear Erik laughing and chatting happily to another male voice that was a lot more muffled, and Remy’s heart sank. This didn’t look good.

“No, of course I didn’t tell him,” he heard Erik saying with a scoff. “What he doesn’t know won’t hurt him.”

Remy pinched the bridge of his nose. Poor Charles, kept in the dark. Should he warn Charles, despite the very real possibility of losing the best job he had ever had?

“I love you too, so much. You’re the only one for me,” he heard Erik say softly.
Well, that was too much, even for a self-admitted womaniser like Remy. Sure, he had his fair share of women, but he had never lied to any of them or cheated on them. Shaking his head, he decided that enough was enough. Standing in front of the door, he took a long, deep breath to steel his nerves before swinging the door open--

--and finding a surprised Erik sitting in front of his laptop, a sandwich halfway to his mouth. On the laptop screen, Remy could make out an equally surprised Charles holding up a piece of sushi with his chopsticks.

“What are you doing here?” Erik asked a little sharply.

“Darling, who is that?” Charles’ voice from the laptop speakers was tinny and muffled.

“Just the pretty-boy moron,” Erik grumbled, putting down his sandwich.

However, Charles was waving gaily at the screen. “Remy, my good man! Join us for lunch?”

Remy just stared at Erik. “So you two--”

“--have been having lunch together over webcam, yes,” Charles explained, while Erik looked rather embarrassed. “Erik, there’s nothing to be shy about, we’re just using modern technology to our advantage.”

“Oh.” Remy stood there, blinking. “And I thought...well...”

“What did you think was going on?” Erik asked suspiciously.

Fortunately, Charles was able to see the lighter side of this misunderstanding, and he was laughing to himself. “See, darling? I told you that you should have informed Remy. No wonder the poor chap got all suspicious because you were being so needlessly secretive.”

Erik’s eyes were round with surprise as he turned to face Remy. “Wait a minute. You thought I was cheating on Charles?”

Remy couldn’t help scanning for the nearest exit in alarm. How far could he possibly make it until Erik snapped his spine into two? Erik had impossibly long legs; Remy would be a goner within five minutes. But to his surprise, Erik’s mouth quirked up into a grin before he dissolved into laughter along with Charles.

“Oh.” Remy was more surprised - and relieved - than anything else. “Wait, so I’m not fired?”

“The thought of cheating on Charles is ridiculous, and impossible,” Erik said, shaking his head with a grin. “I’m more amused than anything else.”

“Also,” Charles added, “I’m touched that you’re concerned about us, Remy. Any other assistant would have kept their head down and not said anything to keep their job, but you actually went the extra mile, my friend.”

Remy could feel his entire face burning in embarrassment now, but Erik seemed to have already dismissed him, picking up his sandwich and giving Remy an arch look. “Is there anything else?” he asked dryly. “Or do you want to stay and watch me and Charles have ‘dessert’?”

“Merde, no thanks,” Remy mumbled, backing out of the trailer quickly to the echoes of Erik’s and Charles’ snickering.
If there was anything Erik hated more than normal production delays, it was production delays that no one had a reasonable explanation for. He didn’t want to behave like some kind of diva, and he completely understood that sometimes things went wrong and caused everyone - not only him - some massive inconvenience.

But when he walked onto the set and saw some of the lighting crew playing poker to pass the time, no one could blame him for getting snappy. “Why are we delayed?” he asked the nearest PA, who simply shrugged. Ahead of him, Erik could hear a loud argument in Cantonese, and he wanted to roll his eyes when he saw it was the animal trainer having a heated discussion with John Woo. Erik suspected it had something to do with the several caged pigeons backstage. Why were the pigeons even there?

“I do not even understand the delay,” he heard Remy say beside him with a sigh. “Apparently Monsieur Woo insists on getting the shot with the pigeons while the animal trainer says it is a bad idea.”

“Of course it’s a bad idea,” Erik agreed. “I know this. You know this. Even the pigeons know this. Everyone except our beloved director, it seems.”

Remy was trying to hide his laughter behind his hand. “Are you implying Monsieur Woo is ah, a bird brain?”

“I shouldn’t have to imply the obvious,” Erik stated matter-of-factly, scowling.

It wasn’t long before a PA nervously crept up to Erik and told him that they were going to start filming a few takes of the stunt with the pigeons. Gruffly chasing Remy away, Erik went to join the discussion with John, the stunt co-ordinator and the DP over how they were going to shoot the scene. The one major thing Erik liked about shooting action movies was that they were supposed to be straightforward and brainless, but John Woo was unfortunately quite adamant on making his movies a bit more cerebral (and Erik’s job much more difficult). It also meant more stunts, and true to his promise to Charles, Erik had argued valiantly against doing as many as he could. John had reluctantly acquiesced, but even then there were some stunts that Erik couldn’t avoid doing, like this one.

Erik tried his best not to roll his eyes and mostly succeeded, and he could see the DP was fighting to stifle a yawn. It reminded Erik too much about the ‘First Class’ shoot, where he and Charles had been joined at the hip, even before they had gotten together. They had so many of their own inside jokes that Erik had lost count, and it had definitely made filming a lot more fun and bearable. Now that Charles’ warm presence was missing, Erik could hardly be blamed for counting down the minutes until he got to go visit him. Just one more day of filming, and then Erik could hop on a plane for the weekend and flee straight to Tokyo.

“Erik?” Wai Leong, the stunt co-ordinator, was now looking at him, as was everyone else in the small circle. “Are you okay with what we discussed?”

“Huh?” Erik blinked, cursing himself for spacing out during work. Surely he was more professional than that? “Yes, I’m good, let’s just start.”

“Good.” John nodded towards the animal trainer who was nervously lurking nearby. “Get the pigeons ready! Fainti ah!”

Erik muttered under his breath the whole time as he allowed his makeup to be touched up, then stood
at his mark. *Just one more day*, he reminded himself, thinking of Charles smiling in bed beside him in the morning, eyes soft with sleep. It was a very small price to pay for getting to see Charles again.

“Action!”

Forcing himself to focus, Erik fought the two stunt guys who were acting as triad members, knocking one to the floor with a vicious right hook before running down the fire escape. The cameraman was strapped to a harness in front of him, and Erik could see Wai Leong waiting at the bottom of the fire escape with the animal trainer. For the scene, Erik was supposed to leap across and land on the fire escape of the opposite abandoned building, startling a bunch of roosting pigeons which would flap into the air, and John wanted to capture the scene in slow-motion. Erik wasn’t looking forward to having the birds flapping all around him, even if they were trained. These were still pigeons, after all, and they weren’t exactly the smartest animals around.

As Wai Leong gave the cue, Erik took the leap, but the animal trainer must have been too early with her cue because there was suddenly a flock of frightened pigeons flapping around him, and one of them flew right into Erik’s face. Cursing, he reflexively twisted around to avoid it, landing on his right shoulder on the fire escape and crying out in pain, the metal ringing loudly in his ears.

“*Schieße!*”

“CUT!”

A flurry of different crew members, including one of the on-set medics with the First Aid armband, came rushing to Erik’s side, asking what happened. “I’m fine,” Erik said with a grimace, holding his shoulder and shying away from the concerned medic. He didn’t want to delay filming, he just wanted this scene to be over so he could go see Charles as planned tomorrow. “I’m fine, let’s keep going.”

“But Mr. Lehnsherr, you’re hurt—” the medic said hesitantly.

“I said I’m fine, are all of you deaf?” Erik snapped, not at all missing the doubtful look that the medic and her assistant exchanged. His shoulder was throbbing in agony, and he only clutched it harder in response, forcing himself to look normal. “Let’s just get this scene done.”

There was a hurried discussion in Cantonese, but it seemed that there was something else wrong apart from Erik’s shoulder, because filming had halted entirely. Ignoring his damn shoulder, Erik limped to the side as a team of grips came to inspect the fire escapes, and he could see Woo shaking his head, a sour expression on his face.

“*Mon Dieu,* what happened?” Remy ran up to him, pale with concern and completely flustered, which was very uncharacteristic of him. “One of the PAs told me you had an accident, and that the set was damaged?”

“I’m fine,” Erik said through gritted teeth. He waved away yet another medic who was bringing over a first aid kit. “No need for that, go away.”

The medic looked at Erik with raised eyebrows before turning to Remy. “You might as well bring him back to his trailer and let him get some rest,” she said, her mouth in a disapproving twist as her gaze remained fixed on Erik’s banged-up shoulder. “I heard there are some problems with the set and I don’t think they’ll be resuming filming anytime soon.”

Remy nodded. “I’ll do that.” He tried to help Erik to the trailer, but kept his hands to himself when he saw Erik’s glare. Once in the trailer, Erik yanked down his collar to peer at his shoulder in the mirror, and even he was shocked at the dark red bruise blooming across his skin.
“Merde, that looks abominable,” Remy said with a wince. “Since they’ve stopped filming, I’m getting you to a hospital.”

“No.” Erik shook his head, mopping away the sweat on his forehead. “Just leave me, it’ll be fine in a while. I’ve had worse.”

But it wasn’t fine in a while, and Erik was contemplating asking Remy for an ice pack when there was a knock on the door. Remy answered it, and a PA informed them that production was halted, and that the principal cast was getting a few days off while the set was under repair.

“Thank God you’re getting a few days off, now can we go to the hospital, s’il te plaît?” Remy pleaded, but Erik only shook his head, knowing there was only one place he wanted to go to right now, and it wasn’t the hospital.

“Get me on the earliest damn flight to Tokyo,” Erik instructed, grimacing as he massaged his shoulder.

* * * * *

It had been four hours since Erik’s last text message, and Charles wasn’t normally a person given to unnecessary worry. He chided himself for being one of those obsessive boyfriends he had sworn he would never be. After all, Erik was a normal person who needed his space from time to time, and Charles knew that any healthy relationship meant a hefty amount of give and take. If Erik needed some time to himself, Charles was more than willing to give it to him. Still, it didn’t stop the what-ifs from crowding his mind, making him wonder if something had happened to cause Erik’s uncharacteristic silence. They talked all the time, and it was rather strange for Erik to drop off the grid for more than a couple of hours on end.

After trying to distract himself with a book, Charles thought that it wouldn’t hurt to just give Erik a short call and see if he was all right, just in case. His first few calls went unanswered, and Charles ignored the spike of worry in his chest. Maybe Erik was shooting late and his phone had run out of battery. Still, given how fastidious Remy was with making sure Erik’s electronic devices were always fully charged, that was also rather unlikely.

Charles thought for a while, then dialled Remy’s phone. Also no answer. By now the spike of worry was burrowing deeper into his chest, making him wonder if something had happened to both of them. Charles chewed on his nails for a while, idly entertaining the temptation to jump on the very next flight to Hong Kong. But Erik is a grown man who can take care of himself, a dry, subtle voice in the corner of Charles’ brain reminded him, suspiciously sounding like Emma. Give it a while before you overreact.

Charles stood up quickly, running his hands through his hair. He needed a shower, badly. And if Erik still hadn’t called after his shower, then Charles would go find Raven and seek her advice to see what was the best course of action.

He didn’t enjoy the shower as much as he normally would have, harassed by thoughts of Erik in pain or in trouble, unable to get to a phone and let Charles know what had happened to him. He had just finished rinsing the foam off his body when he heard a soft, familiar quacking noise from outside. It was the silly quacking duck ringtone that Raven had assigned to Erik’s number, and Charles had found it so funny - and rather adorable - that he had kept it. He quickly turned off the water and roughly towelled himself dry as he stumbled towards the phone on top of his dresser.

Nothing could describe the relief he felt when he saw it was Erik’s number on the caller-ID. “Erik? Please say you’re okay,” he babbled, tucking the phone under his chin as he wrapped the damp
towel around himself.

“I’m fine, Liebling,” Erik sounded rushed, but apologetic. “I’m so sorry, I didn’t mean to make you worry.”

Charles sank against the wall in relief, mopping at his still-wet face. The damp towel was sticking to his legs. “I honestly thought something had happened to you, but I didn’t want to seem like I was breathing down your neck or anything.”

There was a soft exhalation of breath from Erik’s end of the line. “I would never think of you as a ball and chain, you know that.”

“Good to know,” Charles said with a mock huff. “At the same time, excuse me while I was biting my nails off in worry.”

“The reception here earlier was terrible because of a storm,” Erik said, now a little fainter because of the background noise. “So I wasn’t able to call you. I hope I didn’t worry you too much.”

Charles was just happy that Erik was fine and that it had been nothing more than bad reception. “Well, it put a dent in my plans to find a new boyfriend, but I suppose I could put up with you for a while more,” he said, grinning as he tugged the towel tighter around himself.

Erik made a soft ‘hmph’ noise that made Charles laugh. “Already shopping around so quickly? I’m hurt, Liebling. I suppose I should crawl back to Klaus for comfort.”

Charles rolled his eyes. “Are we bringing our exes into this? Fine, let me go search for the blue blanket I used to have as a baby.”

Erik’s laughter was low and rich. “I imagine you would have been a very cute baby,” he said wonderingly. “With those blue eyes and pink cheeks, everyone must have cooed over you.”

“I saw your baby pictures, you were quite adorable yourself.” Charles found himself grinning like a maniac. “Your Mama said she had trouble trying to stop the neighbours from pinching your cheeks.”

“Well, Mama does have a tendency to exaggerate,” Erik said dryly, and maybe it was Charles’ imagination or his loneliness, but Erik sounded closer than ever before. The reception had never been clearer.

“I miss her,” Charles admitted, the back of his head hitting the wall with a soft thump. “I miss you even more, darling.”

There was a long pause, and Charles was beginning to get worried. “Erik, are you there?” He frowned in irritation when there was a knock on his door; the last thing he wanted to do was entertain someone else when he had finally gotten Erik on the phone, and he wondered if he could get away with remaining silent and pretending not to be in.

“Open the door, Liebling.” Erik said, and Charles could have sworn he heard an echo coming from the other side of the room. He stilled, realisation dawning upon him. With his heart hammering in his chest, he quickly crossed over to the door, his steps hurried and eager.

When he swung it open, his jaw dropped when he saw who was on the other side. Erik was holding up his mobile to his ear, hair slightly damp from the rain outside, dressed in a white polo and his favourite brown leather jacket. Charles only vaguely registered the soft thump of his phone hitting the floor before he jumped on Erik and their mouths were mashed together in a desperate, urgent kiss. As he tugged Erik down he was faintly aware of Erik’s slight wince of pain, but before he
could ask in concern, Erik was already backing him into the room and dropping his bags askew all over the floor before grabbing Charles and slamming him against the wall, kissing him obscenely while his hands roamed under Charles’ towel.

When they pulled apart for breath, Charles couldn’t stop touching Erik’s face as if to ascertain whether he was real or a product of Charles’ ongoing frustrated fantasies. “You’re here,” he said in amazement, brushing his thumbs over the smooth, sharp planes of Erik’s face. “You’re really here.”

“Not even a lightning storm or a clerk reluctant to give away your room number could stop me,” Erik said, panting slightly as he dragged his fingers through Charles’ shower-damp hair. His eyes were roaming all over Charles’ face in wonder, as though he was also in disbelief that he was actually here. Now his lip was curling up in a crooked grin. “Also, I must say I liked your pseudonym. ‘Francis Eisenhardt’, really?”

Charles felt heat suffusing his cheeks. “I couldn’t say ‘Francis Lehnsherr’ or it would be really obvious,” he said, palming the sides of Erik’s face.

“I like that,” Erik murmured, closing in on him. “You, having my name. It fits.”

The implication of that sentence wasn’t lost on Charles, but there was only time to part his lips before Erik bent down and devoured his mouth in a silky, sensuous kiss that made Charles’ knees tremble. Then Erik tilted his head and yes, his tongue was doing something wicked to Charles’ mouth and he wanted to writhe back against Erik, but his body was trapped under Erik’s and he found he was perfectly content to remain where he was, pinned to the wall by Erik’s hips and chest.

The kiss was getting more and more heated and out of control when Charles tugged Erik down for more leverage, and Erik winced again, muttering a curse in German. “Erik, what’s wrong?” Charles asked worriedly, scanning Erik for any visible injuries.

“Nothing, it’s nothing, I’m fine,” Erik insisted, but he relented when Charles took off his jacket and his polo, mouth dropping open at the gigantic, angry purple bruise on Erik’s right shoulder. Instinctively he tugged a shirtless Erik towards the bed, ignoring his protests and sitting him down so that his back was leaning against the headboard.

“This is not nothing,” Charles said with a frown, kneeling on the bed so he could better inspect Erik’s shoulder. “How did you get this?”

Erik let out a long sigh, closing his eyes. Even then Charles couldn’t help admiring the way his lashes fanned out over his cheek. “It was just a simple stunt gone wrong, that’s all,” Erik explained, before opening his eyes again to give Charles a pleading look. “I’m fine, you worry too much.”

“You promised me that you would be careful.” Charles couldn’t help directing a bolt of anger towards a faraway John Woo somewhere in Hong Kong for getting Erik into this, and he saw the way Erik winced at his words this time. Now Charles felt bad. Erik already was in pain, and he hadn’t meant to put Erik through the wringer.

He gently started massaging Erik’s shoulder, easing his strokes when he saw Erik’s nostrils flare in silent pain. Bending down, Charles traced the edges of his bruise before kissing it reverently, rubbing his cheek against it. He risked a look upwards, and he found Erik staring down fondly at him, fingers gently threading through Charles’ hair. “Does it feel better now?” he asked, turning his head to kiss the affected area again. Erik nodded, lips quirking up in a little smile. His eyes had this strange, soft light in them as they studied Charles intently.

“You make everything better,” Erik said, rolling his shoulder under Charles’ careful stroking. “You
always do.”

Touched, Charles placed Erik back against the headboard, then started working on his belt and jeans. “Leave this to me,” Charles said with a grin as Erik reached down to help, batting his hands away. “I want to make you feel much better than ‘better’.”

“Then I’m very interested in seeing your methods,” Erik purred as he stroked Charles’ hair back, unable to stop himself from brushing a thumb against Charles’ mouth.

Charles immediately captured that errant thumb with his teeth, nipping at it gently before drawing it into his mouth to suck on it, causing Erik’s jaw to go slack and his eyes to darken. Charles knew Erik had a fixation with his mouth, and he used it to his every advantage, sucking on Erik’s fingers with barely disguised, obscene motions while he deftly unbuckled Erik’s belt and took off his jeans in a familiar, oft-practised motion. By the time he released Erik’s hand from his lips, Erik was already stretched out against the headboard, naked, and Charles couldn’t resist letting his gaze run over those lean, golden muscles.

“There seems to be one last important thing,” Charles said innocently while Erik stared at him with dark, hungry eyes. He slowly undid his towel, keeping his eyes locked with Erik’s as he let it drop to the floor, and he smiled as Erik’s gaze roamed appreciatively over his body, drinking in the sight. He knew how Erik felt; after all, he too had been deprived of Erik’s body for what felt like years.

As Charles climbed onto the bed and straddled Erik, they both let out a soft hiss at finally being skin to skin, and Charles could feel Erik’s hands sliding down his back to caress his arse, his palms rough and heated. Charles couldn’t hold back the little catch of breath at being manhandled by Erik like this, and that little sound didn’t escape Erik’s notice, judging from his widening grin and the way he was nuzzling Charles’ lips. “Open up for me,” Erik instructed before he took Charles’ mouth in a slow, sure kiss that short-circuited his brain. All he could think was, Oh, Erik and taste so good and want you inside me right now, and he blamed all those weeks apart for forgetting how good Erik’s skin smelled as he broke away, burying his nose in the curve of Erik’s neck.

Now he could feel Erik’s hand sliding up his spine, tracing the individual knobs before he buried his fingers in Charles’ hair, scratching his scalp soothingly. Charles was so keyed up from being deprived for so long that he couldn’t help moaning, rolling his hips against Erik’s flat stomach. This caused Erik to make a low, pleased sound as he nuzzled against the shell of Charles’ ear, his breath hot and shivery.

“Really missed you in my arms,” Erik whispered, before nipping at his earlobe. Charles could feel himself surrendering to Erik’s warm, wet mouth travelling down his neck, leaving a trail of increasingly distracting kisses, especially when Erik started using his teeth to scrape against Charles’ skin.

“Oh God, Erik--” Charles let his head loll back, giving Erik more access to kiss his neck as he let a hand skate down Erik’s amazingly firm chest, swiping a thumb across Erik’s hardened nipples which made him moan softly. Charles willed himself to be patient, despite the fact that he wanted to lube Erik up right now and ride him until they both screamed. It had been too long since Erik’s touch, Erik’s mouth and especially Erik’s cock which he could feel under his thigh, growing harder and firmer every time Charles kissed his skin and stroked his nipples. His own cock was pressed against Erik’s flat belly, leaving a smear of fluid that Charles couldn’t resist rubbing into Erik’s skin.

“Charles, please--” Erik’s voice was rough and pleading, and Charles immediately leaned over for the bedside drawer, taking out the half-used tube of Glide there. At Erik’s frown when he saw it, Charles couldn’t help grinning. “I have to confess, I’ve been having a six week affair with my right hand.”
Erik’s laugh was throaty and gorgeous. “You know, somehow that line sounds rather familiar,” he said teasingly, nipping at Charles’ jawline before his mouth found Charles’ and seduced him into a rather sloppy kiss. Charles took this opportunity to suck on the tip of Erik’s tongue, taking delight in the helpless groans Erik was making into his mouth, and he placed a warning hand on Erik’s bruised shoulder to remind him to take it easy.

“Get me ready,” Charles instructed him, and there was a gleam in Erik’s eyes as he squeezed lubricant onto his fingers, then made his way between Charles’ legs, searching out his entrance. Charles let out a soft whimper when Erik’s long, familiar fingers slid into him, taking a few seconds to get used to the stretch. Even the toys he regularly used in Erik’s absence weren’t big enough to prepare him for the real thing, and he waited patiently as Erik slicked him up, stealing kisses every chance he could. Erik was already panting heavily, his cheeks flushed red, which were sure signs that he wasn’t going to last long.

Charles grabbed his head and fucked Erik’s swollen mouth with his tongue, his fingers tugging every now and then on Erik’s long fringe. Fine, he was desperate for Erik, aching to get that long cock inside him and fuck him hard until he came all over Erik’s stomach. Before he could articulate his desperate need, he was glad to feel Erik lifting up Charles’ hips, positioning his slicked up cock between Charles’ thighs. “I’m sorry, Liebling, if I don’t have you now, I’m going to explode,” Erik gasped, his hands trembling where he was clutching Charles.

“Fucking do it,” Charles hissed at him, and Erik nodded jerkily before thrusting up, and both of them let out low moans as Charles felt the head of Erik’s cock breaching him, biting down on his lip as he gave himself a few seconds to adjust to the initial stretch. Seeing the tight strain on Erik’s face to hold himself back, Charles leaned forward and licked at his parted lips. “Does it feel like I’m a virgin again?” he asked slyly.

Erik’s answer was a muffled moan and his eyes rolling up in pleasure, and now he was trembling even harder. “Charles, don’t--”

Charles threw his head back and let out a wanton, pleased moan. “Erik, you feel so big inside me, I don’t think I can take all of you...”

“Fucking--” Erik now buried his face in Charles’ neck, mumbling a few curses in German and Charles both felt bad and naughty for torturing him like this. He rolled his hips, sinking down more onto Erik’s massive cock and they both clutched at each other, which was quite a feat considering how sweaty and slick they both were.

“Charles.” Erik’s voice was low and shocked, as though he had forgotten how good this could be. “You really are...so tight..”

Charles bit on his lips, which he knew had the effect of making them redder. “Think of it,” he whispered into Erik’s ear. “You’re the first man to fuck me, to show me how good this is, to make me come from your cock alone.”

”Charles!” Erik’s strangled warning almost made him laugh, but Charles just continued talking in his smoothest, silkiest voice.

“I look so virginal, don’t I, in my tweed suits and cardigans? But only you have seen what’s underneath,” he continued to murmur in Erik’s ear, before nipping at his earlobe. This caused another tortured groan from poor Erik. “Before we got together, I’m sure you thought about ripping those clothes off me and sullying this good English boy by fucking me until I can’t walk.”

Now Erik was starting to thrust unsteadily, fully sheathed inside Charles and his hips jerking up in
short, sharp movements that made Charles’ breath catch in his throat. “Yes,” Erik admitted breathlessly. “Thought about you...jerked off to thoughts of you...”

“I knew it.” Charles could hardly be blamed for sounding triumphant. “In the shower? After you’d driven me home?”

“Yes,” Erik moaned. “Yes, yes, yes, I jerked off and imagined it was your mouth, your hands--”

“Oh, fucking hell.” Sweat was starting to pour down Charles’ forehead and temples, dripping down onto Erik’s shoulders. “I did the same, Erik, I touched myself in bed at night, I used my fingers and wondered how big your cock would be--”

“Oh Christ.” Poor Erik sounded like he was in pain, except that Charles knew better. “Please, Liebling, I’m so close...”

“You were bigger than I ever imagined you’d be,” Charles whispered against Erik’s sweaty temple, his breath catching when Erik’s large, warm hand wrapped around his cock and started stroking it firmly. “So big....oh God, Erik, please fuck me...”

“Yes,” Erik was almost shouting now, clutching at Charles with one hand and stroking him with the other. Charles was dizzy with the feel of Erik in his arms fucking him silly, every brush of Erik’s cock against that spot inside him sending him keening forward, and he could already tell that his knees were going to be bruised tomorrow. He tightened his hold around Erik, his fingers threading through the soft hair on the back of Erik’s neck before they slid down his sweaty back, not caring if they left red scratches that would show up on Erik’s skin in the morning.

Charles could tell from the way Erik’s grip was tightening on him that he was close, and he paused to kiss Erik soundly, swallowing those helpless sounds Erik was making. When he was sure that Erik was getting closer and closer to the edge, Charles wickedly leaned forward and whispered in his ear, “I’ll tell you a secret.”

Erik’s hand on his cock slowed down, his strokes a little unsteady. “What, Liebling?”

Charles sucked on Erik’s earlobe before nuzzling against the shell of his ear. “You’re the only man....who’s ever come inside me bare.”

There was a short pause, then he heard Erik’s low, choked moan before Erik thrust up so hard that Charles’ knees were temporarily lifted off the bed, and he balanced himself on Erik’s good shoulder, crying out when he felt Erik’ warmth inside him. Reaching for his own cock and wrapping his hand around Erik’s, which had gone slack and clumsy, it took only a few more strokes together before Charles thrust upwards and came all over Erik’s hand and stomach, cherishing the feeling of Erik still inside him.

Poor Erik was now shaking and panting like a workhorse. “Charles, are you trying to kill me?”

Charles buried his face in Erik’s neck, laughing breathlessly. “Don’t pretend that you didn’t like it.”

Erik only managed to maintain his stern façade for a few more seconds before bursting into a sated grin. “I think that made the Top Three, don’t you think?” he asked, wincing a little as he pulled out of Charles, who settled back bonelessly on Erik’s lap. Erik was quick to wrap his arms around Charles, both of them still trying to catch their breath and recover from the amazing sex.

“Oh yes, definitely the Top Three, darling.” Charles curled up against Erik like a lazy cat, sweat cooling on his skin which, happily, once again bore pink prints where Erik had clutched him. He lifted his head, warmed by the ridiculously fond, lovelorn way Erik was looking at him. “I’m so glad
Erik said, brushing Charles' hair back with his fingers. “It was worth jumping onto the very next flight and ignoring my stupid shoulder just to see you.”

Feeling rather sleepy and drunk with post-coital bliss, Charles lifted Erik’s arms and folded them around him like his trusty human seatbelt. “Tomorrow, I’m getting a doctor to make a house call and take a look at that. No buts.”

He felt Erik’s huff of breath against his fringe. “Fine,” Erik conceded, before placing a soft kiss on Charles’ forehead. “You’re lucky I’m so crazy about you that I can’t see straight.” As Erik pushed back the quilt, his eyebrows jumped when he spotted the ‘boyfriend pillow’ that Raven had bought him, and Charles had, for a lark, slipped Erik’s turtleneck over it a couple of weeks ago. He hadn’t meant to keep it permanently on the pillow, but it had smelled so much like Erik that he had given in, since it had been the closest thing he had to the sensation of falling asleep in Erik’s arms.

Erik fished out the pillow, mouth quirked in amusement. “I see you’ve brought someone else into your bed,” he said dryly with a raised eyebrow.

Charles grinned, stroking Erik’s leg and trying not to get distracted by the firm, sweaty muscles he could feel there. “What did you expect? I was lonely, you weren’t there, the pillow was in town for business, we had drinks, one thing led to another--”

Erik was now laughing heartily, his shoulders shaking with mirth as he held up the man-shaped pillow with his good arm. “I don’t think this pillow can satisfy you like I can,” he said with a smirk, eyes dropping down to the drying come on Charles’ stomach.

Chuckling, Charles slid his arms around Erik’s neck, leaning in to brush their open mouths together. “Nobody will be able to satisfy me like you can,” he murmured, in between kisses.

Erik grinned so wide that his eyes were all crinkled at the corners. “I love you,” he whispered, before bending down to nuzzle against Charles’ neck.

Charles smiled against Erik’s warm skin. “I love you, too.”

Sometime on the second day after Erik’s arrival, Charles and Erik finally managed to leave the hotel, after placing an apologetic note under the telephone to the chambermaid since the suite looked as though a hurricane - and a couple of sex addicts - had rolled through it. However, it was hard for Erik to feel remorseful, not when he and Charles had spent a delicious, scorching two days in bed doing nothing but fucking and ordering room service, then fucking some more. It was a sweet respite from his month-long Charles drought, and Erik couldn’t resist wrapping his arms all around Charles even though they were now in full view of the conservative Japanese public.

Charles didn’t seem to care either, judging from the way he was half-tucking himself into Erik’s coat and chattering excitedly. “There’s this place with great sake and ramen that I want to take you to,” he said cheerfully, steering Erik down the sidewalk. “And then later we can go to this takoyaki place that Raven just adores.”

An amused Erik just watched Charles ramble on thinking that he would never get tired of hearing that prim, cultured accent talking about anything and everything under the Sun. “What is ‘takoyucky’?” Erik asked curiously. Seeing that Charles was shivering a little, Erik took out the cardigan that he had brought to Hong Kong with him. It had lost most of Charles’ scent, having been in Erik’s
possession every night for the past few weeks, so he had brought it along in the secret hope that he
could get it to smell like Charles again. He slipped it over Charles who happily acquiesced as he held
out his arms and put it on, before letting Erik wrap his arms around him again. The cardigan made
Charles feel warm and fuzzy in Erik’s arms, like hugging a ball of delicious-smelling cotton.

Laughing, Charles turned inwards to press a kiss to the curve of Erik’s neck. “There’s nothing
‘yucky’ about it at all, Erik. It’s these grilled snack balls made with batter, and they have fillings like
shrimp, ham and octopus.”

“Balls, huh?” Erik gave Charles a sidelong smirk, which just made him laugh even more. “Show me
these delicious balls you speak of.”

They ended up in front of a neat little shop tucked beside a ramen store, and to Erik’s surprise, all the
staff were neatly decked out in uniforms that showed a smiling octopus and shrimp holding hands.
Very professional, for such a small shop. The staff greeted Charles and Erik enthusiastically, and
Erik couldn’t help wondering just how many times Charles had come here because one of the girls
was addressing him as ‘Chaaa-sama’ and giggling wildly, and Charles was smiling right back at her.

“I will have my usual, Mizuki,” Charles said pleasantly, before turning to Erik, placing a warm hand
on his chest and rubbing it in circles. “What about you, darling?”

Erik squinted at the puzzling menu, which caused Mizuki to giggle again and say something to
Charles, and Erik thought he heard her mention ‘Erikkun’. “Did she say something about me?” Erik
asked suspiciously.

Charles’ cheeks were now flushed an endearing pink as he smiled up at Erik. “She said we look nice
together. And that I look really happy today.”

“Oh.” Erik couldn’t help giving the girl a smile, which thrilled her all the more as she laughed,
covering her mouth as she did so. After niftily retrieving three different varieties of the takoyaki balls
and deftly placing them on a little styrofoam tray, she doused the balls with two different sauces and
topped them with a pile of bonito flakes. Then she handed it to Erik with a bow, and he accepted it
with a small smile. Charles paid for the snacks and took his own little tray, waving goodbye to the
staff who seemed genuinely sad to see him go.

Erik couldn’t stop smiling as they walked away, and he felt Charles nudging him. “What’s so
funny?” he asked Erik.

“Everybody loves you and are sad when you go,” Erik teased him, brushing back a stray lock of
dark hair which had tumbled forward. “It’s not just me.”

“For God’s sake, Erik.” Charles rolled his eyes at Erik, but he couldn’t hide his pleased blush. “Eat
your balls.”

They both couldn’t stop chuckling after that, bumping into each other playfully before Erik finally
finished his snack and tossed his tray into the bin before scooping an arm around Charles and pulling
him closer. Charles happily acquiesced, making a pleased, contented sound as he continued on his
snack. Around them were masses of Tokoyoites, on their way to the temples, pachinko parlours, and
ramen shops, equally determined to enjoy their weekend. But Erik didn’t really care about any of
them, concentrating on just the man in his arms.

“You know, there is so much to do and see in Tokyo,” Charles was saying as he relaxed in Erik’s
embrace. “I don’t quite know where to bring you first.”
Erik nuzzled Charles’ ear, ignoring the raised eyebrows of a few passers-by. “I trust you, just bring me anywhere you like.”

He could see Charles deep in thought, eyebrows drawn together in a little frown. He really liked Charles’ eyebrows, which he found particularly expressive. With just a mere wiggle, Charles could make audiences laugh, and he had this way of comically arching an eyebrow to look either suspicious or skeptical. Erik felt that Charles was really underrated as an actor, and that not many people took him seriously just because he acted mostly in rom-coms. To be honest, Erik had learned so much from Charles’ expressive facial expressions alone.

“Erik?” From Charles’ amused tone, Erik realised that he must have zoned out again. “Did you hear what I said?”

Oh. “Sorry, I was distracted by the gorgeous woman who walked past earlier,” he said with a grin, laughing when Charles smacked him on the arm.

“Liar, you never took your eyes off me,” Charles shot back with a chuckle, before turning away to throw his styrofoam tray into the garbage bin. Now he was sliding an arm around Erik’s waist, steering him in another direction. “Anyway, I know the perfect place to bring you. Let’s head to Shinjuku, love.”

* * * * *

Erik’s breath was taken away when they finally arrived at the park, arm in arm, Charles’ cheeks pink with exertion. Erik was frankly torn between staring in awe at the pretty, fluffy cherry blossoms of the rows of sakura trees and the way Charles was beaming at the sight, his smile bright enough to light the whole of greater metropolitan Tokyo.

“What do you think?” Charles had his arms spread, grinning as he gestured at the jaw-dropping beauty around them. “Isn’t this the most beautiful thing you’ve ever seen?”

Erik couldn’t take his eyes off his smiling Charles. “Perfection,” he murmured, and before Charles could say anything, Erik bent down and kissed him right there in the midst of the park, cradling his face with soft reverence. Charles went completely still, then suddenly melted into the kiss, and Erik could feel Charles’ arms sliding around his neck. They broke off the kiss, but their foreheads were still pressed together, and Erik sighed happily.

He could feel Charles’ thumbs gently stroking his sideburns. “You’re such a mushball,” he teased Erik, who raised his eyebrows.

“What did I do?”

“Look around us.” Charles gestured at the sakura trees. “We’re surrounded by one of the most beautiful sights and all you can do is stare at me and kiss me silly.”

Erik rolled his eyes. “I’m sorry, I’m such an inconsiderate boyfriend. Here, I promise to ignore you for the next few hours,” he said dryly, even as Charles laughed.

“That’s better, ignore me as long as you want,” Charles said sternly, but he couldn’t help breaking into a smile when Erik took his hand in hold and squeezed it, both of them walking along the path quietly and enjoying the scenery.

As they walked, Erik didn’t think there was anything odd about the small group of Japanese girls who had started trailing him and Charles ever since they had stepped into the park, but he couldn’t help being distracted by their giggles. Charles seemed oblivious, struck by the scenery around him.
and blissfully unaware that the Tokyo chapter of the Charles Xavier Fanclub was a few steps behind him. A few times Erik turned around out of curiosity, but the girls, who were dressed in tiny tops, short skirts and long, striped socks, simply burst out laughing whenever he did so. Intrigued, Erik continued walking arm in arm with Charles, who was now resting his head on Erik’s shoulder.

Even Charles didn’t miss the excited shrieks of "Kawaii desu ne!" behind them, and now Erik simply had to stop and ask. “Hello?” he greeted the girls, who were all still giggling shyly. “Can we help you?”

All the girls seemed to defer to their leader, the tallest member who wore glasses with plastic green frames, and she had a black ‘Kira’ T-shirt on. She stepped forward hesitantly, then retrieved a thin book from her satchel and handed it to Erik. He frowned down at it, but before he could get a good look at the cover, Charles had snatched it out of his hands, laughing wildly. “My word, Erik, they have a drawing of you!”

“What?” In his haste Erik almost stumbled, peering over Charles’ shoulder. It was a shockingly accurate comic drawing of a man in a white shirt and waistcoat with dark, floppy hair and blue eyes that looked very much like Charles, and he had his arm around a tall, stern, elegant redhead in a strappy blue dress that bared her muscular shoulders.

Wait. Erik had to blink again. Oh Gods, that was--

“Is that me?” Erik bellowed, and now the girls were nodding and laughing even harder, covering their mouths as they did so - was it a Japanese thing? But Erik was too stunned to care, just staring at the comic in disbelief. His eyes widened even more as Charles started flipping through the book, and there were endless pages of him doing all sorts of explicit things with Charles that had never even made it to his wildest dreams (well, all right, maybe a few of them had crossed his mind a couple of times.)

“This is...this is...” Erik was just at a loss for words.

“Bloody brilliant,” Charles finished for him, before flashing a grin at the girls. “Where did you get this?”

The tall girl in the ‘Kira’ shirt rattled off something in Japanese that Erik didn’t have a clue about, although Charles nodded at parts he must have recognised. When she was done talking, Charles turned to Erik. “She said they got this at a convention.”

“Wunderbar,” Erik muttered.

“And that they’d like us to autograph it.” Charles’ smile was more innocent than ever, which meant that he was going to try and seduce Erik into agreeing to this, by hook or by crook. “What do you think?”

More than accustomed to his boyfriend’s wiles, Erik sighed, fishing out a pen from his pocket. “Where do I sign?” he said wearily.

They spent the next few minutes autographing the various comics (‘doujinshi’, if Erik had heard correctly from the lead fangirl) and Charles also urged him to pose for some photos together. He wanted to protest when they asked him and Charles to kiss while posing for a shot, but Charles seemed more than game for this, and Erik had never been one to turn down those pleading - yet cunning - blue eyes.

And it was never, ever a hardship to kiss Charles; Erik bent down and pressed a chaste kiss to his
lips, making a strangled noise when Charles tried to slip a little tongue in. The fangirls cheered and hooted like a bunch of (rather polite) hyenas. Judging from the looks of manic glee on their faces as they ran through the shots on their cameras, they must have gotten some good ones in.

“All right, my dears, we really do have to get going,” Charles said politely, taking Erik’s hand in his and twining their fingers together. “Thank you for stopping to say ‘hi’.”

The girls all bowed daintily and waved goodbye before turning tail, and Erik winced when he heard their screams further off in the distance. “Couldn’t they have waited until we left the park?” he said with a laborious sigh.

“I don’t blame them, darling. I would have been very excited to meet you, too,” Charles smiled reassuringly at him before leaning up to reward him with a soft, lingering kiss.

As they continued walking, Erik remembered a scene from a movie he had watched a long time ago where two lovers had parted ways in Central Park, and that scene had stuck for him because the sakura trees had been flowering then, and it had been a visually stunning yet poignant moment. He looked up now, filled with an odd, bittersweet sense of loss. He didn’t have very long in Tokyo, and he’d have to leave in a few days to go back to Hong Kong once the crew rebuilt the set.

He could feel Charles’ hand rubbing along the small of his back. “Beautiful, isn’t it?”

“It’s almost dream-like,” Erik admitted, watching other couples strolling in the park. It was tempting to ignore his watch, which was counting down to his flight back to Hong Kong, but even then he couldn’t ignore reality forever. Sooner or later, he’d have to leave.

“You don’t have to go back that soon, right?” Charles’ voice was low and pleading, and Erik stopped in his tracks, turning to face him. Erik pressed his palm against that downy cheek, his thumb gently gliding along Charles’ cheekbone.

“I don’t want to,” he said quietly, bending down so that their foreheads were pressed together. Now that the wind was picking up, cherry blossoms were being shaken off their branches and falling around them like snow, and Erik was struck by both the beauty of the scenery and the overwrought emotion in Charles’ eyes. They just held each other for the longest while, people on the path moving around them like water and leaving them alone, thankfully. Erik doubted they would have gotten any kind of privacy in Hong Kong.

“How much do you think I could pay Remy to call in a bomb threat so Haneda Airport gets shut down when I have to leave?” he said at last, making Charles chuckle a little.

“You’re being ridiculous,” he chided Erik softly, but he could see the longing in Charles’ eyes, plain as day. He wanted Erik to stay as well.

They took their time walking through the park, and they were almost at the very end of the footpath when there was another short rain of sakura blossoms, and Charles nimbly plucked one out of the air. He handed it to Erik with a knowing smile, and Erik cupped both his hands around that single blossom, taking it and reverently tucking it into his pocket. It was such a tiny, delicate blossom, yet it seemed to represent the entirety of the few short days he had to spend with Charles in Tokyo. For Erik, it was such a quiet, private pocket of time, treasured only by both of them.

Separation, Erik thought, was such a bittersweet thing.

* * * * *

Ever since Erik had turned up unexpectedly in Tokyo and swept Charles off his feet, Raven had
been cracking jokes with Darwin and making bets. Were the gruesome twosome going to get arrested for indecent exposure? Hell, were they even going to leave their hotel suite? Unfortunately, after a while, the jokes and bets quickly got old, and Raven found herself bored without Charles’ company. Even worse, she couldn’t swallow away the jealousy that Hank wasn’t going to be able to visit her the way Erik could visit Charles. To while away the time, Raven tried hanging out with Yuriko, who seemed appalled at the notion that colleagues would willingly spend their time off together, and Darwin was busy as ever with Alex.

Just as Raven was about to die of boredom - and reluctant jealousy - she spotted Erik as she was leaving her suite that morning, shuffling out Charles’ suite with his shoulders slumped, dragging his suitcase behind him. An obviously miserable, rumpled Charles soon followed, wearing Erik’s Ray-Bans. “What happened?” she asked, noting how tightly Charles was clutching Erik’s hand.

“I have to go back to Hong Kong,” Erik said shortly. Here, Charles just sighed.

“But Charles--” Raven checked her watch. He was due on the set in half an hour, and he would never be able to make it to the airport and back without risking Yuriko’s wrath.

“I know, I’m not going to the airport.” The way Charles said this was as though it physically pained him. “I’ll just see Erik off downstairs, till he gets a cab.”

“Oh, okay.” Raven bit her lip, unsure whether Charles wanted her to follow or butt out. It was hard to tell sometimes, especially when Erik was around, but she assumed she was invited when Charles gave her a ‘come-on’ gesture as they headed towards the elevator.

The silence in the elevator during the ride down was deafening. Raven pointedly did not look in their direction, and pretended to ignore the slow, sad kiss they were exchanging in the elevator in an effort to grant them some privacy.

The remnants of Charles’ composure crumpled as Erik wheeled his suitcase to the hotel lobby, speaking to the concierge who bowed before whistling for a cab. Charles was lifting the Ray-Bans and discreetly wiping at his eyes, while Erik pulled him close and kissed his temple softly, fondly. When the cab pulled up, Charles released a shaky sigh and let go of Erik, helping to take his luggage and load it into the trunk, both of them refusing the doorman’s help.

Now that Erik’s departure could no longer be delayed, Erik turned and nodded at Raven, and she was surprised to see that his eyes were red-rimmed and bloodshot. “Goodbye, Raven, I’ll see you soon.”

“Take care, Erik.” She stepped forward and hugged him briefly. Normally she would either tease or make fun of him, but the mood seemed too sombre for that.

Now Charles was taking a deep breath, tiptoeing up to kiss Erik on the lips, and Raven wasn’t at all surprised when the kiss lasted for a good deal many more seconds than necessary. Then Erik pulled away and whispered into Charles’ ear, something long and quiet. Raven could see Charles biting his lower lip, his grip on Erik tight and desperate. She wondered what Erik could be saying to Charles, so heartbreakingly private that it hurt her just to watch them, so she respectfully turned away.

When she looked again, Erik was already in the cab, head slumped against the window in misery as the car pulled away. Charles just watched, a little less sad than earlier, touching his lips in wonder as though he were under some spell Erik had cast on him. It was only sometime later that Raven gently touched his arm, and he jumped as though he had been startled, surprised to see her there. “Oh.”

“Need a hug?” she asked kindly, and all she saw was his tight, wan smile before he wrapped his
arms around her gratefully.

* * * * *

Ever since he had gotten back from Japan, filming just seemed more tedious and bothersome to Erik, who had long lost the patience to deal with John, the producer, the DP and a dozen other people on the set who all had their own bizarre ideas about movie-making and thus delaying the shoot even further. Erik missed how easygoing Bryan had been as a director, and how ready he had been to listen to his cast’s suggestions. Hell, Erik even missed those morons Alex and Sean, who had always been receptive to script changes whenever he and Charles had any ideas.

Most of all, he missed Charles, who had been by his side since day one of filming, and he had been one of the most affable, professional actors Erik had ever had the pleasure of working with.

It was a good thing that Emma took it upon herself to finally visit Erik and Remy in Hong Kong, and her presence admittedly helped Erik to stay calm and get through the longer days of filming. It always helped to have someone familiar close by, and Erik suspected that poor Remy was getting a little tired of bearing the brunt of his irritability.

When the three of them were out at dinner one night in a noisy *dim sum* restaurant, Emma eyed Erik warily as she poked at a bamboo basket of something steamed and fluffy. “Please tell me Charles is coming to visit sometime soon,” she said, eyeing both Erik and Remy as she viciously speared a steamed *har kow* with her chopsticks.

“He’ll be here soon with Raven,” Erik replied, his spirits more than lifted at the thought. “In two days, they’re flying in and then we’re heading off to Macau.”

Emma tilted her head speculatively. “Is that somewhere nearby?”

“*Oui*, it’s supposed to be the Venice of the East,” Remy said with a grand gesture, before sipping his tea and wiggling his eyebrows at Emma. “Will you not join us, *Mademoiselle* Frost?”

“Remy, I’m trying to eat here,” Erik complained. “Stop flirting for a minute, goddammit.”

Emma shot him a deadly look. “If you think you and Charles are any better, you are sadly mistaken.”

Remy raised his tiny cup of Chinese tea and clinked it against hers. “*Touché,*” he said smoothly, and Erik narrowed his eyes at the French traitor.

It was a good thing that when Charles and Raven finally landed in Hong Kong two days later, Erik miraculously forgot every single joke and good-natured insult that Emma and Remy had thrown his way. After Raven had settled into her junior suite, Erik had carried Charles off to his and they did not emerge until the next day, both of them bruised and exhausted, Erik walking a little funny and Charles wincing when he sat down at the hotel restaurant’s breakfast table with the rest of their group. After enduring an embarrassing amount of teasing and joking about their rumpled appearances, Erik, in his desperation, turned the breakfast conversation to Macau. Thankfully that worked; everyone was ridiculously excited about it, Emma remarking that she hoped she wouldn’t get seasick on the boat while Raven wanted to try her hand at gambling.

The boat ride to Macau was smooth, and Emma didn’t throw up although she did look a little green, but Remy was there to gallantly escort her. Erik refused to let Charles out of his sight and his arms, the two of them practically glued together as they headed for the glitzy hotel. It reminded Erik a lot of Vegas, apart from the glaring addition of canals. Everyone agreed to meet at the hotel lobby in half an hour, although Erik and Charles were predictably late because they had gotten ‘distracted’.
“Let’s go to dinner before they get even more ‘distracted’,” Emma said distastefully.

“And then when we are at the casino, we shall play a few rounds of poker, oui?” Remy suggested with a grin, which faltered when Emma wrinkled her nose.

“Gambling’s not for me, it reminds me too much of my old job in Vegas. I’m going shopping,” she announced, before gesturing at Erik and Charles. “But at least you can keep an eye on these two in the casino.”

“You make us sound like a bunch of zoo animals,” Erik complained, slipping an arm around Charles’ waist.

“Which you are,” Raven said immediately, to much laughter and agreement. She turned to Remy with a winning smile. “Don’t worry, I’ll watch you gamble for a while.”

After dinner - during which many strange and weird dishes were ordered and eaten - they decided on the Venetian, which was one of the more established casinos, and they piled into the towncar while Emma hopped into a separate taxi to go shopping. Remy discussed all his gambling strategies with an unimpressed Raven, while Erik simply stroked Charles’ back, tipsy from all the wine.

Erik was already a little unsteady by the time they reached the casino, and he used this as an excuse to drape himself over Charles as they headed in, following Remy and Raven towards the entrance. “I suppose we will see you two later?” Charles said with a lopsided grin that made Erik just want to kiss him senseless.

Raven thankfully made this impossible by stepping forward and hugging Charles, before looking at the two of them. “May the odds be ever in your favour,” she called out, before following a waving Remy into the casino.

* * * * *

“Erik, shall we try our luck at the tables?” Charles asked as he leaned heavily against the solid warm plane of Erik’s chest, watching Remy and Raven make their way through the casino floor. “Remy enjoys his poker; we should let him have some fun before we get him to put us to bed. After all, he’s taken such good care of us.”

Erik laughed loudly, tightening his hold around Charles’ waist as they started to squeeze their way past the hordes of gamblers towards the VIP section of the casino, stumbling against a few unfortunate people along the way, neither of them quite steady on their feet. “I still think he’s trying to torture me with leftovers from Fear Factor that he’s passing off as food,” Erik complained.

Charles chuckled, thankful that everyone around seemed to be too focused on the hands of their croupiers to pay any attention to a couple of slightly sloshed foreigners. He patted Erik’s back in consolation before he changed his mind and decided to caress the muscles along his shoulder blades instead. Erik truly had such a gorgeous back. “Oh, darling. He’s just making sure you try all the local delicacies, if perhaps a little too enthusiastically.” Charles paused, taking a deep whiff of Erik’s cologne before giggling into his chest. “But you know Remy; he’s just very passionate about everything.”

They had just come from dinner at one of the Cantonese restaurants in Macau and Charles had had to draw on all his years of acting experience to keep a straight face when he felt Erik’s hand tighten in his own the moment Remy picked up the menu and took it upon himself to order. Actually, after all the horror stories Erik had told him, Charles had been perversely excited to try the weird and wonderful dishes that Remy had become notorious for. He still remembered that one lunch when
Erik had opened the take-out Remy had delivered and let out a strangled noise once he found it to consist mainly of braised duck giblets. Charles had had to coax him to eat it, saying that he was sure it tasted just as good as the tuna belly sushi he was having. Erik had shot him a look when Charles finally cracked up after the last of the gizzards had been swallowed, assuring Charles that there would be no webcam sex that night. Charles had managed to convince him otherwise, of course.

All in all, Charles had rather enjoyed tonight’s dinner. Sure, the fresh fish head in herbal soup had been a slight cause for concern, but Charles had emptied his glass of wine with one gulp and taken to it rather well, even earning an impressed nod from Erik. Erik had followed his lead and both of them had simply downed more wine with each dish because everyone knew that all food tasted better with wine. Charles had found the drunken prawn flambé particularly delicious, while the crunchy texture of the stir-fried geoduck they ordered had been very interesting (and had led to a scintillating discussion with Raven where he had questioned the evolutionary imperative for a clam to take on the appearance of Erik’s cock), and the red dates with hashima (which Charles had managed to convince himself was jelly and not the oviduct fat of snow frogs) they had for dessert had been nice as well. Actually, everything at dinner had been lovely, like the wine. No, especially the wine. All right, perhaps he and Erik had overdone it on the alcohol again, just a little. But that was still no reason for Raven and Emma to be rolling their eyes at them non-stop all through the meal. A bottle or two of wine per person when among friends was perfectly acceptable.

Charles straightened up when he spotted the security guards at the entrance of the high-stakes gambling area in a bid to project an air of propriety and decorum, Erik sensing the shift and adjusting his posture as well. The guards barely batted an eye as the two of them strode past, expressions ever serious and forbidding, and Charles momentarily felt like he was waltzing right into a maximum security prison rather than a casino high-stakes area. He gazed up at Erik, eyebrows arched as they exchanged amused looks. Everything tended to tickle him after a drink or ten. Charles giggled when they were out of earshot, feeling strangely like they had just pulled off the con of the century.

“Perhaps we’re not in the best state to be gambling right now but oh, sod it. What would you like to play, love?”

Erik slung an arm over his shoulders, leaning heavily on him as he brushed his lips lazily against the shell of his ear, warm breath tickling his skin and leaving Charles feeling rather hot under the collar. “I’ve always been partial to roulette.”

They moved unsteadily over to the roulette table, Erik grabbing a thick wad of cash from his wallet and tossing it in front of the croupier. Charles did the same, indicating to the croupier that they were playing together. “Chip change,” she announced, counting the notes as the floorman watched and sliding them a stack of high denomination chips in return.

Charles hooked his arm around Erik’s neck, smiling as he picked up the chips and placed them in Erik’s hand. Charles had never been particularly good at roulette, always much better at card games like poker. Raven had said once that he had an uncanny ability at calling other people’s bluffs. “You play, darling.”

Erik grinned a little maniacally, and Charles managed to stifle his giggles with his fist, attributing Erik’s arguably worrying behaviour to him being just as sloshed as Charles was. Erik picked up a stack of chips, placing them in a straight bet on ‘30’, and Charles’ eyebrows shot up when he calculated that there was about two thousand quid worth of Hong Kong dollars in that bet.

“Someone’s feeling terribly lucky.”

“I always get lucky when you’re around,” Erik replied, smile turning just this side of cocky, hand sliding down to give Charles’ arse a playful squeeze.
Charles chortled. “Now you’re just being completely shameless.”

“No more bets,” the croupier announced, waving her hand over the table while the metal ball continued to circle the spinning wheel.

Without warning, Charles buried his fingers in Erik’s hair, pulling him down for a deep, intoxicating kiss, Erik’s lips still tasting faintly of the merlot they had shared at dinner. “Just a little snog for good luck,” Charles said, grinning smugly when Erik looked at him with a dazed expression. Alcohol always made him bolder, and Charles took the opportunity to rub up against Erik’s maddeningly warm, solid chest. Before, Charles had only allowed himself what was safe and acceptable, always bowing to the expectations of society. But there was something about Erik that made him want to do crazy things when he was around him, throw logic and reason out the window and risk everything, and Charles never felt more alive than when the two of them were together.

“I crossed paths with a black cat or two this morning, so I’ll need much more luck than that,” Erik teased. Charles went pliant when Erik’s hot palms cupped his neck, the delicious mix of want and alcohol leaving him giddy and grappling for more as Erik tasted his mouth again, their kiss turning sloppy when Charles listed to the side in his attempt to suck on the tip of Erik’s tongue. Charles giggled in embarrassment, nuzzling at Erik’s lips before peppering them with feather-light kisses.

“30, red, even.”

“Wait, E-Erik... Erik!” Charles batted gently at Erik’s face, gasping. “That’s our number. Christ. Erik, that’s us!” He gaped as the croupier placed the dolly on top of their stack of chips and then proceeded to sweep the losing bets off the table. Charles grabbed a fistful of Erik’s jacket to steady himself, laughing hysterically as he hugged Erik’s torso with his free arm.

Erik broke out into a guffaw, tightening his hold around Charles’ waist. “Didn’t I say you were good luck, Charles?”

“I can’t believe we—” Charles was cut off when Erik bent his knees and lifted him by the waist for a celebratory kiss, Erik wobbling a little on his feet from the gallon of wine they had polished off together while Charles tried to bank them back in the right direction, still laughing uncontrollably between kisses. “Darling, wait,” Charles paused, pulling away to survey the room. “Did you see that?”

Erik’s eyebrows knitted together as he looked around, and Charles was tickled by the considerable effort Erik was putting into his attempt to focus through the haze of alcohol. “See what?”

Charles stroked Erik’s cheek with the back of his fingers and kissed it. “Precisely! Not a single blasted flash has gone off in our faces! No one’s taking our picture,” Charles replied excitedly, silently thanking whoever came up with the rule that casino patrons were not to be photographed.

Erik turned to him and grinned like the handsome devil he was. “Casinos are my new favourite place. I say we make the most of this.”

“My friend, you’ve got yourself a deal,” Charles agreed wholeheartedly, stealing one last kiss before he slid down Erik’s chest to collect their mountain of winnings and handing the croupier, who was making a valiant attempt at staying composed, one of the chips in return as a tip.

“What number would you like?” Erik asked when the game restarted, slowly stroking up and down Charles’ back.

Charles quirked an eyebrow playfully as he eyed Erik, then placed two fingers up to his temple while
he pretended to concentrate. Erik snickered, recognising it from the movie as one of James’ tells whenever he was flirting with Michael. Charles closed his eyes and smiled as Erik placed a kiss on his forehead. “I’d like ‘32’, if you don’t mind.”

Erik nodded and placed the chips, Charles only noticing belatedly that he had doubled their previous bet. “Erik, shouldn’t we pace ourselves?”

“I trust you. And now I’m going to make the wheel do exactly as you said.” Erik smirked, turning his attention to the spinning metal, his brow furrowed in concentration.

Charles laughed, loosening Erik’s tie to unbutton his collar so that he could kiss the soft skin at the side of his throat. Charles felt Erik’s body relax, instinctively arching his neck to give Charles better access. “That made no sense whatsoever. And I’m quite certain you—”

“32, red, even.”

“Good Lord!” Charles exclaimed, his head snapping up to make sure that he had heard right. Amazingly, he had. He was laughing in disbelief, only to be silenced by Erik’s mouth on his, both of them giggling too much to put much effort in the kiss.

“I think we could make a career out of this,” Erik said as he collected their chips, patting the hand that Charles had rested on the table lightly.

“I’m still wondering if someone is playing a mind trick on us.” Charles glanced around, noticing the awed looks from the people gathered around them and deciding that good fortune should always be shared. He signalled to one of the servers, calling him over. “Could you be a good chap and bring us a bottle of Glenlivet 21? And some extra glasses for the table?”

“Charles, I won’t be held responsible for any laws I break after the Scotch arrives,” Erik warned, fingers walking down Charles’ stomach and popping open each button of his waistcoat in their path, Charles shuddering as the fabric parted. He idly wondered what had happened to the rest of his charcoal grey suit, one of his favourites that he had gotten from the Burberry boutique in Ginza, but it all came back in a sweet rush when Erik slid his hand under Charles’ shirt, his heated palm warming Charles’ stomach. Maybe his jacket had been left in the coatroom much earlier when Erik had seduced him from behind, his mouth hot and sweet on Charles’ nape before he had dropped to his knees to suck Charles off. Charles let out a soft moan at the memory, and he could feel Erik’s gaze lingering on his lips.

Aching for Erik again, Charles reached up, lacing his fingers around the back of Erik’s neck, the corner of his mouth quirking up. “I would ask you to have me on this table right now, if I wasn’t so sure Emma and Raven would just let us rot in jail under these circumstances.”

“And Remy is good for nothing.” Erik pulled him closer with a hand on the curve of his back, and Charles let out a gasp when Erik tugged on the shell of his ear with the sharp edge of his teeth, Erik’s warm breath ghosting on his ear and down his neck. “How very unfortunate.”

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Remy’s luck had gone south. He had started off the night with a full house that had then led to a winning streak that lasted all of fifteen minutes (or, the entire time Raven had been at the table watching him); long enough to get him to stay and spend the rest of the evening doubling-up in a bid to win back his capital. He was quite sure that he had gambled away most of his salary for the month by this point, and a quick check informed him that he had seventeen dollars left – barely enough for the cab ride back to the hotel, perhaps. Remy was once again deliberating on whether to make his
third trip to the ATM for more funds when a tall, broad shouldered man in a black suit approached his seat, looking disconcertingly like the extras who played members of the Chinese mafia on the ‘Rule of Capture’ set. Except, of course, this very pissed-off looking man was definitely not a struggling actor pretending to look menacing just for the cameras.

“Are you Remy LeBeau?” the possible triad member asked.

Remy swallowed and put his cards down. “Do I owe you money?”

“No.”

He released the breath that he had been holding, sitting up in his seat. “Then Remy LeBeau I am,” he said with his most winning smile and a wave of his hand, hoping to charm his way into the man’s good graces.

“The Management requests that you escort your bosses out of the casino,” he said curtly, motioning for Remy to come along with him, which he did with a resigned shrug. *Merde.* His luck had *indeed* gone horribly south.

The Man in Black was evidently a member of the casino’s security team and Remy sighed heavily, grabbing his remaining chips off the table and following the suited employee towards the VIP section. He had spent the past couple of months babysitting his snarly, cranky boss, and all he’d asked for was this one weekend to himself. Erik was spending time with Charles, and Remy just wanted to be reunited with his one true love as well, Poker. But *non!* Now he had to collect not one, but two misbehaving children, and if he wasn’t so fond of his neck, he would be asking Erik for a raise.

Remy realised that things were much worse than he had thought when he stepped into the room. There was a large crowd gathered around the roulette table, surrounded by a perimeter of very harassed pit bosses talking into their transceivers, the entire area in utter chaos as the casino patrons struggled to place their bets.

“You f-forgot your good-luck kiss, darlin’!” Remy heard Charles slurring loudly, immediately followed by scattered wolf-whistles and cheers.

Remy dragged his palms down his face and shook his head. How did he ever let Emma convince him over the phone that morning in Paris that being Erik Lehnsherr’s personal assistant was going to be anything other than a daily exercise in catching bombs falling from the sky? He elbowed his way through the crowd, cursing his fortune as he made his way towards the source of that drunken voice.

*Baise-moi.* Charles was perched on Erik’s lap, both of them dishevelled and in various states of undress, shirts unbuttoned halfway down their chests, Erik’s tie slung over Charles’ neck like a medal for finishing first in the Sex Olympics. “Please tell me you are still wearing pants,” Remy pleaded as he walked up to them.

“Remy! They found you!” Charles greeted, his cheeks completely flushed, laughing where he sat with Erik’s arms firmly around his waist. Thankfully, both their pants appeared to still be on. “Come play, we’ve helped our new friends win s’ much money.”

“*Non,* it is time to go,” Remy insisted, tugging on Charles’ bicep to steady him as he swayed a little in his seat, although he did raise an eyebrow at the mountain of chips in front of them.

“Oh, riijight, yes,” Charles nodded, blinking. “ Wanted to leave a while ago, but Erik couldn’t stand up, you see? I think his legs fell asleep.” Charles paused, turning his head to shoot Erik a lopsided
“I’ve been sittin’ on his lap all night.”

“Why can’t you save the lap dances for the hotel room like normal people?” Remy complained, sliding the chips over to the croupier to have them changed for larger denominations. “And why are you on his lap?”

Erik finally looked up from that spot on Charles’ neck that he had been fascinated in from the moment Remy had found them. “Because Charles has a lucky tush. I always win when he’s on me.”

Charles wrapped an arm around Erik’s shoulders, voice dipping. “We both do, don’t you think?”

Remy let out an exasperated curse as Erik’s smile broadened into a predatory grin. “Are you sure it’s not because you were both too drunk to stand?” He picked up the almost empty bottle of Glenlivet, eyes widening. “How did you finish a bottle of Scotch after all that wine at dinner?”

“Only been ’ere a couple of hours. What do you think we are? Alcoholics?” Charles giggled, nestling back down against Erik’s chest.

Erik shook his head. “That’s the third bottle, actually,” he said, prompting Remy to put the bottle down in horror. “Charles shared them with the table,” he added with a smirk.

“Okay, enough. Up, we are leaving now,” Remy instructed when the croupier returned the chips, dragging Charles off Erik and spending a few moments buttoning him back up and making sure that he could stand straight on his own. If Charles collapsed onto the ground, Remy was sure Erik would smash his face in, numb legs or not. “Come on, mon ami, let us get you to bed,” Remy said as he hooked Erik’s arm around his neck and pulled him to his feet, Erik stumbling a little before Charles slid in to support him on the other side after he had collected their chips from the table.

Charles waved cheerfully to the other patrons while Erik acknowledged their goodbyes with a nod, then Remy lug’d his deadweight of a boss towards the exit, much to the relief of the members of the casino’s security team. Erik slowly managed to regain the use of his lower limbs as they staggered along, and was almost fully mobile by the time they were halfway through the main casino floor, maintaining his balance mostly by resting his weight on Charles. Not the wisest of decisions, judging from how often Remy was being dragged along due to Charles tipsily losing his footing.

“Don’t see what the fuss was, behaving as though Erik was controllin’ the wheel,” Charles mused aloud, twirling a finger in the air as he turned to face Remy. “’s must be how it feels like in an ‘Ocean’s’ movie, don’t think the Venetian will ever let us back again.”

Erik chuckled softly, leaning away from Remy and resting himself heavily on Charles. “Then I’ll just take you to the real Venice. Anyway, I’m done with roulette, tonight was child’s play.” Erik bent down, nudging at Charles’ face with his head. “Now Russian roulette, on the other hand...”

“No!” Charles exclaimed in alarm, stumbling spectacularly. “I’m going to chalk this up to the alcohol talking. Don’t you, don’t you dare-“

“Relax, Charles. I’m just bluffing.” Erik reassured him, and Remy gagged when Erik kissed the corner of Charles’ mouth until Charles was reduced to giggles. It was almost impossible reconciling the Erik before him with the one that glared the world into submission and jumped off tall buildings for a living, and this vast difference only served to highlight the profound effect Charles had on one of the most notorious actors in the business. Remy would never acknowledge it aloud, but he honestly hoped that there would come a day when he would find someone who meant as much to him as Charles did to Erik, enough to make him want to leave all his old habits behind and be better than what he was.
“Oh!” Charles’ eyebrows shot up and he poked at Erik’s chest, blinking up at him animatedly. “Darling, ‘member what we agreed upon?” Charles asked as he dug into his pockets, holding out two large handfuls of casino chips.

Erik released Remy from under his arm, reaching over to grab the chips and counting them in silence. “This is a terrible precedent to set, Liebling,” Erik said, shaking his head fondly. “Remy, stop staring and hold out your hands.”

Remy did as he was told and Erik dumped the chips into his open palms. “From Charles and I, for the fine job you’ve been doing.” Erik paused, raising a finger and eyeing Remy, “Those are Charles’ words, not mine.”

Remy gaped at the pile in disbelief. A quick weigh - a skill he had picked up from all his years at the tables - told him that there was a little over a hundred thousand dollars sitting in his hands, more than he had ever held in them in his life. “Are you sure, mon ami?”

“If you don’t want it, I’m taking it back.” Erik said, faking a grab for the chips as Remy sidestepped away, laughter verging on hysteria. Erik tightened his hold on Charles, making a show out of distancing them from Remy. “See? I told you he’s a moron, Charles.”

Charles looked like he was about to chastise Erik (like how one would with a favourite misbehaving pet, when one actually found whatever mischief it got up to impossibly adorable), but Remy cut across the path of his two drunk bosses effortlessly, stopping at Charles’ free side and hooking an arm tightly around his neck to give him a long, audible kiss on the cheek. “Thank you, mon cher.”

Charles chuckled in delight the whole time, and Remy caught Erik’s look of surprise as he pulled away. Remy smirked like the devil, giving no further warning before he grabbed Erik’s face in both hands and puckered up, placing a quick, closed-mouth kiss on Erik’s lips.

“Goddammit, Remy! Get your fucking mouth away,” Erik cursed the moment Remy released him, wiping his lips with the back of his hand. “I think I caught an STD or twenty.”

“Mon Dieu, your language! Do you kiss Charles with that mouth?” Remy couldn’t help but laugh at the look on Erik’s face, quickly positioning Charles between them in a valiant attempt at self-preservation.

Charles, though, was about to hyperventilate, collapsing red-faced against Erik in a fit of giggles and earning himself a huge pout from the man. “I’m so sorry, I shouldn’t be-” Charles gasped out, hugging Erik tightly. “My poor, poor darling.”

Erik shot Remy one last glare and sighed, resting his chin on the crown of Charles’ head. “I think I’m going to be sick.”

* * * * *

Erik shifted on the trailer couch, sighing as he pulled out his phone. It had been a long, exhausting day. He had gotten up at the crack of dawn to send Charles off at the airport after their decadent weekend in Macau, both of them trying their best to hold it together one last time before Raven dragged Charles away. Charles had taken the first flight out to Tokyo in order to make it back in time for his night shoot, but Erik was thankful that they had at least had that one last night together. He had grown pathetically dependent on Charles, unable to sleep well without him wrapped up in his arms, knowing that Charles was safe and protected from the perils of the outside world. He had long since discovered that the feel of Charles pressed against him was the only thing that could keep the nightmares at bay. Erik would dream of that day at the beach on the nights when they were apart,
always watching as Charles fell a thousand different ways onto the sand, lying there broken and still
even as Erik lifted him up and held him close to his shattered self. And in the morning he would
awake alone in his empty bed, unable to shake the lingering feeling of sand between his fingers.

He checked his phone and found that there was still no word from Remy. He had gone off to arrange
for a car to drive them to dinner after Erik had grudgingly agreed, seeing as Charles would be unable
to have it with him over webcam anyway. Remy had relaunched his campaign to force-feed him like
a French goose after the obscene bonus Charles had coaxed Erik into giving the moron, thinking that
Erik actually enjoyed the torture. This was all Charles’ fault, really. Who was the one who had to
stomach the stinky tofu? Not Charles, that’s for sure. Erik tried to get his mind off his impending
doom by checking his Google news feed for “Charles Xavier”, smiling when he saw some photos
from a few weeks back of Charles and Raven looking happy shopping around Ginza. He grew
maudlin thinking that he now watched Charles’ life in pictures like how he used to watch him sleep,
and Erik had to remind himself that it was just a couple more weeks until Charles wrapped filming.
A man who could not change his fate must learn to endure.

He could feel the fatigue all the way down to his bones, and suspected that he was still experiencing
the after effects of the hangover from hell he had suffered the day before, made worse by the boat
ride back to Hong Kong. On the other hand, he was also not above admitting that the physical ache
was probably a manifestation of his loneliness, and Erik fished out his wallet, opening it to look at
the picture he carried with him of Charles and him outside Neuschwanstein Castle, smiling in the
snow. Charles always said that the picture made him look like a porcelain doll, but Erik thought
Charles was adorable with his cheeks all flushed. That comment always earned him an embarrassed
blush in return, so of course the picture had stayed. Erik was about to pull out Charles’ handwritten
Valentine’s Day notes that he kept behind their photo, already badly dog-eared due to the alarming
rate at which he had given in to his inner lovelorn teenage girl, when he heard a knock on the door. It
opened immediately and without his prior invitation, so naturally it was Emma.

Emma sashayed her way in, cocking her hip when she stopped in front of him and looking
immaculate in a white sundress that was undoubtedly from her recent shopping haul. Emma had
called Remy when they were about to leave Macau and said that she had decided to extend her stay,
making this the first time Erik had seen her since their group dinner two nights ago. “Where’s
Charles?” she asked in curiosity.

Erik shook his head. “Gone,” he paused, setting his wallet aside self-consciously when Emma began
making her way closer. “Left a bit of a gap in my life, if I’m to be honest.”

Emma sighed fondly, moving over to sit on his knee. “Sugar, you can quit the tough guy act,” she
said, crossing her legs as she balanced herself on him. “Those defences you’ve been putting up all
these years never worked on me, I can read you almost as well as Charles can.” She leaned over,
quashing his cheeks between her palms and cooing, “Does my big baby need a hug?”

He grunted petulantly and was about to bat Emma’s hands away when she laughed, releasing his
face to throw her arms around his neck, squeezing briefly before letting go. Erik mentally cursed
himself, wondering what happened that ruined his carefully cultivated image of fearsome
intimidation. Charles. Charles was what happened. Erik sighed in exasperation. “Why are you here,
Emma?”

“Your accountant called, sounding most distressed. He wanted to know if he should raise an enquiry
for your phone bill last month.” Emma paused to pull out a faxed copy of the bill from her clutch bag
and handed the slip to Erik, arching an expertly tweezed eyebrow as she eyed him. “It’s almost five
figures, for your information. I told him it was probably correct. All I want to know is how you
managed to spend seventy-two hours yakking on the phone.”
Erik smirked, scanning through the charges before tossing the bill aside. “Charles likes to talk. I enjoy listening to him.”

Emma’s expression softened in contemplation and she prodded him in the chest lightly. “Do I need to warn your accountant about a million-dollar jewellery store charge to your credit card?”

“No, not yet,” Erik replied wistfully. The thought crossed his mind often, and he wanted to give in to the temptation so very badly. There was nothing that would make him happier than putting a metal band around Charles’ finger.

Emma nodded in approval, her curls bouncing softly with the movement. “I should hope not. You know what the New York Times said about the length of a celebrity couple’s courtship and their chances for doom.”

Erik rolled his eyes. “Yes, you sent me the article. Four times.”

“Swell, I was just making—”

Erik’s phone went off, a photo of Charles now displayed on the screen. “Get off, Emma. Charles is calling,” Erik instructed, shoving her off his knee. He answered the call, chasing an amused Emma out the door. “Hello, Liebling. I see the slave-driver finally gave you a break.”

He heard a soft laugh on the line and smiled. “No, more like an act of God. It’s raining,” Charles explained, the noise from the static that was echoing in Erik’s ears made Charles feel even further from him than ever before. Charles continued, sounding completely lost and sad, “It’s raining, and I thought of you.”

Erik sat down and closed his eyes, thinking back to that night on the streets of Paris. He could still smell the rain, remember the taste of Charles’ kisses as they stood soaked to the bone in the freezing cold, Charles’ mouth hot against his lips. God, he wanted him back so much. “I think of you, all the time.”

* * * * *

They had all been waiting for the day for so long that when Yuriko finally announced that filming would be wrapping up a few days ahead of schedule, everyone on the set had been too stunned to react. Once the news finally sunk in, Charles decided that some kind of celebration was definitely in order. A few years ago, he might have organised a huge shindig fuelled by tons of alcohol, music and yet more alcohol. But now, any party that was missing Erik didn’t seem at all appealing, so he finally decided on a quiet, intimate gathering with Raven and a few others in his hotel suite.

On the last day of filming, Charles made the obligatory appearance at the crew’s wrap party, being friendly, posing for pictures and distributing a few gifts he had gotten for everyone. The amount of goodwill that earned him meant it was easy enough to excuse himself for the night, and he happily made his way back to his suite with a bottle of wine. Raven was already in his room, blasting Lana Del Rey on the hotel’s CD player and dancing around, while Darwin and Scott were deep in a Gran Turismo race in the suite’s living room. They both grunted in acknowledgement as Charles let himself in, and Scott pointed at the crate of Asahi they had brought over. “Help yourself, Xavier.”

“Thank you, my good chap.” Charles eyed the small mountain of beer in amusement before gingerly stepping over the Playstation and making his way to Raven, who welcomed him with a squeal and a generous hug.

“Sorry, we got started without you,” Raven said apologetically, although Charles just waved her
away. “Well, it’s not like we got a rave going or anything, it’s mostly me and Alex arguing over what music to play while Darwin and Scott get sucked into video games.”

“Gran Turismo is not just any video game, okay?” Darwin called out from the living room, raising a stern finger. “It is an awesome three-dimensional car race with the best-- oh hell no, Scott, you did not just cut me off--” Darwin was frowning at the screen now as Scott cackled wildly.

Alex rolled his eyes. “Just ignore them, that’s what I’m doing,” he told Charles, before gesturing at his laptop. “And sorry that I kinda have to work tonight, Sean is supposed to write but he’s lost in Moira-land.”

Charles’ eyebrows jumped up as he took off his grey tweed jacket and draped it over an armchair before undoing his waistcoat. “Some context would be much appreciated?” he said, glancing questioningly at both Raven and Alex.

Raven was giggling as she poured out some light sparkling moscato into three glasses. “Sean and Alex are working on a new script, and they’re both supposed to write ten pages each,” she explained. “Alex did his bit, but Sean has been too busy watching Moira on Broadway.”

Charles remembered. “Oh yes, her new play! I wonder if she got my flowers.”

Raven nodded. “She mentioned them the last time I spoke to her. Apparently, Sean’s been in the front row every night.”

“Not exactly surprising,” Charles said with a smirk as he accepted the glass of moscato from her, clinking it against her own and Alex’s. “Cheers to Moira and her new stalker, then.”

All of them laughed before downing the sweet wine, and Charles made himself comfortable on his luxurious king-sized bed, smoothing his hand over the Egyptian cotton sheets and remembering the last time Erik had been here, and they had made love - repeatedly - on this very bed. Raven was comfortably snuggled beside him, her head using his shoulder as a pillow as she texted Hank. Her face was a pleasant shade of red, although he couldn’t tell if she was flushed from the alcohol earlier or the racy text conversation with Hank. He tried to read it over her head, but received a prompt smack on the arm. “Charles!”

“Sorry, sorry.” Charles winced as he rubbed his arm, apologetically averting his eyes as Raven glared at him before returning to her phone.

“I don’t spy on your disgusting sex chats with Erik,” Raven muttered, while Charles rolled his eyes.

“Erik and I don’t just talk about sex,” Charles primly declared, surprised when everyone in the room started laughing, Scott shouting out ‘Liar!’ from the couch.

“Dude, I always hate to say this, but Scott’s right,” Alex said with a smirk. “You guys get pretty hot and heavy whenever Erik comes to visit, and I heard from Remy it was the same deal when you guys were over in Hong Kong.”

Charles frowned at Alex. “You heard it from Remy?”

“Yeah, on Facebook,” Darwin chimed in, right before he forced a dismayed Scott off the road.

“Remy talked about our sex life on Facebook?” Charles felt faint, but at least Erik wasn’t here. If he knew about this, Remy would be skinned alive. And Charles quite liked him.

“Oh come on Charles, it’s no big secret,” Raven said in what she probably meant to be a reassuring,
soothing tone. “And most of Remy’s Facebook friends are all these dumb girls anyway.”

“Raven, seriously,” Darwin chided her. “It’s not Remy’s fault that these girls are dumb.”

At the scattered laughter around the room, Charles shook his head with a grin. “You are all very mean and not at all gentlemen.” He eyed Raven beside him. “Or gentle-women.”

She wiggled her eyebrows at him. “I think you mean ‘lady’, which I am, thank you very much.”

Charles snorted as he reached over for his iPad, which was charging on the bedside table. “Fine, while you’re entertaining yourself with delusions of being a lady, I shall entertain myself with language lessons,” he said loftily, tugging out his earphones from the drawer and plugging them in. He opened up the Berlitz app on his iPad, selecting the ‘German’ language option and grinning to himself as a low, pleasant voice began speaking standard German in his ears. It wasn’t a stretch to imagine the speaker wearing a black turtleneck and brown leather jacket, and Charles ran his fingers lovingly over the candid photo of Erik he was using as his wallpaper.

About thirty verbs later, Charles yanked off his earphones to realise Raven was now a deadweight against his shoulder, smiling in her sleep and loosely clutching her phone. Tucking the quilt over her, Charles jerked in surprise at someone’s yell before realising it was Alex shouting at the screen of his laptop. “Goddammit, Sean!”

“Are you chatting with him?” Charles asked curiously, making Alex twist around in his seat.

“We’re both on Google Docs now, and there’s a chat function here.” Alex shook his head miserably. “Sean still has barely written anything! I’m about to give up here, man.”

“Get him to use Moira as his muse,” Charles suggested, before the ‘ping’ of a Skype notification popping up on his iPad distracted him. He sat up quickly when he realised it was Erik making a video call. “It’s Erik!” he said with an embarrassingly wide grin, and he must have been too loud because he could feel Raven stirring beside him, mumbling, “Whuh?”

His iPad screen hung for a moment, and then a fuzzy image of Erik flickered on. Even though his hair was damp and ruffled after his shower and he had an old T-shirt on, Erik still looked like the most handsome thing Charles had ever seen. “Liebling, can you see me?” Erik said, his voice tinny over the iPad’s speakers.

“Hello, darling.” If there weren’t other people around, Charles would have been tempted to kiss the screen. “Shooting ended late?”

A tiny side window of Charles himself popped up on the screen, which meant that Erik could finally see him as well. It was also very obvious from the way Erik’s slight frown suddenly melted into a wide, toothy smile of pure pleasure. “It did. You’re just what I wanted to see at the end of a long day of dodging pigeons.”

“John Woo is still making you shoot those scenes?” An incensed Charles asked, although he calmed down when Erik started laughing.

“Don’t worry, Liebling, it’s just a joke that Remy and I made up. John Woo is so fond of pigeons that we refer to filming as ‘dodging pigeons’,,” Erik explained, before his eyes slid over to the side of the screen. “Hello, Raven.”

Charles turned to find a sleepy Raven peeking over and waving at Erik. “Glad to see you could join us,” she mumbled, before snuggling against Charles again. “That explains why Charles is smiling like an idiot.”
“Raven!” Charles rolled his eyes before focusing on Erik again, who was grinning as he stroked his stubbled chin. Erik looked so rakish and gorgeous, definitely good enough to eat. Charles couldn’t wait to run his fingers over that straight jaw again.

“I thought you’d be out at the crew wrap party, getting wasted,” Erik said, propping his chin on his hand. “But you opted for a smaller party instead?”

This time Charles did allow his fingers to trail along the edge of the iPad. “The wrap party wouldn’t have been fun without you,” he said truthfully, making Erik smile. “I would much rather be up here with you and a few select others.”

“Thanks man!” Scott shouted from the couch. “It’s an honour to be here.”

It was hilarious to see the look of disgust cross Erik’s face. “Is that Scott Summers?” he asked distastefully.

Charles chuckled, lowering his voice to a hush. “Be nice, darling.”

“Hey, I’m always nice.” Erik looked up from the screen momentarily. “Oh hang on, I think the pretty-boy moron is at the door with my dry cleaning.”

Charles waited until Erik was gone before he sighed, staring at Erik’s empty chair. Now that filming was finally over, he couldn’t wait to fly over and join Erik in Hong Kong. He made a promise to himself the two of them were going to have so much reunion sex that Erik wouldn’t be able to walk to the set (provided Charles allowed him to even leave the bed).

He heard Raven make a soft ‘hmm’ sound beside him, and he turned to her with raised eyebrows. “What is it, my dear?”

The look on Raven’s face was both contemplative and sympathetic. “You look sad when you think he can’t see you,” she said softly.

Charles’ mouth was open to reply, then he realised she was right. “Do you think Erik knows?” he asked, worried.

Raven shook her head, before nudging Charles as Erik returned to his seat, this time with a cheerful Remy in tow who was waving to the camera. Charles immediately put on his brightest smile. “Nice to see you again, my good man!”

“Bon nuit, mon cher! I have a hot date tonight, and so does my boss, it seems.” Remy winked at the camera while Erik rolled his eyes. “Anyway, I’m running late. Have a good time, everyone!”

“Bye, Remy!” the room chorused, followed by Scott asking Darwin, ‘Who’s Remy?’

“Anyway darling, I have a special surprise for you,” Charles told Erik with a grin. “I was thinking about showing it to you on camera, but maybe it would be more special if I showed it to you in person tomorrow.”

Alex turned around in his chair, narrowing his eyes at Charles before they dipped down to his crotch. “You’re not going to whip it out in front of us, are you?” he asked worriedly.

“What?” Charles blinked at Alex, while Raven dissolved into a fit of giggles. “Not at all, how crude! I was referring to this.” He bent down and rummaged in his Louis Vuitton messenger bag, pulling out the slim CD case and showing it to Erik with a flourish. “Do you recognise this young lady?”
Erik peered at the camera, frowning before his eyes widened in shock. “Mein Gott, it cannot be! Is that Emma?”

Charles was laughing at Erik’s stunned expression, too weak to clutch onto the CD when Raven snatched it out of his hands. “Let me see!” she shrieked, holding it up while Alex ducked over to take a peek. Now both of them were weak with laughter, and Alex was even clutching his stomach as he pointed at the CD and roared with mirth.

“It’s perfect!” Erik was saying over the webcam, clearly delighted. “I can use it to blackmail her when I want a few more weeks of vacation to spend with you, Liebling.”

Charles raised his eyebrows. “Blackmail? That’s playing dirty, Erik.”

Raven waved him off, leaning over to speak directly to Erik. “I disagree, you should totally make fun of Emma at least. Look at her!”

Sighing, Charles stared at the CD that Raven was holding up. On the cover, a teenage Emma was dressed in a sparkly blue tank top and playfully biting her thumb. In bubbly pink words across the sleeve was her name and the title of her single ‘(I’m Not) Your Ice Queen’, and right below it was the Japanese translation in bright blue katakana. Charles had found it at a record store in Roponggi, delighted at his unexpected find and saving it to show Erik.

“I knew she used to be in the music business, but I had no idea she wanted to be a Spice Girl,” Erik said with a smirk, making everyone laugh. “Or rather, an Ice Girl.”

Raven giggled at this. “You can threaten to show this to Sebastian Shaw anytime you want something from her.”

“She’ll cave faster than an Olympic sprinter,” Alex agreed. “Come on, let’s go listen to this!”

As Raven crawled out of bed and ran out with Alex to the living room, Charles was left alone on the bed, smiling intimately at Erik. “I never thought we were going to be alone, darling.”

Erik’s smile was softer now, his eyes half-lidded. “I can’t wait to see you tomorrow. No changes to your flight time, right? It’s still landing at 12.10 P.M.?”
“Yes, I hope there are no delays.” Charles played with the hem of his quilt. “Don’t worry about picking me up, I can get a cab—”

“Of course I’ll be there, I’ll just take an early lunch break.” Erik leaned in, raking his fingers through his hair, and Charles cursed those fingers for being so lucky. “Call me when you land, I’ll probably be somewhere outside, glaring at all the pigeons.”

Charles laughed, ignoring the sudden silence as Raven took out the Lana Del Rey CD, before popping in Emma’s dancepop CD. Now the suite was filled with the cheery, bouncy beats of Emma’s song, but Charles only had eyes and ears for Erik, who was grinning at him as though he were the best thing Erik had seen all week.

“Not joining the party?” Erik asked, gesturing to somewhere off-camera. He could probably hear the music in the background, but Charles only gave him a placid, contented smile.

“I’m very much where I want to be, here talking to you,” he said honestly, and something loosened in his chest as Erik’s smile widened, and Charles could hardly blame himself for counting down the minutes to his flight tomorrow.

* * * * *

Erik was quite sure that the airport staff would have already called security on him if he weren’t a celebrity. He had been anxiously waiting outside the arrival gates with a large bouquet of roses and a piping hot takeaway cup of the most potent Earl Grey brew he could find, looking up every time he spotted a Caucasian passenger out of the corner of his eye. The flight arrivals board stated that Charles’ flight was a few minutes behind schedule, and Erik was worried that the tea would get too cold.

He set it down on a nearby chair before fishing out his phone, and he beamed broadly when he saw Charles’ hurried, misspelled ‘jst landed, darling’ text. Looking up anxiously, he paced around the arrival hall for a few more minutes before he heard that wonderful voice shouting his name. “Erik!”

It all happened too fast: Erik hearing his name and looking around wildly for the source, and his heart leapt into his throat when he finally spotted Charles, who was smiling from ear to ear and running full tilt towards him. Charles looked unspeakably gorgeous, even with his rumpled airplane hair and the bags under his eyes, wrapped in a soft blue cardigan and grey flannel trousers. Erik barely had time to let the delicious sight sink in before Charles dumped his luggage and jumped into his waiting embrace, and Erik had to drop the bouquet because his arms were full of Charles, smelling so sweet and so him, like a thousand chess games and old books and mornings spent reading by the fire sipping tea. It was only when Erik blinked in shock that he realised his cheeks were wet, and he held onto Charles tightly, refusing to let him go.

“Oh God, never again,” Charles’ muffled voice said against his shoulder. “If it were any longer, it would have killed me.”

“Never again,” Erik agreed, his breath ruffling Charles’ hair. Then Charles was pulling back, and Erik only got the barest glimpse of red-rimmed blue eyes before Charles was kissing him frantically, and Erik kissed him back with equal fervour without any regard for the other passers-by milling around them in the airport.

When they finally broke apart, they were both panting wildly, and Erik finally let Charles down onto his feet, smiling like the biggest idiot in the airport. Charles was running his fingers through Erik’s hair, tugging a little on his fringe. “I’ve got another little surprise for you,” he said, his grin suddenly shy.
“Oh?” Erik nudged Charles with his hip, grinning. “I remember it being not-so-little.”

“Idiot,” Charles said with a laugh, before clearing his throat. He took a deep breath, then stared into Erik’s eyes as he said hesitantly, “Alle meine Träume und alle Blitzen bedeuten (mir nichts ohne dich.”

Erik’s jaw dropped. Although Charles’ pronunciation had been a little off, hearing him speak German was an unexpected delight. “How did you learn that?” he said in wonder.

Charles now seemed more confident, grinning broadly. “I had to spend all those lonely nights doing something, so I tried to learn German.”

Erik couldn’t resist tipping his head down to capture that talented mouth. “You’re a remarkable man,” he murmured, before kissing Charles thoroughly. Erik forced himself to break the kiss before he was tempted to have his way with Charles in public, tidying his hair before bending down to pick up the fallen bouquet. “These are for you,” he said gruffly, heat burning in his cheeks as Charles accepted them with a laugh, understanding immediately that the flowers were a reference to their wild Valentine’s Day in Westchester. Then he picked up the tea carefully, handing it to a grateful Charles. “And I thought you might want something hot and comforting when you landed.”

Charles sipped the tea with an appreciative sigh, the very picture of an English gentleman. “Well, you’re comforting,” he said with a cheeky grin, before his gaze raked appreciatively over Erik. “And very hot, I must say.”

“Are you still sticking to those terrible pick-up lines?” Erik teased him as he took Charles’ bags from him and propped them on a trolley. “You can give it up, Charles, you already got me.”

“Never,” Charles said, a good-natured twinkle in his eye as he linked arms with Erik, both of them heading out to the waiting car. “Looks like you’re stuck with my terrible pick-up lines, darling.”

“Such hardship,” Erik muttered, but he couldn’t hold back his own smile as Charles laughed, the two of them heading out to the parking lot.

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Notes:
1. The title of this chapter is a quote from ‘Memoirs of a Geisha’.
2. “Are you here to make me look pretty?” and “May the odds be ever in your favour.” are two of Jennifer Lawrence’s lines from ‘The Hunger Games’.
3. This is the Burberry outlet in Ginza that Charles and Raven went to and this is Matsuya Ginza where they saw the mattress commercial, which was made using a clip of Michael Fassbender in ‘Shame’.
4. The part where Charles caresses the screen and says, “Shut up Raven, he’s gorgeous,” is an homage to Palalife’s (unrelated) artwork that she drew based on the ‘Shame’ poster.
5. This is the boyfriend pillow that Raven bought for Charles as a present (turtleneck sold separately).
6. James McAvoy had a ‘quacking duck’ ringtone when his phone went off in the middle of a Soccer Aid 2012 TV interview, more details here.
7. John Woo’s fondness for putting flying pigeons in his movies is a well-known - and hilarious - trope.
8. Shinjuku Gyoen is the park that Charles and Erik stroll in while watching the sakura blossoms rain down around them.
9. Doujinshi is very popular in Japan, and Dragneto is often featured in the ones drawn for ‘X-Men: First Class’.
10. The part where Erik is leaving and whispers in Charles’ ear is a tribute to the bittersweet ending of ‘Lost In Translation’.
11. This is the intriguingly-shaped geoduck (a type of clam) that captivated Charles’ imagination.
12. Remy’s lines at the poker table are from his meeting with Wolverine in ‘X-Men Origins: Wolverine’.
13. The New York Times article that Emma sends to Erik about the longevity of celebrity marriages is this one.
14. When talking about Erik in Ultimate X-Men #16, Charles says, “Sometimes we could spend seventy-two straight hours on the telephone just talking about our ideas for the world.”
15. The quote that Raven says to Charles: “You look sad when you think he can’t see you.” is from the BBC show ‘Sherlock’.
16. The image used for Emma’s CD cover is of January Jones in ‘Love Actually’.
17. Charles says, "All my dreams and all the lights mean nothing to me without you." in German at the end. They are part of the lyrics of the Lana Del Rey song featured in the soundtrack for this chapter. The next chapter will feature the interview circuit for ‘First Class’, so if you would like to request an ‘Actors’ spin on any particular McFassy interview clip, just drop the link to the video in the comments and we’ll try our best to oblige! ETA: X-Treme X-Men was published after this chapter was written, and featured Charles as a unicorn.
I'm Never As Good As When You're There

Chapter Summary

Charles and Erik briefly enjoy a sex-fuelled reunion before embarking on the press circuit to promote ‘First Class’, and Erik starts thinking about his future with Charles.

Chapter Notes

We truly apologise for the long wait for this update! Real-life caught up with us. Anyway, we’re excited to share some fanart that we’ve been very lucky to receive, courtesy of two talented artists: Nan, who did so many beautiful pieces of artwork, and Marimo, who drew two delightful and cute artworks based on the @charlesxavier__ and @eriklehnsherr__ Twitter accounts.

NAN’S ART
1. A **group shot** with the entire cast of Actors.
2. A scene from Chapter 2 where Erik and Charles have their **first dinner ‘date’** with an exasperated Raven in tow and this is the scene where Erik rescues Charles from the **paps**.
3. Another Chapter 2 scene where Charles asks Erik, **“Do you fondue?”**
4. A scene from Chapter 3 where Erik and Charles take a drive to **Santa Monica**.
5. Nan drew not one, but TWO Dragneto scenes because she is just that awesome. The first scene where Erik mixes Charles some **Wolf’s Bite shots** and the second scene where they **make out in the limo**.
6. There are also two scenes from Paris! Nan drew Charles and Erik bumping into a **certain poster** and also a scorching hot **kiss in the rain**.
7. A beautiful scene from Japan where Charles and Erik are standing together in the **sakura park**.
8. Bonus unicorn! Charles with **‘Property of Erik Lehnsherr’** tattooed on his butt.

MARIMO’S ART
1. Charles having tea with the Muppets, and Charles and Erik as Snuffie and Big Bird **here**.

A huge ‘thank you’ to xsilverdreamsx for starting a **Tumblr blog** for us, as well as all the hard work she put into making the media this chapter. We will be using that site to post all updates in the future.

This chapter is best viewed on the AO3 website as it has several media posts, which might be difficult to read on your phone.

Soundtrack: **Kings of Leon - ‘Sex On Fire’**

Whoever coined the phrase ‘**Absence makes the heart grow fonder**’ had been right on the money,
except that Charles would also add, ‘and makes other parts hornier’ as well. As it was, on
normal days he and Erik could barely keep their hands off each other, but after such a long
separation, it wasn’t an exaggeration to say he and Erik were literally joined at the hip. Normal sex
with Erik was amazing, of course, but reunion sex was bloody fantastic.

Finally having Erik back with him felt strangely like they had been given a fresh start, an opportunity
to fall in love all over again, and Charles had come to realise how spoiled he had been before, when
he had had the luxury of reaching out with just a touch, a light brush to let Erik know that he was
there. The separation had been horrible, to finally get what he had always longed for only to have it
ripped away. Charles still remembered vividly how it had crushed him each time he had tried in vain
to connect with Erik, hoping that perhaps this time he would answer, and cursing how they had let
their commitments force them apart whenever he accepted that he was not going to hear from Erik
until his task was through. Now that Erik had been returned to him, he never wanted to part from
him again, and Charles let that thought curl all over him each time Erik claimed him, their limbs
wrapped tightly around each other as they tried to shove themselves back together, his mind
whispering the fervent hope that Erik would forever stay.

After filming in Hong Kong had ended, Erik had swept him off to a private villa in Phuket, which
came equipped with a gorgeous pool of its own. Mornings were spent sipping mimosas on the deck
chairs in the shade, while red ruby dessert was his main form of sustenance throughout the day. Sure,
the bits of water chestnut coated in tapioca flour were nice, but Charles was more addicted to how
Erik could never resist helping himself to some when he offered the small cubes to him, nestled
strategically in puckered lips. He occasionally wondered if anyone ever got hospitalised due to an
overdose on food colouring, but had long decided it was well worth it for having stray trails of
coconut milk licked off his skin by Erik. As such, they barely had any reason to wander outside,
which was a good thing in its own right because both of them could hardly walk. “We should really
get out and explore Phuket,” Charles said on the fourth day of their vacation, hanging onto the side
of the pool while Erik lazily floated by him. “Otherwise it’s such a waste to come all the way here,
darling.”

Erik dipped his head underwater, then brushed his wet hair back, and Charles couldn’t help staring at
all that expanse of ripped muscle and wet golden skin, marred only by red bite marks left by Charles
himself. Erik was now wading towards him with a gloriously wicked smirk, his eyes reflecting the
blue-green hue of the water. “You think all this is a waste?”

Charles made a small, embarrassing whimper when Erik nudged his legs open to stand between
them, their bodies pressed together. “Ngghh-n-no.” Charles couldn’t tear his gaze away from Erik’s,
those dark blown pupils ringed with blue.

“I’m doing all the exploring I want right here,” Erik whispered against his cheek before moving
down and taking Charles’ mouth, and Charles lost his train of thought in that steamy kiss, melting
into it as he wrapped his arms around Erik’s neck, all thoughts of exploring Phuket forgotten.

* * * * *

After an entire week of relaxation and mind-blowing sex, it was time to fly home to Los Angeles.
Normally, such a long flight would have been a bore, but they had a private booth in first class where
Charles could cuddle with Erik and watch old movies while sharing a bottle of champagne. This was
what all those years and years of hard work and focusing on his career had amounted to: a tall,
handsome boyfriend and a never-ending flow of all the booze they could ever want. Charles thought
it was an even trade.

It was no exaggeration to say that Charles wanted to fall to his knees when they got to Erik’s house
and kiss the floor. “It’s so good to be home,” Charles declared once they rolled their luggage in, and Erik turned to face him, his eyes soft and affectionate. “What? What did I say?” Charles asked, gasping as Erik suddenly leapt over and wrapped his arms around him.

“You said ‘home’ without even thinking,” Erik murmured, punctuating his words with kisses. “I’m glad you think of this place as your own, too. Because it is.”

Charles couldn’t help smiling into the kiss. “Then please take me to our bedroom and fuck me silly until our bed breaks.”

After a round of very boisterous ‘welcome home’ sex, they finally got to unpacking, and Erik was laughing in delight at all the quirky, unique things that Charles had bought in Japan: the boyfriend pillow (which Raven had stuffed into a vacuum bag before sucking all the air out), a Hello Kitty vibrator (yet another well-meaning, albeit mortifying, gift from Raven), even a chess set that consisted of shot glasses as chess pieces. As Charles had predicted, this was the item that had seized Erik’s interest immediately. “How do we even play this?” he asked, picking up the white rook shot glass and peering through it.

“Easy.” Charles cleared a space on the bed for the board. “Here, lay out the pieces while I go get something.”

While Erik was doing so, Charles nipped downstairs to the liquor cabinet, which was always well-stocked. One of the benefits of having a boyfriend who used to be a bartender, he supposed. Retrieving a bottle each of Patrón and Tennessee Honey, as well as some lime wedges and a salt shaker, Charles headed back upstairs and stopped by the door when he saw that Erik was now laid out in bed, wearing only his briefs and a huge smirk. “Come to bed, Charles,” he said, patting the mattress.

“You always play dirty, darling.” Handing Erik the bottles and various paraphernalia, Charles stripped down to his Banana Republic briefs as well before joining him on the bed. Charles instructed Erik to fill the black shot glasses with the Tennessee Honey while he poured tequila into the white ones. “So, we play as normal, but when you win a piece, you get to drink up.”

“Then it’s easy.” Erik’s generous mouth was quirked up in a smile. “I’ll be drunk in fifteen minutes.”

“Oh really?” Charles grinned back, making the first move. He was always up for a challenge. “Don’t be overconfident.”

“We’ll see who gets sloshed first,” Erik said with a grin, pushing forward a pawn shot glass.

The game got off to a good start, although Charles was a little distracted. His eyes kept flicking up to look at Erik, who was languidly relaxing on the bed. He couldn’t help it: after being separated for a few months, it felt like he was greedy for every glimpse of Erik he could get. It felt good to be working together again, now that they were about to start travelling around the world for the ‘First Class’ publicity trail. It made him smile, and Charles sensed Erik’s fond gaze on him in return. “Why are you so happy?” he asked Charles, pushing forward another pawn.

“I’m looking forward to going on the press tour with you.” Charles pretended to shoot him an even look. “I’ve done my share with several female co-stars but I used to wonder what it would be like to do one with you.”

Erik’s smile went soft at the edges. “Now we both get the chance to troll interviewers and have our own inside jokes.” Smirking, Erik leaned over, pressing a chaste kiss to Charles’ lips. “But seriously, I don’t mind any red carpet or press tour as long as you’re by my side.”
Charles’ mouth twisted in amusement. “You’re such a saphead,” he remarked fondly, borrowing Raven’s words.

Erik rolled his eyes at him. “You should appreciate this, you know how much I hate red carpets,”
Erik grumbled, raking a hand through his hair. For a moment, Charles was struck by his handsomeness even as Erik continued talking. “It’s just an excuse to schmooze with industry people you hate and make small talk about how everyone is fabulous. I don’t know, I’ve never had a good red carpet experience.”

Charles sighed, brushing back Erik’s hair. “You’ll enjoy the red carpet this time, because I’m here. And hopefully this will be the first of many more to come,” he promised, reaching over to stroke Erik’s arm, rubbing the soft hairs there.

Erik’s smile was back. “We’ll make sure it happens, Liebling. Anyway, it’s your move.”

Charles thought he was gaining ground when he downed two of Erik’s pawns and one knight, but Erik quickly caught up when he captured Charles’ rook and two pawns as well. Charles didn’t mind, though. The honey Jack had a nice, sweet flavour to it, and it felt smooth sliding down his throat, but that didn’t make it any less potent. Charles could feel the alcohol going to his head, while his blood went to other parts, and it was starting to get difficult telling his bishop apart from his queen. As he eyed the noticeable bulge in Erik’s underwear, he thought about other things that had no problem going down his throat, and he grinned to himself.

“What’s so funny?” Erik asked, after downing his fourth tequila shot and licking his lips. “Wait, I get it. You’re trying to get me drunk so you can seduce me, aren’t you?”

Charles chuckled at Erik’s mock accusation. “Am I that transparent?” he said, picking up a lime and pressing it to his cheek, its sharp zesty aroma hitting his nostrils.

Erik followed the motion with a crooked grin. “Maybe you’re not that transparent, but your underwear is.” Those pale blue eyes darted down, leering at Charles. “I can see your, ah, interest from here.”

“Oh?” Charles set down the lime before adjusting himself in his briefs. He sat up, leaning over the board and closer to Erik. “I was thinking that you should enjoy your tequila shots properly, with the traditional accompaniments,” he said slyly, nodding towards where the limes and salt shaker waited.

Erik affected a look of mock innocence. “Well, I wouldn’t want to be a man who messes with tradition,” he said, picking up the salt shaker. “Although tradition doesn’t state that I have to sprinkle the salt on my own body, right?”

Charles’ smile only grew wider and naughtier. “No, darling, not at all.”

Erik sat up as well, his underwear now distended due to his erection. Charles licked his lips longingly, but before he could reach out and touch what he wanted, Erik was looming over him and placing a hand on his shoulder to hold him still. “Tilt your head to the right,” he implored, and Charles shivered as he felt Erik’s hot breath along his shoulder, obeying him.

He couldn’t see what Erik was doing, but he heard the soft rattle of the salt shaker, and he realised Erik was tipping salt into the groove above his collarbone. Before he could wrap his mind around what Erik meant to do, he let out a startled moan as Erik began kissing a path up his shoulder, stopping at the juncture where his neck met his shoulder and sucking on it softly, his mouth hot and wet.
“Oh God, Erik...” Charles surrendered himself to that wicked mouth, threading his fingers into Erik’s hair and tugging on it, making Erik groan against his skin. Now Erik’s tongue was licking a pattern against his neck, swirling and lapping and tasting the salt. When Erik finally pulled away, he looked dazed, his hair mussed as he blinked at Charles. Charles only laughed breathlessly, picking up a random shot of tequila and handing it to Erik.

Tipping it back, Erik picked up a lime wedge, tapping Charles’ lips with it. “Open up, Liebling.”

“Good thing for you that I’m used to hearing that,” Charles retorted, which made Erik laugh. When Charles parted his lips, Erik delicately placed the lime wedge there. Grinning, he then leaned in and pressed his own lips against Charles, the juice bursting into their mouths and running down their chins. Charles pulled back, tossing away the abused lime wedge before leaning in and kissing Erik proper this time, chasing the taste of tequila and lime and salt around his mouth.

When they pulled apart for breath, panting, Charles cast a wary glance down at the board on their bed. The poor cleaning staff had already cleaned out so many stains from their bed, it wouldn’t be fair to make them get spilled alcohol out of it as well. “Maybe we should finish the game first,” Charles said, giving Erik soft pecks in between.

“Screw the game,” Erik said, his grin wide and predatory. “Let’s just finish off the alcohol and find something more fun to do.”

Charles laughed. He was a big believer in not wasting alcohol, after all. “Fine, you’ve convinced me,” he agreed brightly, picking up the shaker to tip a meandering trail of salt from his nipple down to his navel.

* * * * *

Driving to the Fox studio lot together was like a nice ride down Memory Lane, reminding Erik of the time they had spent shooting ‘First Class’ together. He would never forget the early days of their friendship, when they were still tentatively testing the waters and learning how to get along, and how he had offered to chauffeur Charles around even though it was entirely out of his way. Hindsight, of course, now allowed him to see that he had been falling for Charles even then. His hand crept over to Charles’ lap and squeezed his hand.

Charles turned to him, bright and luminous as the sun. “What is it?” he asked, rubbing Erik’s hands between his own.

“Just a huge sense of déjà vu,” Erik said with a broad smirk, squeezing Charles’ hand while continuing to navigate their way. When they got to the lot, he spotted Emma’s shiny white Lamborghini already parked outside, and he grinned when he spotted Shaw’s black Maserati right beside hers. Shaw’s vanity license plate read, ‘HLLFIRE’, while Emma’s plate aptly read, ‘FRSBITE’. Erik chuckled as he parked the car and hopped out, waiting for Charles. This should be interesting.

The Fox staff were already waiting for them, but Erik could not find any familiar faces. A pint-sized Asian girl with a blue streak in her hair introduced herself as Jubilee, the VP of Regional Marketing and Communications, and Erik found himself shaking hands with the rest of the team, who were equally as polished and eccentric as her. He tried his best not to wrinkle his nose; he really hated suits, especially when they tried to tell him how to behave and what to wear to maximise his box office potential for their movie.

He could feel Charles’ hand rubbing soothing circles on his back, and already he felt grateful that Charles could sense his moods. He stayed close to Charles, narrowing his eyes at one of Jubilee’s
As they marched into the studio, Erik realised that the wardrobe and makeup people were already waiting for them, the ‘First Class’ costumes hanging on nearby racks. Everyone looked up at their entrance, and of course Charles started waving and said, “Good afternoon, everyone! I do apologise for keeping you waiting, we know how valuable everyone’s time is.”

Erik could see many of the staff breaking into smiles and whispering about how nice Charles was, and when he felt an elbow to his ribs, Erik quickly said, “I’m sorry as well, thank you for waiting,” in a rather gruff tone.

As the Fox staff started fussing around them, Erik caught sight of Emma trapped in a corner near the coffee machine, while Shaw was leaning against the wall and rambling self-importantly. Hiding his laughter against Charles’ shoulder, Erik wondered how long he should let Emma suffer before saving her from Shaw.

“Erik?” Charles was looking around to see what Erik was laughing at, and he must have spotted Emma because he was smacking Erik on the shoulder. “That’s not nice, go rescue her.”

“Do I have to?” Erik pleaded, wiping away his tears of laughter. The trapped Emma was shooting pleading looks at both of them, while Shaw was waving his Scotch about and boasting about something.

Charles arched an eyebrow at him. “If you don’t rescue that poor woman, I will. And then you can think about how funny it is while you’re sleeping on the couch tonight.”

That did it. Sighing, Erik pressed a kiss to Charles’ temple before heading over to where Shaw and Emma were, interrupting politely and extracting Emma from her trap. Shaw only shrugged before wandering off to talk to Jubilee, and Erik managed to hold his laughter until they were safely with Charles again.

“Did you have to take so long to rescue me from that pompous windbag?” Emma said furiously, while Erik couldn’t help laughing again.

“I do apologise, my dear.” Charles wrapped his arms around her in a tight hug, before reaching out and smacking Erik again. “Darling, please make amends while you still can.”

“All right, all right.” Erik pretended to sigh dramatically, raising an eyebrow at Emma. “Do you want me to go beat him up for you?”

Emma haughtily flipped her hair, although Erik could see her mouth twitching as she bit back a smile. “We’re not animals, Erik. No need for violence.”

“Violence is never the answer, Erik,” Charles said seriously, although when he turned his back to them, Emma made a stabbing gesture in Shaw’s general direction, and Erik managed to conceal his laugh with a cough.

The shoot finally began after a few false starts, and the photographer was a German fellow whom Erik had worked with a couple of times. Hans was good at his job, clicking his DSLR non-stop while yelling out instructions for Charles and Erik to stand in front of the green screen and pose in different ways: side by side, face to face, leaning against each other. When Hans wasn’t looking, Erik managed to sneak a pinch of Charles’ ass, smirking as Charles yelped in surprise. “Erik!”

“Ooops, sorry,” Erik drawled, and when Charles was rubbing that delicious bum, Erik pinched it again. This time Charles was ready for him and caught his errant hand, dragging Erik forward so that
it wrapped around Charles’ waist. This brought them closer so their faces were only inches apart, and Erik smiled lovingly at him.

“That’s perfect!” they heard Hans shouting, and Erik looked up to see the entire studio grinning at them while Hans snapped pictures. “Keep looking at each other in that longing way. Charles, tilt your head slightly to the right so we get your profile.”

Charles obeyed, his eyes locked with Erik’s as he shifted his body to align with Erik. It was hard for Erik to remind himself of the distinction between James and Michael, Charles and himself. During filming they had occasionally blurred the lines, especially during James’ death scene, and Erik was never more glad that Charles was alive and in front of him. He ran a hand tenderly through Charles’ wavy hair, and maybe it was his imagination but he heard a few female sighs from their little audience.

Hans’ voice now seemed faraway, distant. “If you could, give us a kiss or two and we’ll see how the pictures come out.”

“With pleasure,” Erik growled, pulling Charles’ body flush against his before he bent down and just took Charles’ mouth. Charles, as always, completely gave way to him, letting Erik’s mouth plunder his own as he wrapped his arms around Erik’s neck.

“Hey, he said a kiss or two, not eat him alive,” Emma called out, making everyone laugh.

Charles chuckled against his mouth, sliding a hand down to rest on Erik’s chest and gently push him away. “She’s right,” he said, winking at Erik. “Let’s be professional for now, and we’ll save this for later.”

Well, this seemed to be a better alternative as opposed to wishing he could push Charles down onto the floor and take him in front of all these people. Erik placed himself in Michael’s headspace again, and pretended he was looking down at James’ earnest face for the rest of the shoot. With Charles, as always, everything was easy enough.

* * * * *

After a week of getting their affairs in LA back in order again, it was time to head to Westchester, which was fast becoming Erik’s favourite place in the world. Life was idyllic there (or at least it would be, until the paparazzi found out and started camping out outside their gates). But for now, Erik enjoyed having Charles all to himself, except when they had to go out and meet other people, like Moira. “We can’t just stay in the house and have non-stop sex, Erik,” Charles explained patiently, although Erik didn’t see why not. But Moira was important to Charles, so Erik dutifully drove them down to the city so they could have dinner with her and Sean, then watch her play on Broadway.

As always, Times Square was busy and ridiculously crowded, no matter what time of the day it was. It was a tourist trap, plain and simple, and Erik hated going there even before he had gotten famous. Now, it was more crowded and garish than he had remembered it. Russian and Chinese tourists clogged the sidewalks and roads, lining up for discounted ‘Lion King’ tickets at the TKTS counters or posing in the middle of the sidewalk for photos. Others were busy picking over ‘I Love NY’ T-shirts and other cheap souvenirs hawked by the pushcarts, and Erik sidestepped them with a noise of impatience, an arm braced over Charles to protect him from the jostling crowd.

“That is certainly an enterprising street entertainer,” Charles remarked as they passed a street artist posing as a living Statue of Liberty. “She must go through several pots of green makeup a day!”
Erik shot the artist an amused glance. “She’s magnificent. My mother has always wanted to take the ferry to the Statue of Liberty. Maybe we should bring the statue to her instead.”

Charles grinned, tightening his arm around Erik’s waist. “Speaking of which, shall we call her later? She says I looked too thin the last time we had a video call.”

“You? Too thin? Impossible.” But it had been true, as Charles had lost a little weight in Japan. Erik had been concerned, secretly feeding Charles with good food to get him back to normal. He pressed a kiss to Charles’ temple now, thankful that they weren’t going to be separated again anytime soon. A silent message: You’re perfect to me.

Charles must have gotten it, for he was smiling at Erik, blue eyes lit up brighter than all of Times Square. “Flatterer.”

They followed Moira’s previous instructions to the Belasco Theatre, tucked away further down 44th Street. Thankfully the crowds were fast thinning out, although there were people on their way to see various plays and musicals, and most of them either gawked or pointed at Charles and Erik as they walked past. Erik ignored most of them, although Charles waved back whenever anyone shouted their names.

They spotted Sean’s red hair from a distance, and he waved frantically when he saw them. “Hey man, it’s been a while!” He was beaming widely, throwing his arms around a laughing Charles. He was about to do the same to Erik, but at Erik’s raised eyebrow, Sean seemed to reconsider and offered a handshake instead, which Erik accepted. When Charles discreetly shot him a look, Erik grudgingly patted Sean on the shoulder as well, earning a smile from Charles.

“You look...well,” Erik said, which was an understatement because Sean was fucking glowing. His eyes were bright, his smile was ridiculously luminous and he had obviously made an effort to dress a lot sharper than the battered rock band tees and jeans that were previously his uniform. He’s in love, Erik realised, and he couldn’t help wondering if he had looked like that too when he first fell for Charles.

“Thanks! Well, New York agrees with me,” Sean was saying as he gestured for them to follow him inside the theatre.

“You mean Moira agrees with you,” Erik said dryly, surprising a laugh out of Charles who affectionately wrapped an arm around Erik’s waist. Erik couldn’t resist pressing another kiss to his temple, holding him close.

As they entered the lobby, Sean flashed a special pass at the security guard, who waved them forward towards a side entrance, and Erik let Charles do all the catching up for both of them, telling Sean about the past few eventful months as they climbed down the narrow stairs. One thing Erik didn’t like about NYC - among many other things - was how most of the buildings were so old and squashed and tiny.

They finally emerged in a musty theatre with too-bright overhead lights and a narrow wooden stage where Moira and the other actors were in the midst of rehearsing. The theatre was a lot smaller than Erik had initially imagined, but then again most of the theatres on Broadway (except for the major ones) were pre-WWII buildings and not designed for throngs of modern audiences. He followed obediently as Charles took his hand and led him to the front row where they could sit and watch with Sean. Moira caught their eye and smiled, while her co-star, a young blonde girl that Erik had seen in some TV show, comically turned purple when she spotted Charles and Erik, but admirably managed to keep her composure otherwise.
They watched the rest of the rehearsal and clapped politely when it was over. Sean, however, was on his feet, applauding wildly as though Moira had just won a Tony. Charles was turning to hide his laughter against Erik’s shoulder, while Moira just looked embarrassed amidst the smirks of her co-actors.

“Thanks for waiting,” she said as she came off stage, her face a little flushed. Sean was just staring at her, and if this were a cartoon, he’d have hearts in his eyes. Erik bit back his smirk, watching as Charles stepped forward to hug her.

“You were wonderful, my dear,” he said, before kissing her on both cheeks. “I can’t wait to watch your play later.”

“Do you guys need more tickets?” Moira asked, understandably a little wary as Erik leaned forward and kissed her on both cheeks as well. Her skin felt soft, like peaches, although Erik quickly pulled back when he saw Sean watching both of them like a hawk.

“No, it’s all right, Raven is off for a little Hanky-panky,” Charles said teasingly, scooping an arm around Erik’s waist. “And I believe Darwin and Alex have their own plans.”

“It probably involves a lot of acrobatic sex,” Erik said dryly, grinning when Sean made a disgusted face.

“Oh please, like you two are any better,” Moira retorted, as a guilty flush settled on Charles’ cheeks.

“Guys, we’d better get going now if we don’t want to lose our 6:30 reservation at Sardi’s.” Sean pointed at his watch, probably hoping to break up any impending argument or snarkfest.

“Yes, that’s a brilliant idea,” Charles said hurriedly, ever the peacemaker as he placed a calming hand on Erik’s chest. “Lead the way, Sean.”

The director reminded the actors and crew to be back by 7:30 P.M., then Sean and Moira led them back outside the theatre again, chatting about the play as they walked to Sardi’s. The restaurant was not that packed yet, and the maitre d’ neatly checked Sean’s reservation, not at all blinking an eye at his three famous companions. Erik liked not being gawked at, for once.

Once they had sat down and ordered, Charles sipped his wine and smiled at Moira. “I’m really looking forward to watching your play later, my dear.”

“I’m so glad you could come,” Moira said warmly. “Would you like tickets for this weekend as well?”

“The New York premiere is on Saturday night,” Charles said regretfully, as Moira nodded in understanding. “If we weren’t going to be on the red carpet, we’d love to come. Wouldn’t we, Erik?”

Erik, who had been distracted watching Charles talk, blinked in realisation as Charles frowned at him. “Yes, of course,” he said hurriedly. “Charles has been talking non-stop about your play.”

“Oh hush, Erik. How have the audiences been so far, Moira?” Charles asked, placing his glass-free hand on top of Erik’s on the table and squeezing it. Erik squeezed back.

Moira shrugged. “Opening night was good, and the reviews were generally favourable. There were one or two that were quite caustic, though. It might have affected sales.”

“Those reviewers must have been blind,” Sean said with uncharacteristic vehemence, causing both
Charles and Erik to raise their eyebrows.

“Chill, Sean,” Erik said. “People are entitled to their opinions, you know.”

Sean leaned forward on the table, an eyebrow challengingly arched. “Oh, so if Charles’ next movie gets bad reviews, are you going to ‘chill’, too?”

Damn, the kid had a point. However, Charles was laughing a little uneasily. “My goodness, what is with you two today?”

Moira shot Sean a sideways smile, patting his hand. “Don’t rise to Erik’s bait, he just needs to argue for sport since he doesn’t fight with Charles.”

Erik let out a scoff. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

Moira smiled sweetly at him. “Let’s just say that this is the first time I’ve seen someone come back from Phuket without a tan.”

Charles almost choked on his wine, while Erik could feel his entire face burning with embarrassment. Sean, however, was laughing until his face was red, exchanging a high-five with a smirking Moira. “Nice burn!”

“All right, MacTaggert, you win this round,” Erik said sarcastically, gesturing to the waiter to top up his wine glass. It was going to be a long night.

* * * * *

Someone had once told Charles that suits did for men what lingerie did for women. Right now, staring at Erik as he knotted his cornflower blue silk tie in the mirror, Charles absolutely couldn’t agree more with that statement. Erik was all slim and trim and dashing in his double-breasted pinstripe Armani in his favourite shade of charcoal grey. Charles had picked out a tapered, navy blue Ermenegildo Zegna for himself, but compared to Erik, he felt extremely plain in comparison.

“I hope I don’t trip and fall on my face later,” Erik was grumbling as he fidgeted with his tie, but Charles could see the tight, tense line of his jaw. Erik was nervous.

“I’ll be there to catch you if you fall,” Charles promised, coming to stand in between Erik and the full-length mirror, knotting the tie for him. “My, my, you look absolutely stunning.”

“Charmer.” Erik’s gorgeous mouth was trying not to twitch up into a smile. “You know that I hate red carpets with a passion, right?”

“I know,” Charles said seriously, as Erik’s eyebrows jumped in surprise. “You’ll be amazed at the number of red carpets I’ve gone to, hoping to bump into you.” Charles couldn’t resist placing his hand on Erik’s broad, firm chest, which was now his pillow most nights. “You stood me up all these years, Erik Lehnsherr.”

Charles had only said it in jest - mostly - but something in Erik’s eyes had softened. “You mean if I had attended these infernal things, I could have met you a lot sooner?”

Nodding, Charles tiptoed up and kissed Erik gently. “It doesn’t matter, we managed to meet in the end anyway.”

Erik kissed him more firmly this time, pulling away before the kiss could deepen. He leaned over to peer out of the window at the mob of paparazzi and fans alike. The long, sleek limousine Remy had
hired for them was idling outside the hotel entrance. Erik let out a sigh. “Time to go and face the madness, then. You ready for this?”

Charles grinned as he threw his arms around Erik’s neck. Somehow, that morning when he had woken up in Erik's home and knew that his entire life had changed didn’t feel all that long ago. “Let’s find out.”

* * * * *

As expected, there were many media outlets already camped along the red carpet, rows and rows of photographers waiting with their immensely long zoom lenses and checking their watches. In the limo, Charles had his hand on Erik’s thigh, and he could feel Erik brimming with nervous energy. At least, these days, Erik was much better with the press than he had been a year ago, when he had been regularly earning the wrath of gossip websites like Perez Hilton and TMZ (who had never quite forgiven him for throwing up on the shoes of their reporter). Now, Erik smiled more and actually interacted with the media, without any threats or sarcasm. Of course, it helped that Charles was consistently rewarding him every time Erik behaved well, and if it meant Charles had to continue giving Erik lapdances for the rest of his life, Charles was more than happy to oblige.

Once the limo arrived at the Ziegfield theatre, they stepped out and were instantly bathed in a dazzling array of camera flashes, and Charles waved merrily to the photographers, pressing himself against Erik as he slid an arm across Erik’s trim waist. Erik tucked him under his arm in return, steering them away from a bunch of paps that had somehow managed to weasel their way close to them. Darwin used to be in-charge of his security detail before Erik had come into his life, just one of the thousand things Darwin had learnt to handle as part of his PA duties, but he was probably relaxing at the cocktail reception with Alex now that Charles no longer needed him for that. Charles had to fight back a snicker when the paps cowered the moment Erik shot them a glare, and he couldn't help thinking that Erik made a much better bodyguard than Darwin had ever been. Charles tightened his hold around Erik's waist, grinning. "You're my knight in shining Armani."

He felt Erik drop a kiss on his forehead, and together they sauntered down the red carpet, beaming and waving. Hundreds of fans were squashed behind the barricades, sticking their camera phones in the air to get a picture of Erik and Charles. This was one of the largest red carpet crowds Charles had ever seen.

“Erik, let’s go and say hi to some of the fans,” Charles said, and it only took a moment of hesitation before Erik nodded in agreement. The screams and shrieks grew louder as they approached the barricades, and Charles signed as many pictures as he could, laughing when he saw a gay pride group snapping Erik for a self-shot group picture. Erik shot him a dark look that basically screamed, You owe me! and Charles winked back at him, enjoying the sight of his boyfriend getting mauled by a group of very excited men.

Unfortunately, Charles wasn’t the only one who had witnessed this. They spotted Robert Downey, Jr and Chris Evans standing further down the red carpet, grinning widely at them. “Well look at what the cat dragged in,” Robert drawled, shaking hands with Charles and Erik. “You guys are looking good.”

“Well, Charles and Erik are the stars of the show,” Chris said, giving them a goofy grin.

“Thank you for coming,” Charles said before giving Chris a warm hug, glad that their friends had managed to take time off their busy schedules to be there.

“Where’s Susan?” Erik asked, looking around for Robert’s wife.
“At home with the baby,” Robert said, his grin getting wider. “Thanks for asking after my wife, seeing how you’ve brought yours along.”

“Robert, be nice,” Chris reminded him, as Erik rolled his eyes and Charles laughed. “I don’t want to get kicked out before I watch this year’s Brokeback movie.”

Erik groaned. “Is that what they’re calling it?” he asked as they made their way down the red carpet together.

“Course it is, why do you think everyone’s here?” Robert retorted. “To see you two get freaky on the silver screen, surely.”

Chris shuddered. “I think I’m going to go and look for Jeremy. I thought I saw him around here somewhere. See you guys later,” he said, giving them a salute before dragging Robert away with him as well.

Charles watched them walk away and wave to their fans, before turning to grin at Erik. “Iron Man and Captain America would make quite a couple,” he said, arranging Erik’s pocket square.

Erik’s generous mouth curled into a smile. “They still would have nothing on James and Michael,” he said, leaning down to kiss Charles, which elicited a sudden wave of screams and catcalls from behind the barricades.

Charles chuckled into the kiss, patting Erik’s chest before turning to give an embarrassed wave to their little audience. “Come on, love, I think that poor lady from E! has been waiting to interview us for some time now.”

Erik conceded with a nod, tucking his arm proprietarily around Charles’ waist. “Sure, Liebling, I’ll just follow your lead.”

* * * * *

They had to take the inevitable group shot before going into the theatre, and Charles made sure that Erik was standing nowhere near Shaw, who was thankfully distracted by Emma’s ample cleavage on display. Erik had one arm loosely around Bryan, and of course his other arm was wrapped tightly around Charles, keeping him close. The main cast and crew posed for a few pictures, ending with a fun candid one where Sean gave Alex rabbit ears and Charles had his hand in a compromising position on Erik’s right thigh, causing ripples of laughter and cheers from the crowd.

It was time to go in for the premiere, and Charles happily waltzed in with Erik, feeling like a billion dollars. They were ushered into the theatre, which had been decked out with the movie’s promotional posters, that had unsurprisingly turned out incredibly well. Once they were brought to the VIP row, Charles sat down with Erik, while Raven and Hank plopped down on Charles’ left and Emma daintily perched herself on Erik’s right. Remy, Darwin, Alex, and Sean followed soon after, filling the rest of the seats and talking excitedly about watching the movie for the first time. Overhearing snippets of their conversation made Charles aware of the nervousness in the pit of his stomach. Despite spending months and months living and breathing the script during shooting, this would be the first time he and Erik would be seeing the finished, edited product.

He could feel Erik’s hand folding in his, his thumb stroking the ridges of Charles’ knuckles. “Excited?” Erik asked, smiling a little as his other hand brushed back Charles’ hair.

“Of course, we worked on this for months.” Charles nuzzled into Erik’s touch, and something in Erik’s eyes softened. He let go so that he could properly wrap his arms around Charles, and Charles
happily sank against him, thinking that life couldn’t possibly get any better.

“Just a heads-up,” he heard Raven’s loud voice beside him. “If you two start making out during the movie, I’m going to throw popcorn.”

“Hush, Raven,” Charles scolded her, even as Darwin chimed in with ‘Me too!’ and Alex with ‘Me three, bro.’

“All of you just stop it right now,” Erik said, the warning clear in his voice. “The movie is about to start.”

“Boo Erik, you’re no fun,” Emma said tartly, eliciting some low chuckles and giggles from the rest as Erik shot her a sideways glare.

The audience started applauding as Bryan walked into the theatre, smiling as he headed to the seat that had been reserved for him, right next to Sebastian Shaw and a few Fox suits. Finally the lights dimmed, and Charles burst into a grin as the Fox logo appeared on screen, along with the Bad Hat Harry animation. “This is it, darling,” Charles said, gripping Erik’s hand in excitement. In comparison Erik seemed a lot calmer than he was, but Erik had always been good at stowing away his emotions beneath the surface.

“I know, Liebling.” Erik took Charles’ hand and brought it to his mouth, pressing a kiss to the back of it. His lips were dry and warm. “I can’t wait.”

They watched, enraptured as the opening scene flickered into life on the screen. This was one of the shots that had nothing to do with them, a flashback to the very first murder. The camera panned past a row of sleeping plane passengers in first class, and Charles remembered watching this scene being shot during his and Erik’s lunch break. “Erik, this is when we had just gotten together, remember?”

“Like it was yesterday,” Erik said, tenderly brushing back a lock of his hair.

“Shhh!” Raven hissed at them, and Hank put his finger to his lips, reminding them to be quiet. Charles held up a hand in apology, resting his head on Erik’s shoulder as he continued to watch. He smiled when he felt a kiss to his temple, and squeezed Erik’s hand.

They watched the rest of the scene in silence, and Charles burst into a huge grin as he realised the scene where James and Michael met for the first time was coming up. A little thrill raced down his spine as, in the scene, James turned around and watched Michael walking into his boss’ office for the first time, and Michael refused to accept his new partner. “Oh Erik, remember the day we shot this? I was struggling so hard not to throw myself at you, because you looked so good in that white polo tee of yours.”

“Really?” Erik’s voice sounded both amused and smoky with arousal, the heat in his voice sparking tinges of warmth in Charles’ stomach. “It’s a shame you didn’t, it would have been one hell of an introduction.”

“Geez, you guys,” Raven snapped, annoyed, while Darwin hid a laugh behind his hand. “Can we save the sappy DVD commentary for later, please?”

“Sorry, sorry.” Charles turned to bury his face in Erik’s shoulder, shaking with laughter. Erik’s hand was now rubbing up and down his spine, and it felt large and warm. Soothed by the touch, Charles returned his focus to the screen, biting back the comments that were popping up in his head everywhere like mushrooms. He had to be considerate, after all.

It was hard, though. Every scene at every turn brought back a rush of memories that sucked him in
all over again, and whenever he burst into an excited gush of words, Erik would be looking fondly at him and paying attention to absolutely nothing else, not even the peanut gallery around them who were complaining and telling them to shut up.

“It’s okay, Liebling, I love hearing your voice. Ignore them,” Erik said, leaning down and pressing a chaste kiss to Charles’ lips.

“We shouldn’t have gotten popcorn,” Charles heard Raven grumbling to Hank. “I’m just going to throw everything up.”

Charles could see Shaw craning his neck and looking over at their noisy little section with a frown, so Charles obediently stifled his laughter and sat quietly in Erik’s arms. Now that he was properly concentrating on the movie, it was a treat to watch the interaction between Michael and James, and how Michael was slowly lowering his guard to eventually let James in. It was an interesting parallel of the gradually developing offscreen relationship happening between him and Erik as well, at the same time.

It had taken a while to get Erik to lower his defenses, but it had finally happened. And it had been so worth the wait. Charles shot Erik a fond, upwards glance.

They continued watching until Charles realised that their big love scene was coming up, and he felt his skin prickle with both anticipation and embarrassment. Judging from the way Erik’s hold had tightened around him, Erik had noticed, too.

As James and Michael started kissing and fumbling to get each other’s clothes off, Charles could hear Emma saying in a flat tone, “Oh boy, here we go.”

“Emma, pass the brain bleach, please,” Raven said, causing another spate of scattered laughter.

Charles sunk against Erik with a groan, nibbling on his lower lip as the love scene slowly intensified, heating up the screen. He could still remember all the details of that day, how Erik’s skin had smelled of rosewater and Angel’s concealer, and how close they had come to making it an actual sex scene. He stole a glance at Erik, who was shifting in his seat, eyes riveted to the screen. A quick peek at Erik’s lap confirmed that Erik was getting just as excited by this as he was.

“Later when we’re home, we’ll relive this scene,” Erik promised, his breath hot in Charles’ ear. Charles could only nod, his face flushed with heat as he watched his fake ‘orgasm’ on the screen, crossing his legs. He hoped he’d be able to last until then.

* * * * *

“There is no such thing as too much champagne, my dear.”

Raven rolled her eyes as exaggeratedly as she could, because it was obvious that Charles was sloshed and barely able to remain upright. They were at the after-party for the premiere at the Marriott ballroom, which was filled with several celebrities milling around and schmoozing with people from the industry. The ‘First Class’ cast had gathered together in their own little corner to drink and celebrate, and Charles had been in a very celebratory mood. Now his entire face was flushed with alcohol, and his lips were reddened and puffy from an entire night of snogging Erik on the sly. Raven tried to rescue the half-empty champagne flute from Charles’ grasp, but he only made an offended noise, holding it out of her reach.

“Come on, Charles, give it to me before you faceplant on the floor,” Raven warned him, but Charles only started chuckling before he guzzled the rest of the champagne in one full gulp.
“Ta-dah! How’s that for a magic trick?” Charles said with a laugh as he handed her the now empty glass.

Raven heaved a long-suffering sigh before depositing it on a passing waiter’s tray. “Of course, I shouldn’t be surprised at how good you’ve gotten at swallowing things,” she said sardonically.

“Did someone say something about swallowing?” a low voice rumbled behind her, and Erik appeared just in time to catch Charles in his arms, holding him upright. “Liebling, did you inhale an entire bottle of champagne while I was gone?”

“Close,” Raven said, rather amused. Erik had returned from the bathroom rather refreshed, his hair swept back and his eyes clear. There were barely any signs of inebriation at all, as opposed to Charles. “You know, I’m glad at least one of you can hold your alcohol. Then I don’t have to worry about finding you two in a ditch somewhere.”

Erik’s mouth crooked up in a smile. Damn, he was kind of handsome, Raven had to admit. No wonder Charles was so besotted with him; it wasn’t just his looks, but also his total devotion to Charles. Now Erik was gently arranging Charles’ loose limbs around himself so that he could support Charles’ weight. “Has he always been like this?” Erik asked Raven, stroking Charles’ hair.

Raven assumed that Erik was referring to the drinking. “Well, I do have a theory,” she said, as Erik listened attentively. “There’s this belief that celebrities are only as mature as the day they became famous.”

Erik raised an eyebrow at her. “I haven’t heard of that,” he said dryly.

Raven flapped a hand dismissively at him. “Anyway, what I’m saying is that Charles got famous right out of college, so his mentality will always be that of a college frat boy. Don’t you think that explains the constant drinking and humping?”

Erik’s face slowly turned scarlet. “I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“Oh please,” Raven scoffed, “Are you under the impression that Charles doesn’t go around talking about your sexcapades?”

“Er, we have to go,” Erik mumbled as he helped Charles to a plush cream sofa, then hailed a nearby waiter for a cup of coffee. Grinning widely, Raven hugged herself and went to look for Hank, who was chatting with Bryan and one of the camera operators. Before she could cross the room, she heard a loud gasp, and turned to see that Emma had flung her drink at Shaw and was now stalking away, furious.

“What happened?” Remy asked a dripping wet Shaw, who was retrieving an expensive silk handkerchief and mopping his suit with a grimace.

“All I did was compliment her on her dress,” Shaw complained. “And, all right, I may have asked her to get me some ice.”

Raven rolled her eyes extra-hard this time. Why were men so stupid? She took a detour so that she could go after Emma and check if she was all right, taking out her phone to text Hank so that he would know where she was. Hank replied with a smiley face, and Raven was very much relieved that Hank was nothing like Shaw, and neither was Erik. When it came to boyfriends, both she and Charles had gotten lucky.

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No Bumpy Landings for First Class Thriller
‘First Class’, directed by Bryan Singer

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At first glance, ‘First Class’ makes out to be a bid by 20th Century Fox to capitalize on different demographics brought in by the movie’s two very different leads: action star Eric Lahnheiser, more known for explosive stunts than explosive acting, and rom-com darling Charles Xavier, the transatlantic boy-next-door renowned for sweeping hearts instead of acting accolades. Which makes it all the more deliciously surprising that Bryan Singer’s latest venture turns out to be a meaty, cerebral thriller that sinks its hooks into the audience’s hearts as well.

‘First Class’ is a sixties detective thriller set in several different countries, which gives the main characters purchase to run around the globe chasing the villain down. On the surface, it gives off Bourne-like vibes with a touch of the Bond franchise and ‘The Fugitive’, except for one important factor: both lead characters, Special Agents Michael Fassbender (played by Lahnheiser) and James McAvoy (Xavier) are gay.

It is their tumultuous, tentative relationship that is at the heart of this movie, and it carries the taut storyline along to its nail-biting, satisfying finish. Fassbender has a personal vendetta – his ex-partner is one of a string of victims by a murderer dubbed ‘the First Class killer’ because the killer’s MO is to poison his victims mid-flight. McAvoy comes from a more psychological background and helps his new partner to figure out connections that can be traced back to seminal LGBT events like Stonewall.

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Over the years, Emma had accompanied Erik to numerous interviews, and for most of them she pitied the poor saps who were saddled with the task of interviewing Erik Lehnsherr, who was always brief, prickly and almost taciturn to a point. She could count - on one hand - just how many interviewers Erik had actually gotten along passably well with. However, the one they were going to record today at the Marriott would be entirely different, and rather interesting: they were going to get Charles and Erik to interview each other.

It was quite a novel idea, and Emma grudgingly had to admit that whoever in publicity had come up with it was a diabolical genius. If anyone could get Erik to open up for the cameras, it was Charles. She watched impassively as Angel finished dusting Charles’ and Erik’s faces with mineral powder while the sound man hovered above them, checking the levels for the overhead boom. Charles and Erik, the two fools, were oblivious to the crew swarming around them as they grinned down at their phones, probably engaged in another tweet-a-thon. Every now and then, they’d stop to sip their tea and coffee, then exchange a peck on the lips.

“Okay, you two,” Emma said warningly as she approached the set, the two of them looking up at her. “Please remember that children may be watching this, so keep it family-friendly.”

“Emma, I’m wounded,” Charles said, giving her those big sad blue eyes that worked on nobody but Erik. “We’re not a bunch of perverts who can’t keep their hands off each other.”

“I’m sorry, sugar, but that is exactly what the two of you are,” Emma said sweetly, before turning to a glowering Erik. “Am I right, Selena?”

“Stop calling me that,” Erik complained at the same time as Charles asked, “Why did you call Erik that?”

“Didn’t you hear?” Emma held up her iPad with a grin. “Justin Bieber was given a speeding ticket for trying to outrun the paps. Good thing Charles didn’t get caught like he did.”

“See, darling? Emma agrees that I have excellent driving skills,” Charles chirped, grinning when Erik pinched the bridge of his nose in dismay.

“I really don’t think that’s what she meant. Here, show it to Charles,” Erik said, taking her iPad and reading the article with Charles, their heads bowed together. “Emma, I still don’t see how this makes me Selena Gomez,” Erik said tartly, as Charles started running his fingers through Erik’s hair.

“If you don’t see it, then I can’t help you.” Emma retrieved her iPad just as the director came over and told Erik and Charles how they were going to shoot the interview. They would take turns asking each other a scripted list of questions, and there would be a producer on the side keeping time and making sure they didn’t stray too far from the topic.

It was finally time to shoot. Emma folded her arms, watching in interest as the red lights on the cameras lit up, and the producer signalled for Erik and Charles to start. Charles was sitting with his legs crossed, a hand propping up his chin as he smiled at Erik, who was regally perched on his own chair, his posture perfect and elegant as always. Erik himself wore a little soft smile as he gazed devotedly at Charles. Emma fought not to roll her eyes.

“Erik Lehnsherr, thank you very much for joining me today,” Charles said, his grin turning wicked.

“It’s always a pleasure, Charles.” Erik’s voice was a low purr, his thumb stroking his bottom lip. Emma could see Charles’ gaze dropping to Erik’s mouth, his cheeks a little flushed now. These two
“perverts need to be locked up,” Emma thought, amused.

“Anyway, I want to ask you about the first time we met.” Charles shifted in his seat, adjusting his Cartier watch around his wrist. “What was your first impression of me?”

Emma hid her laugh behind her fist as Erik made a constipated face. “Do we really have to talk about that?”

Charles was grinning from ear to ear, nudging Erik with one foot. “Go on, love, why don’t you tell us?”

Erik let out a long sigh, then mumbled, “I thought you were arrogant and pompous.”

There were a few chuckles from the watching camera crew. Charles, however, only had eyes for Erik. “I hope you’ve changed your mind since,” he said with a grin.

“I have,” Erik said, growing serious. “You’re an incredible actor, and you have this, this *gift* for putting the people around you at ease. Everyone loves you, and at first I couldn’t understand it, but now I see why.”

“Oh, Erik.” Charles reached over to squeeze Erik’s hand, completely oblivious to Emma gagging behind his chair. It was impossible to deny the truth in Erik’s statement, though. If you ever needed proof that Charles Xavier could get anyone in the world to fall in love with him, you had to look no further than at the besotted Erik Lehnsherr sitting by his side.

Erik only shot her a glare before returning his attention to Charles. The producer was signalling for the next question, so Erik cleared his throat. “So, what made you sign on for ‘First Class’? How did you feel about working with me?”

Charles pursed his lips and looked thoughtful. Emma could see the exact moment Erik’s eyes became hazy with lust. “Let’s see,” Charles wondered aloud. “I still remember when Raven - she’s my agent - first came to me with the script. I skimmed through it and was intrigued, but when she told me that *you* were being considered for the role of Michael, I confess I dived head first into the project.” Now he was blushing even more, but he kept his gaze fixed on Erik.

Erik’s smile was slow and predatory. “Did you, now?”

Charles nodded earnestly. “What about you? How did you feel about the project when you first read the script?”

“I went into the meeting ready to turn down the offer, but wow, that would have been a mistake,” Erik admitted, almost giving Emma a heart attack. Erik rarely ever admitted that he was wrong. “But in the end, I changed my mind because you convinced me not to.”

“I’m glad I did,” Charles said, leaning forward to give Erik a chaste kiss. “You’re a bloody amazing actor.”

Emma saw the producer was now standing beside her, grinning to himself. “I’m sorry I forgot to bring the insulin shots,” she whispered to him. “These two are *terrible*."

“They make for great TV, though,” he replied, as Charles and Erik continued to shamelessly flirt and ask each other questions like the rest of them didn’t exist. “Don’t worry about it.”

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Charles had found the solo interview segment with Erik quite fascinating, because they were both often used to being on the other end of the mic. Unfortunately it was over too soon, and they were now being shepherded to the ballroom for the press conference. As they approached, Charles could already hear the babble of the waiting journalists and cameramen from behind the closed doors, waiting for the cast and crew to appear. Charles hooked his arm around Erik’s as they followed the Fox studio execs to the back of the ballroom, where the rest of the cast were waiting and sipping coffee with Bryan and Shaw.

“Ah, now it’s a party,” Shaw said when he saw them, raising his arms in welcome.

“Thank you, Sebastian,” Charles quickly said before Erik could say something snarky. “Sorry everyone, the interview ran a little long.”

“That’s all right,” Bryan said, looking around at everyone. “Shall we?”

One of the hotel staff opened the doors, and the babble rose to a swell of applause and cheers as the ‘First Class’ cast and crew walked in, taking their respective seats along a long covered table. There were placards with their names on it, determining their seats, and a mic behind each placard. Charles and Erik were sitting in the middle, of course. At the right side of the room, Charles could see Emma and Remy standing side by side and watching the proceedings, while Darwin was looking through Charles’ schedule. Remy’s awed expression reminded Charles that this was probably Remy’s first conference, and Charles sincerely hoped that Remy would be around for many, many more. Remy understood Erik and his gruffness, and he also understood what was important to Erik. Charles smiled at Remy, who waved back.

“Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to the press conference for the latest movie by 20th Century Fox, ‘First Class’, starring Erik Lehnsherr and Charles Xavier.” The studio exec waited for the applause to die down before she continued. “We will take questions for 30 minutes, and please remember the rules we discussed during the media briefing.”

A sea of hands rose into the air, and the studio exec pointed at a man wearing suspenders and horn-rimmed glasses. Charles found him vaguely familiar. “Yes, you, Dom.”

“Dom Cambington, Total Film,” the man said by way of introduction. “Charles and Erik, I’m interested in hearing your views on how shooting a movie set in the Sixties went for you, and whether it reminded you of less liberal attitudes back then.”

“Hello, Dom,” Charles said into the mic. “And yes, it definitely did. It made me appreciate that views have changed, and people are now more liberal and open-minded. We get a choice these days, and people aren’t forced to hide how they feel about the ones they love.” Charles could feel Erik’s hand curling over his, and he shot Erik a sideways smile.

“It’s a testament to how times have changed that the studio went along with the request for James and Michael to be gay,” Erik said softly into the mic, and Charles could see several reporters leaning forward, straining to hear him. “It is good that we are now starting to see more well-rounded gay characters in mainstream film.”

“I completely agree,” Charles chimed in, squeezing Erik’s hand. “And more well-rounded roles for women too, while we’re on this topic.”

Most of the female journalists were clapping enthusiastically, and Charles grinned in appreciation. Now their hands shot up again, and the studio exec pointed at a woman who looked like Moira. “Yes you, Katie.”
“Thanks. I’m Katie Wilde, from *Entertainment Weekly,*” the journalist said, tapping a pen against her chin. “Charles, I would like to hear your thoughts on your character, and his death in the movie.”

Charles pursed his lips, deep in thought. “James is one of the characters I’ve played that I could really identify with, for obvious reasons,” he said, to a slight titter from the audience. “There is a lot of me in James, and I’m sure Erik will agree that he put a lot of himself into Michael as well. Personally, I approached this as a what-if scenario where we had met in the Sixties instead, and how different our lives could have been. That’s the reason why we make movies, isn’t it? To imagine a life we never lived. So of course, his death affected me greatly, because the tragedy is that James wouldn’t have met his fate if he and Michael hadn’t loved each other. Now, gay marriage is starting to gain a wider acceptance in this country, and all over the world. We can only hope that things get better, and I like to think this movie is a step in the right direction. It’s not a movie about gay law enforcers, it’s a movie about law enforcers who happen to be gay.”

Katie nodded, scribbling down a few notes in the process. More hands shot up, and the studio exec picked a few more journalists, and the ‘First Class’ panel answered them as best as they could. Bryan was asked some of the more technical questions, while Shaw replied to questions about financing and how the studio was handling the publicity for the movie.

Of course, Charles had expected questions of a more personal nature to come along, and it was a reporter from ‘People’ who started it off. “Charles and Erik, you are the first two gay A-list movie stars who have come out as a couple. Please tell us some of your ups and downs after coming out in public.”

Charles could see the studio execs frowning, but he held up a hand to them, indicating that he and Erik would answer it. “It has been an interesting time, I can admit that,” Charles said, to scattered laughter. Even Erik was smiling fondly at him. “Well, you say we’re the first two mainstream actors who have come out together, but you’d be amazed at how many gay actors there are in Hollywood.”

There was a low murmur at this, as well as a few cynical smiles amidst the more experienced entertainment reporters. Erik leaned in towards his mic and said dryly, “The closet is surprisingly jam-packed.”

More laughter, but now Erik was speaking seriously, his large hand sprawled on Charles’ thigh for support. “I have to say that for my part, I was taken aback at how big a deal this is. This is my sexuality, it is a part of who I am. I don’t consider this headline news, and if you do, it is not my problem. I just want to live my life quietly, with the man I love.”

People were now nodding in approval, although Charles could see Shaw looked as though he were about to have a stroke. So Charles quickly grabbed the mic before Shaw or any of the studio suits could say anything. “What Erik means is that our private lives shouldn’t make headlines, as there are far more important issues that need attention,” Charles said seriously, but he could feel Erik squeezing his hand.

The studio exec conducting the press conference must have received instructions, because she did not entertain any more questions. “Thank you for coming, you may pick up your media kits at the door,” she said, gesturing for the ‘First Class’ panel to stand up for another group shot. Charles turned so that he was plastered all along Erik’s side from head to toe, and Erik held him close, his hand possessively resting on the small of Charles’ back. They may have stirred some feathers, but Charles wouldn’t have wanted the press con to end any other way.

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When they flew back to Los Angeles, they had two days off before they had to continue on the West
Coast leg of their press tour, so Erik thought this would be a good chance for them to take a break and get out of the city to somewhere nearby. It had been a while since he had wined and dined Charles on a proper date, so he texted Remy to get the Porsche ready, then told his happy assistant to take the night off. ‘Have fun on your own date.’, Erik texted him, and grinned when Remy replied only with several smiley faces.

Charles was surprised when Erik turned up at the door of their bedroom in his favourite navy dress shirt, the cuffs turned up just the way Charles liked them. “May I take you out for a spectacular evening?” Erik murmured, folding his arms around Charles, who couldn’t seem to stop his hands from running all over Erik’s chest.

Charles pretended to clear his throat haughtily. “You may,” he said with a grin, wrapping his arms around Erik’s neck. “You know, I think you may have been watching too many of my movies.”

Erik affected a look of complete innocence, something he had learned from Charles. “I have no idea what you are talking about.”

Arching an eyebrow at Erik, Charles burst into a laugh and leaned up on his toes to kiss Erik. “Give me a minute to get changed, darling.”

“Oh course.” Erik pulled away with a smirk, patting Charles’ bottom. “I’ll be waiting outside with your carriage.”

Charles laughed again before closing the door, and in the meantime Erik went outside to wait by the car, making a few calls to confirm his plans for the night. He didn’t like using his name (or Charles’ name) as an advantage when it came to last-minute reservations, but sometimes, it was a necessary evil when trying to plan a romantic night out.

When Charles came to the door, Erik had to stop and remember how to breathe. Charles was wearing Erik’s favourite light blue shirt, open at the collar to expose his tantalisingly pale neck. His sleeves were rolled up as well, drawing attention to the Cartier watch Erik had given him for Hanukkah. So far, Charles had never taken it off unless when he was showering, or when they were making love. His smile was broad and brilliant as he walked down the steps towards Erik, his eyes a bright blue like the clear Californian sky above them. “Shall we, my love?” he said, pressing himself up against Erik and blotting kisses against his mouth.

Erik was struggling to fight down his lust. “Keep doing that, and I may carry you back into the house.”

“Mmmm, I can’t say I’d mind that,” Charles said breathlessly, as both of them began kissing in earnest, Erik slumping against the car as Charles ruthlessly attacked his mouth. It was only when his phone began buzzing in his pocket that Erik came to his senses, gently breaking away from the kiss before he and Charles started going at it on the hood of the car.

“Hello?” Erik answered, but he had to bite back a moan when Charles began kissing his neck.

“Mr. Lehnsherr, this is Amy from ‘The Willows’ in Palm Springs,” a cheery, friendly woman chirped at him over the phone. “We wanted to confirm that the Einstein’s Garden Room is available and we’re looking forward to seeing you tonight.”

“Thank you,” Erik said in a strangled voice as Charles began slipping his hands under Erik’s shirt. Once he managed to hang up, he mustered every ounce of will and resolve he had left, gently pulling Charles away. “Come on, Liebling, I promise we can continue this at our destination.”
Licking his reddened lips, Charles patted Erik’s chest. “I’ll hold you to that promise.”

Relieved that they finally managed to get into the Porsche without mauling each other any further, Erik keyed in their destination into the GPS, and soon they were off to Palm Springs. It was still in the early afternoon so the freeways were not yet jammed with rush hour traffic, and Erik kept the Porsche at a comfortable speed, reaching over every now and then to caress Charles’ knee while listening to him chatter about their press tour so far, and how nice it had been to catch up with all of their friends. Most of all, Charles had seemed very excited about Moira and Sean finally getting together, and Erik privately thought Charles was really a match-maker at heart. He grinned as he imagined Charles with a bow and arrow, taking aim at all the would-be couples around him, making them fall in love. Charles would make one hell of a Cupid (and an incredibly sexy one, too).

The hours sped by as the landscape gradually gave way to miles and miles of desert, the mountains rising in the horizon. Erik knew they were close when he spotted the giant windmills in the distance, their sharp white blades spinning in the strong wind. Charles had gotten out his iPhone and was snapping picture after picture, spewing out facts about wind turbines and the benefits of renewable energy. Erik just kept shooting him fond glances, unable to believe his luck at landing someone as smart as Charles.

The sun was already starting to sink behind the San Jacinto mountains by the time they arrived at The Willows resort, the sky streaked with red and pink trails. Getting out of the Porsche and passing the keys to the valet, Erik wrapped an arm around Charles’ shoulder as they walked into the hotel lobby. There were a few retirees reading brochures by the counter, and one of the older women was staring at Charles, delight and recognition dawning on her face.

Erik nodded at the reception staff before things could get out of hand and everyone started fawning over Charles. “I have a reservation under ‘Erik Lehnsherr’,” he told the girl behind the counter. “But could you check us in under the name ‘Max Eisenhardt’ instead? We would like to maintain our privacy.”

The girl - her nametag read ‘Amy’ - smiled broadly at him. “Of course. We’ll get you checked in right away, sir.”

It was worth the long drive and all the trouble just to see the way Charles’ face lit up when they entered the sprawling suite, which was filled with dark oak furniture and a massive brick fireplace that dominated the room. They also had a private balcony that gave them a view of the San Jacinto mountains, the moon already out in full view. “Oh Erik, this is absolutely gorgeous.”

“I specifically asked for the Einstein’s Garden Room, it was his favourite when he used to stay here,” Erik said, to Charles’ delight. “Because you once told me you used to sleep with a picture of Einstein by your bed when you were a boy.”

Charles ran a hand reverently over the framed picture of Einstein and his wife, which hung over a desk beside the window. He turned to look at Erik, his eyes bright and full of affection. “You remembered.”

“Of course I did.” Closing the door behind them, Erik went over and stood behind Charles, wrapping his arm around Charles’ waist and resting his chin on his shoulder so they could both look at the picture. “I know I pretend to fall asleep whenever you start talking about science at length, but I listen to every word.”

“Idiot,” Charles said with a laugh, lifting a hand to rub against Erik’s stubbled cheek. “Well, I guess I always knew I had a thing for German Jewish men.”
Erik slowly kissed the curve of his neck before whispering in Charles’ ear. “Now I’m jealous.”

A throaty chuckle from Charles. “You’re jealous of everything, my love.”

“Of course, the world is plotting to take you away from me.” Erik’s eyes skated over the brilliant cornflower blue of Charles’ eyes, the white line of his smile. “And I don’t blame them.”

“They can try, but it won’t work.” Charles murmured, tugging Erik’s arms tighter around his waist. They stood there in front of the picture for a while, and Erik thought that if anyone ever tried to harm this man, he would make sure they fully regretted ever coming near Charles.

“I missed being alone with you,” Erik said, burying his nose in Charles’ thick, dark hair. He smelled divine. “I thought it would be nice to have a night away, just the two of us.”

Charles nodded with a sigh, and Erik was glad Charles knew what he meant. Although they loved their friends, constant company grew tiring after a while. “Thank you for doing this, darling. How did you come across this place?”

“I filmed here on location once, and the studio booked us in this resort,” Erik explained, pressing kisses to the pink shell of Charles’ ear. “It’s a lovely place, but I had been alone the last time I was here. So I swore to myself to bring someone I loved here someday so I could fully enjoy it.”

Charles turned around in the circle of Erik’s arms, his eyes wide and languid and full of love. “Erik, you’re such a giant sap.”

Laughing as he rested his forehead against Charles’, Erik planted a quick kiss on his nose. “You made me this way, you know.”

They stood there in content silence for a while longer, and Erik slid his hand into the small of Charles’ back. “Come on, Liebling, we have a wine tasting, and then later we can explore the spa and the private jacuzzi.”

Charles leaned up to steal a slow, sweet kiss. “And then what happens next?”

Erik pretended to frown quizzically. “I suppose we could read until we fall asleep. There’s barely any romance in this place.”

Laughing, Charles swatted Erik on his ass. “Just for that, I should request for separate beds. Then you can ‘read’ all you want. On your own.”

At that moment, Charles let out a yelp as Erik picked him up and carried him over to the bed, tossing him onto the mattress, which bounced as Charles landed. “Erik, what are you--”

Erik undid his shirt buttons as he crawled on top of Charles, pinning him to the bed. “Just changing your mind about separate beds, because I’m going to show you how much fun we can have on a king-sized one,” Erik said wickedly, before devouring Charles’ mouth, smiling into the kiss when he felt Charles’ legs wrapping around his waist, his hands snaking into Erik’s hair to pull and tug at it as beautiful sounds escaped his throat.

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The drive out to Palm Springs for their date night proved to be extremely worthwhile, judging from the way they both couldn’t walk straight the morning after, hobbling to the hotel lobby. Once they were in the car, Charles almost immediately drifted off, too exhausted from their night of passion, the smooth, pale curve of his neck bearing a line of red bite marks. Erik himself had to pound a few Red
Bulls in order to stay awake and drive, and once he contemplated asking Remy to drive out and get them. On the other hand, the thought of Remy’s smirk once he saw their dishevelled states was not worth it, and Erik continued on steadfastly until they were safely back home in L.A. Thankfully, they had a few hours more to recuperate and recharge their batteries before they had to attend the L.A red carpet. After braving the one in New York, Erik felt a bit more prepared to face the throngs of fans and paparazzi on his home turf. Charles was utter perfection in a grey, double-breasted Burberry suit, and Erik found he had more trouble than usual keeping his hands off Charles, but the constant flash of cameras in his face - worse than New York - had at least reminded him to behave.

Otherwise, the L.A premiere went pretty much like the one in New York, except that Sean had not joined them. The after-party also ended much earlier, since Shaw insisted that his main cast get a full night’s rest for their busy day ahead with the press.

On the first day of press rounds, they arrived at the Fox headquarters in Century City, fighting hangovers and yawns. Erik knew his grouchesness stemmed from a lack of sleep (he had thoroughly enjoyed peeling off every layer of that Burberry suit) and he hoped he was going to be able to survive the long day with the press. He used to keep his answers short and brief in the past, and he always avoided answering any personal questions. However, Erik knew this wasn’t an option today. Because his relationship with Charles had developed during filming, there would surely be many questions of a personal nature, and since they both had equal billing in the movie, Charles would be with him for all the interviews and it was no secret that Charles loved to talk. Also, Charles was so nice to everyone. Erik anticipated each interview stretching out for hours and hours, and he heaved a long sigh, smiling a little. The things he did for love.

Charles was wearing a grey, long-sleeved V-neck that clung to his body in all the right places, showing off his abs and the strong, lean lines of his arms. Erik was trying not to stare too much, until he almost tripped over Remy’s feet when they were getting onto the elevator. Erik pretended not to notice when Remy shot him a puzzled glance, although Charles had a very small and private smile on his face as he sipped the Earl Grey he had bought from Starbucks earlier.

“Are you laughing at me?” Erik teased him, kissing his ear and making Charles laugh.

“Erik, you’re so obvious sometimes.” Charles leaned up and nuzzled his jaw, running a hand down the buttons of Erik’s dark grey silk shirt. “But just for the record, you’re dressed very nicely, too.”

Once in the studio, they were shown to a pair of ergonomic swivel chairs parked in front of a glossy ‘First Class’ promo poster. Two production assistants fitted them with wireless mics, while a third one asked if they wanted more coffee or tea. Erik asked for his usual - coffee, no cream, no sugar - while Charles smiled charmingly at the girl and asked for a cup of rich, sweet Earl Grey.

“Well, how about that?” Emma said as she stood nearby with a smirk. “Erik’s coffee is just like his heart: bitter and black.”

“And Charles likes his tea rich and sweet, like he is,” Raven said in realisation. “You may be on to something, Emma.”

Erik narrowed his eyes at Emma. “Remy, could you go get my bag? I think Shaw might be interested in this CD I have for him--”

A visible shudder ran through Emma. “You win this round, Lehnsherr,” she warned him as she strutted off with her nose in the air.

“Erik darling, really.” Charles arched a disapproving eyebrow at him. “Are you going to resort to blackmail every time Emma gets the better of you?”
“But Charles,” Erik said, “Emma raps in this CD. How can it not be used for blackmail?”

“Would you like it if someone found really embarrassing old movies of you and tried to show them to Charles?” Raven asked sweetly.

“He probably owns all of them,” Erik said, grinning at Charles who winked at him.

At that point, the studio manager mercifully interrupted and told them the itinerary for the day. They would be conducting face-to-face interviews with TV affiliates from all over the West Coast. Then a few international networks could be calling in, including a Stuttgart TV station that wanted to interview Erik in German.

It was the usual interview set-up. There were a few studio cameras pointed at them, and a chair parked facing them for the interviewer. There was also a large LED screen for the later satellite interviews, where they would be able to see a live video feed of whoever was interviewing them. Erik dragged his chair closer to Charles, the two of them exchanging a quick good-luck kiss before the first interviewer came in.

“How was the red carpet premiere last night?” was of course the first question. The interviewer was from Seattle, a bright and preppy man in his mid-forties, and he looked a whole lot chirpier than Erik felt.

Charles sat up with a smile. “It was wonderful, Mark. We had all split up for separate projects and it was like a little reunion of sorts again at the New York premiere, and then again in LA last night. I really enjoyed catching up with them. And I enjoyed the movie so much as well, because there were so many things Erik and I didn’t get to see during the actual filming process.”

Now the interviewer was looking expectantly at Erik for his answer. “It was good,” Erik said, sitting up when Charles frowned at him. “What?”

Talk more, Charles mouthed at him. Erik turned back to the interviewer, struggling to think of something to say. It was hard when there wasn’t a script. “And I enjoyed myself very much,” he added lamely. “Hands down, this is the best cast and crew I’ve worked with.”

It was the truth, especially after filming with those infernal pigeons in Hong Kong, but Erik was pleased to see the way Charles was smiling at him, as though Erik had just declared his love for Charles out loud to the whole world. “What?” Erik’s grin was slowly widening as Charles tilted his head at him. “You know you were thinking the same.”

“I was, actually,” Charles said, before turning around to face the interviewer. “The cast were all amazing, and the crew were so devoted to the project. Shooting this movie was one of the highlights of my life.”

“It must have been an honour to work with the renowned Sebastian Shaw and Bryan Singer,” the interviewer said earnestly.

“Yes, it was, and an even bigger honour to have worked with Erik,” Charles said softly, reaching over and clasping Erik’s hand. “I’d been wanting to work with Erik for a long, long time.”

“And Charles is an absolute professional,” Erik added, squeezing his hand. “I had the time of my life working with him as well.”

There were a few more perfunctory questions about the movie, and Charles did most of the talking while Erik listened, interjecting every now and then with a funny anecdote that he remembered from filming. Moving on to the next few interviewers, it was mostly the same thing, and Erik found
himself establishing a little pattern for the standard questions: let Charles do the talking, add in his own opinion whenever he was asked, and gush over Charles whenever there was an opportunity to do so, even if it meant Raven and Emma constantly rolling their eyes while watching from the sidelines.

Erik could also feel Charles and himself drifting closer physically to each other, and Erik was finding excuses to run his fingers along the muscles in Charles’ exposed forearms, or just randomly noticing a stray tuft of Charles’ hair sticking out and brushing it back, earning a brilliant sideways smile from Charles. In the rare instances that Erik spoke at length, he could also feel Charles’ hand rubbing up and down his back in smooth, comforting strokes, or Charles just reaching for his hand and twining their fingers together, smiling down at their joined hands on his lap.

When an interviewer brought up the scene where Michael was brooding over his dead ex-partner, Charles jumped up in interest. “Erik was so brilliant in that scene, wasn’t he?” he gushed to the interviewer, a young redhead who could have passed for Sean’s sister. “Especially when he is all brooding and sexy.”

The redhead nodded with a laugh. “Oh yes, my mother has had the longest crush on Erik now. She says Erik always has this dangerous air about him, as though he’s about to pounce on you.”

“Oh, really?” Charles was arching an eyebrow now and pursing his lips - fuck, why did he always look so sexy when he was doing that - and he was now looking over at Erik. “I suppose I’m not just imagining it then, when I think Erik always looks like he’s going to pounce on me.”

Erik grinned as the interviewer laughed. “Guilty as charged,” Erik said, his eyes dropping down to that red, sweet mouth. “Charles is very hard to resist. There were some points in filming where I was amazed I didn’t fling him down on the nearest flat surface and--”

“Er, this is a family show,” the redhead interrupted, blushing a little. “So keep it PG-13?”

Erik blinked a little, realising that he and Charles had drawn closer and were a breath away from a kiss. “Sorry,” Erik said, leaning backwards and trying not to grin when he saw Charles frown in disappointment. “I forget myself around Charles.”

“The two of you are really close,” the interviewer remarked. “Your body language is obvious here, and even in the movie. Did either of you ever worry that the lines would get blurred?”

“All the time,” Charles said, nodding earnestly. “It was hard enough to concentrate when we weren’t together yet. There were times when I’d forget my lines because I was distracted by Erik’s smouldering good looks.”

Erik could feel his face turning hot from embarrassment. “Charles, you told me it was because you kept losing your script,” he muttered.

“And you believed me?” Charles said, grinning brightly. He leaned in conspiratorially towards the interviewer. “Really hot, but not too bright.” He patted Erik’s hand in jest. “Good thing you’re fantastic in bed, darling--”

The interviewer cleared her throat loudly. “Ahem, PG-13!”

“Sorry, sorry,” Charles said, holding up a placating hand in apology. Erik watched, dry-mouthed as Charles crossed his legs, so that the entirety of his left leg was pressing up against Erik’s. Charles felt so warm and firm, and it made Erik think of waking up in bed this morning, spooning that familiar warm body in his arms, his knees tucked behind Charles’. Erik drew in a deep, shaky breath,
remembering how he had started kissing the nape of Charles’ neck to wake him up, and what that had led to. Fuck, now Erik needed to cross his legs.

“Erik?” Charles was now peering at him in fake concern, but Erik could see the evil, lascivious glint in his eye. “Are you all right?”

“I’m fine,” Erik said through his teeth. He was desperately trying not to think about Charles crying out his name in bed, arching his neck, cheeks flushed with orgasmic pleasure. “I’m really fine, can we please move on?”

After a wary pause, the interviewer continued, and Erik tried very hard to think of unsexy things: Remy in a bikini, Darwin in a bikini, Shaw in a bikini... Shuddering, Erik steepled his hands and forced himself to concentrate on the interview at hand, ignoring the way Charles was rubbing his foot up and down Erik’s leg, or how his hand would “accidently” land on Erik’s thigh. Erik prayed and prayed that Charles wouldn’t start moving his hand, or else everybody would soon find out that Erik dressed to the left.

When the redhead interviewer went off, Erik was finally relieved to get a little break. “She was nice,” Erik said casually, before turning to give Charles a mock glare. “You’re terrible, Liebling.”

“I do apologise,” Charles said with a smirk. “I promise to dial it back.”

Of course, Erik should have known that Charles would just take it as a challenge to further frustrate Erik sexually. Charles started stretching and rubbing his own neck, moaning aloud as he kneaded his own muscles. Erik resisted the temptation to massage Charles himself as he knew that could only end up turning into live porn, so he sat on his hands and looked as grumpy as possible.

Once they were done with the morning programs, Charles seemed to have eased his campaign to make Erik have an erection on live TV, and Erik was thankful as they moved on to the entertainment shows. The questions were starting to get more interesting, too. Someone asked Charles about James’ tell in the movie, where James would lift two fingers to his temple. “I fingered myself with one hand in the end,” Charles said wickedly, causing Erik to laugh out loud while Emma choked on her latte in the background.

“I’m sure you did, Charles,” Erik said, still very amused. “You do have vast experience in fingerling yourself, after all.”

Charles was now leaning in towards him, his gaze dropping to Erik’s hands as he licked his lips. “Of course, now that you’re here, I don’t need to do that anymore.”

The interviewer was laughing a little uncomfortably, while Emma fanned herself briskly with a hand and Raven was shaking her head. “Okay, I don’t think we can air that,” the interviewer said a little tentatively.

“My apologies,” Charles said, although he did not look sorry at all. In fact, he looked positively mischievous. “Let us move on, shall we?”

But it only got worse, because the next question was about the love scene. “Were you two already in a relationship at the time you filmed it? Because it would have been interesting - and awkward - if you weren’t.”

“Charles and I had been together for a few months by then,” Erik said, surprising the interviewer by answering without being prodded. “And...let’s just say that the day we shot the love scene was a very hard day at work.”
“It was,” Charles agreed immediately, scooting his chair even closer to Erik’s. Any closer, and he would have been sitting on Erik’s lap (not that Erik would have complained). “But I’m grateful that we were already, well, physically comfortable with each other at that point, so lying there with Erik between my legs was a predicament I was fortunately familiar with.”

The interviewer’s eyes were round with surprise. “I....see,” she said, while Raven waved her fist threateningly at Charles in the background and Remy laughed behind his hand. Emma had stomped off, probably to pitch a fit in private.

“It’s harder than you think,” Erik chimed in, rubbing his foot against the back of Charles’ jean-covered calf and making him shiver. “I had to keep it professional and remember the lines between James and Michael, and Charles and myself. James and Michael were making love for the first time, while I already knew everything about Charles, and what would make him sigh or moan--”

“Erik!” Charles was laughing, his cheeks slowly turning red. “Please, we’re on camera.”

Erik leaned in, his hand raking through Charles’ wavy hair and brushing back a stray lock of it. “It’s your own fault, because you were squirming and writhing under me during that scene.” Erik ran a thumb across his cheek, stroking his bottom lip. “You drove me mad, making me think about you. All it would have taken was a well-placed thrust for it to become a real scene, you know,” he murmured, making Charles gasp.

“CUT!” The studio director announced over the intercom. “Okay guys, come on. You know we can’t use this.”

“Sorry, sorry,” Charles called out, although he was breathing hard. “Shall we do another take?”

“Yes, but first I think we all need a break.” The poor director sounded weary. “Everyone, report back to the studio in ten.”

“Come on,” Charles whispered in Erik’s ear, running a hand down his bicep. “You’ve got me all hot and bothered with all this talk about filming love scenes, and I have a few ideas for letting off some steam.”

Erik grinned as he slid an arm possessively around Charles’ waist. “Lead the way, Liebling.”

* * * * *

Charles knew what they looked like - two red-faced and overeager men stumbling in their frantic search for an empty dressing room - but he didn’t care. Once they found one, Charles dragged Erik in, shut the door behind them, then slammed Erik up against the wall, their mouths already seeking out each other in a hot, bruising kiss, his hand knocking off Erik’s fedora. Erik was already palming Charles’ backside, massaging it as if to seek out the invisible ‘Property of Erik Lehnsherr’ tattoo that was surely there, and Charles gasped into the kiss as Erik hitched him up and carried him over to the deserted makeup counter. “Oh God, Erik,” Charles breathed against Erik’s cheek as he felt his bum rest on the ledge of the makeup table, and then Erik was hooking Charles’ legs around his hips, the glint in his eye sharp and predatory.

“Stop being so fucking handsome,” Erik growled against his neck as his teeth scraped against Charles’ throat, making him cry out and buck up into Erik’s hand, which had slipped between Charles’ legs. Charles completely surrendered himself to Erik’s mouth and his hands and his hot, sexy body pinning Charles to the counter, grinding against him. Whatever Charles had in mind as a reply dissipated into thin air when Erik unzipped his jeans and reached in to stroke his cock, which had been hard ever since the interview when Erik had been looking at him with those fuck-me eyes.
“Fuck, Erik, fuck--” Charles gasped out as Erik’s hot, wet mouth lavished more kisses on his neck, retaining enough sense of mind to unbuckle Erik’s belt and unzip him as well. A well-placed thrust had Erik’s pulsing erection immediately in Charles’ hand, as though it truly belonged there. Erik let out a broken groan as Charles began to stroke him, desperately needing Erik to take him up against the wall until Charles was coming all over the place, shouting Erik’s name.

Charles tugged on Erik’s hair to get his attention. If he wanted to get fucked, it would have to be in the next - he checked his watch - eight minutes. Erik lifted his head, blinking at Charles, his mouth swollen with kisses. “What is it, Liebling?” Erik whispered, pressing his thumb right on the swell of Charles’ lower lip.

“I want you to hitch my legs up on this table and fuck me silly,” Charles demanded as Erik’s eyes became hazy with lust. “Get the lube out of my back pocket.”

Erik’s face suddenly lit up. “I see you always come prepared,” he said with the famous predatory grin that made hundreds of fans shower him with shark stuffed toys.

A smoky curl of desire rose in the pit of Charles’ stomach at the sight of that gorgeous smile. “Indeed I do,” Charles said a little breathlessly, unwilling to let go of Erik’s massive cock. “But now I just want to come.”

Erik’s nostrils flared as he obviously fought to retain his composure and not spurt all over Charles’ hand. “Charles, if you keep doing that, you won’t get to come at all.”

Charles pouted as he reluctantly released Erik’s cock, which he could feel throbbing against his thigh. “You’d better give me something after all that flirting earlier,” Charles whispered in Erik’s ear, biting down gently on his earlobe. “I want to get fucked so hard that I’ll need somewhere soft to sit later, like your lap.”

“Dammit, Charles...” Erik was taking in deep lungfuls of air, his hands clutching Charles tighter. “I hope you know you have been driving me crazy all day.”

“I know.” Charles ground his hips against Erik’s, turning to capture his mouth in a hungry, lewd kiss. “Please fuck me, Erik,” he begged, slipping his hands under Erik’s shirt now to caress his rock-hard pecs. “So hard until I can’t remember my name...”

“Because you’ll only be screaming mine,” Erik promised, before he leaned back and flipped Charles over, pressing him up against the mirror. Charles’ heated cheek felt especially hot against the cool mirror, and Charles could see his pupils were blown wide, his eyes much darker than usual. His lips were red and lush, moist with Erik’s kisses. Charles grinned in triumph as he felt Erik fishing into Charles’ back pocket for the small packet of lube, then he heard the soft rip as Erik tore it open with his teeth. The idea that Erik was so impatient for him and needed him so badly made Charles wiggle back against Erik’s hips, and their eyes met in the mirror.

“What are you waiting for?” Charles challenged, licking his lips, and Erik let out a growl that sent a spike of lust shooting down Charles’ spine.

Charles yelped when Erik undid his jeans with a quick, practised twist of his hand, then yanked them down along with his briefs. He watched in the mirror as Erik nudged a knee between his legs to further spread them apart, coating his fingers liberally with the lube. Even though Charles could watch Erik’s fingers reaching between him and searching out his entrance, he still gasped when Erik slid his fingers inside, slicking Charles up and getting him ready. “Fuck, Erik--” Charles gasped when Erik cleverly crooked his fingers.
“You’re so fucking hot like this,” Erik mouthed against the back of his neck, before burying his nose in Charles’ sex-mussed hair. “And you smell too damn good. How am I supposed to resist you?”

“Don’t,” Charles said through his teeth, watching himself arch back wantonly against Erik like he was already begging to be fucked. Was this how he always looked like? No wonder Erik always stared at him like that, with what Remy had nicknamed his ‘sex-dazed’ look. Erik’s eyes were half-lidded, his mouth slightly parted, gazing at Charles as though he were the eighth wonder of the world, and it was the same look that Charles saw every morning when he woke up in bed, cradled in Erik’s arms.

Those thoughts flew out of his head as Erik slid in a third finger, and now he was truly fucking Charles with all but his cock. Charles arched his back and slammed a hand against the mirror, shoving his arse back against Erik just to get his fingers in deeper. He was shocked at the low, keening moan that escaped - it sounded animal-like and raw, nothing at all like him - but Erik must have liked it, if the way he was plastering himself against the entirety of Charles’ back was any indication.

“Ready, Liebling?” Erik purred into his ear, before pressing kisses against it. The rough, proprietary note in his voice was enough to make Charles want to surrender his entire being to Erik.

“Yes, I’m all yours,” Charles gasped out, and their eyes met in the mirror again. Erik’s were dark and hooded, and he kept them fixed on Charles’ gaze even though they could both see Erik guiding himself into Charles’ body.

They groaned in unison, Charles almost ashamed of how much he sounded like a slut with Erik’s cock deep inside him where it belonged. Charles was still pressed up against the mirror, which rapidly fogged up each time he was moaning, “Erik, Erik, oh fuck...” Erik’s too-long fringe was now draping down across his face, but it wasn’t enough to obscure how wild and heated his eyes were, or how red his face was.

Then Erik thrust deeply into Charles, slamming him into the mirror. The long-awaited feeling of being fucked with that long, thick cock made Charles gasp with delirious laughter, his toes curling in pleasure. “Yes, Erik, yes--”

“You’re so tight,” Erik whispered, before kissing the curve where Charles’ neck met his shoulder, his hips slamming into Charles again and again, causing the whole mirror to shake. Charles was too speechless to reply, treated to a front-row live view of Erik fucking him hard, his body pinned between Erik and the mirror, his hands scrabbling onto the smooth surface for purchase. “So tight -- fuck, Charles, so good--”

“Harder,” Charles shouted, staring at his own red face in the mirror as Erik thrust again and again with wild abandon. From this angle Charles couldn’t see his own cock, but he could feel it leaking down his thigh, and he sighed with abandon and pleasure when Erik wrapped a large hand around it, stroking him in time with his thrusts.

“Hard enough...for you?” Erik ground out between his teeth, his belt jingling each time he slammed home into Charles and made him cry out in pleasure. “Moan for me, Charles, make everyone hear you.”

“Fuck, yes,” Charles shouted, and one particular thrust was so hard that Charles came wailing Erik’s name, muffled by the mirror and Erik’s other hand which he had now slapped over Charles’ mouth. Charles came and came and came, his eyes squeezing shut as his vision whitened off briefly, and he vaguely heard Erik moaning his name before biting down on Charles’ shoulder, and Charles could feel a burst of warmth deep inside him, along with Erik’s broken cry. Erik was now slumped over
him, almost a dead-weight as he pressed Charles further up against the mirror. Charles lifted a hand and tangled his fingers in Erik’s hair, now messy and damp with sweat. And sex.

“That was amazing,” Charles panted when Erik finally lifted his head and started pressing kisses to Charles’ cheek. “I’m not sure if I can walk anymore,” Charles confessed, positive that both his knees were thoroughly bruised.

“I’m so sorry.” Erik hurriedly backed away a little so that he could help Charles up. One of his hands was covered with Charles’ come, and Charles couldn’t help grinning when he saw it.

“Come on, darling. Let’s go get cleaned up before someone looks for us,” Charles suggested, tugging Erik over to the sink.

They were halfway through a quick clean-up when there was a rapid knock on the door. “Mr. Xavier? Mr. Lehnsherr?” one of the PA’s said tentatively.

“Er, coming!” Charles shouted back, although he had to stifle a laugh when Erik muttered ‘But we already came.’

“Okay, glad we found you.” The PA sounded relieved, as though he had been searching for a while. “The rest are waiting outside.”

“Be right there!” Erik called out as he quickly zipped himself up, then fixed his hair. After a quick perfunctory check, Charles nodded at him, and they headed back out to the studio. Charles could feel his face grow hot when he saw everyone’s raised eyebrows and curious expressions, and Remy was waiting for them with bottles of water.

“Are you two all right?” he asked suspiciously, before he took in their rumpled appearances, then sniffed the air. His eyes suddenly widened. “Did the two of you--”

“Remy,” Erik said sharply in a do-you-want-to-be-fired tone. “Could you get more tea for Charles and I, please?”

“All right, all right.” But Remy was grinning way too widely now, and it was even more obvious when he walked past Erik and held his fist up for a bump. Erik just stared at him with a deadpan expression, so Remy shrugged and offered his fist to Charles instead, who bumped it in embarrassment. As Remy went off, both Charles and Erik were limping and wincing their way back to the chairs, and Charles let out a little squeak when his sore arse touched the seat. Even without Remy broadcasting it to the studio, it must have been very obvious what they were doing.

As they carried on with the interviews, Charles found himself occasionally shifting in his seat and wincing a little, and it didn’t help this made Erik stare at him with those bedroom eyes again. It was certainly a good thing that the German interview was now up and the focus would be temporarily off Charles for the meantime. It was also a good chance for him to practise his newly-acquired German skills.

"Have you ever thought about doing a movie in German?" the interviewer asked. Her name was Maria, and her hair was such a bright shade of platinum blonde that it almost hurt Charles just to look at her.

“If ever the right script comes along, I am open to ideas,” Erik replied briskly. “Also, it is important that my schedule does not clash with Charles’ filming so he can be with me.”

“So Charles obviously is the first priority,” Maria said with a laugh. Charles liked her immediately.
“Of course he is,” Erik said, and then he said something really quickly that made Maria clap her hands in delight, but Charles had only caught what sounded like ‘Zielenfreund’, which made him wonder why the word was vaguely familiar.

“What are you saying, Erik?” Charles interrupted, stroking Erik’s arm with a teasing smile. “Are you talking behind my back?”

It was rare for the normally self-composed Erik to appear flustered, but right now he couldn’t quite look Charles in the eye. “No, no, of course I wasn’t,” Erik said hurriedly, but Maria only had the widest knowing grin. Charles filed the information away for later, making a mental note to check on it once their long day was over.

When the last of the interviews was finally done, Charles waited as Erik made his way to the washroom, then quickly dug out his phone while Remy was fetching the car. Charles went to the Google Translate site, then keyed in ‘Zielenfreund’. No results. Maybe he had misspelled it. He frowned, then keyed in ‘Seelenfreund’.

There were several results this time, and their meaning was unmistakable. Soul mate. Charles blinked down at his phone, and a large, splendid grin grew on his face. When an unknowing Erik returned, Charles threw his arms around Erik and held him close, and a puzzled Erik returned the gesture, although he was probably clueless about Charles’ sudden glee. They walked down the corridor and out of the studio, and Charles smiled down at his phone one last time before getting into the car.

* * * * *
Unf at the second picture. Marking, much?

Reply Thread Link Track This

#sextapeplease

Reply Parent Thread Link Track This

+1000000

Reply Parent Thread Link Track This
Shark bait.

Contributing to the spam, because there's no such thing as too much Charles and Erik. Boyfriends drinking tea in two different interviews.

I'm positive Erik didn't use to drink tea.

How awesome is it that we get a front row seat to watching these two perfect male specimens sex their way around the globe?

^THIS

popcorn.gif
There were many popular talk shows in the States, but Charles had always had an affinity for Ellen DeGeneres, whom he found just as warm and friendly off-camera as she was on her show. A few years ago, Charles had worked with Portia on a rom-com, where she had a role as a snooty sister-in-law, and he had a lot of fun hanging out with her during breaks. Ellen would also visit Portia on the set, and the three of them would often go for afternoon tea together.

So, when Ellen’s management had extended an invitation to both Charles and Erik to appear on her show, Charles had insisted that they happily accept. It had taken only a kiss and a pleading smile for Erik to agree to it almost immediately, and Charles almost felt guilty for how easy it was for him to persuade Erik to do something. (Then again, both of them were getting plenty of sex out of it, so whatever residual guilt Charles was harbouring quickly evaporated.)

Arriving in the Warner Bros. lot in Burbank, Charles hooked an arm in Erik’s as they made their way to the studios. Charles burst into laughter when they bumped into a tram tour along the way, and even the guide was shocked to see them. “Hello, everyone, how are you?” Charles said cheerily as he waved at the slack-jawed tourists. “Erik darling, say hi.”

“Hi everyone, have a good tour,” Erik said with a smile. He was probably in a good mood because of the new flexible position Charles had wanted to try in bed that morning, and the fantastic results it had produced. The tourists started tentatively snapping a few photos, and Erik even gamely posed with Charles, planting a kiss on his cheek. Charles would have loved to stay longer and chat with their fans, but the Ellen Show production assistants were hurrying them along, so Charles reluctantly said goodbye, walking off hand in hand with Erik.

Hair and makeup only took half an hour and as they waited backstage in the green room, Charles could hear the muffled boom of the dance music Ellen had chosen for the day. On the LED screens in the green room, Charles chuckled as he watched Ellen grooving her way through the audience, dancing with random audience members who were delighted just to be picked by her.

As Ellen finally sank down into her chair, she grinned widely at her rabid audience. “Let me tell ya, we have quite the show for you here today,” she announced, to a few screams. “Our guests today are Charles Xavier and Erik Lehnsherr--”

The screams rose to a fever pitch and Ellen pretended to cower, amazed at the reaction. She was now squinting at someone in the audience, and the cameraman zoomed in on a tall woman in a bridal gown and veil, hopefully clutching a bouquet. “Hi there,” Ellen said, waving at the ‘bride’. “Who are ya hoping to marry today?”

“Charles! He is just so adorable,” she squealed. “I want to have all his babies.”

Charles laughed in embarrassment as Erik squinted at the TV. “What’s going on?” he asked Charles. “Did I hear someone wanting to have your babies?”

“Of course not,” Charles said, leaning up to plant a kiss on the thin, displeased line of Erik’s mouth. “I’m all yours, darling.”
Ellen seemed to have the same misgivings, stroking her chin. “It’s nice that you want to have Charles’ babies,” she said tentatively. “But uh, won’t Erik have something to say about that?”

“I suppose he can watch,” the ‘bride’ joked, which caused ripples of laughter.

Ellen tapped her chin. “Y’know, I heard Erik is pretty scary,” she said, and on the screen behind her, her crew broadcasted a picture of Erik’s face superimposed on a shark, causing much laughter.

“Anyway, let’s bring out the happy couple!” Ellen declared, and the audience started screaming and applauding wildly as Charles and Erik got up from their seats and followed the PA to the stage, where hysterical fans were shrieking and flailing. Ellen stood up to hug Charles, who joyfully greeted her, and thankfully Erik smiled and hugged her too, although Charles could sense Erik’s usual reticence.

As Ellen sat down on her red plush chair, Charles took a seat facing her, and so did Erik right beside him. The screaming was still rampant, and it got even more shrill when Charles grinned and waved at the audience. Someone shouted, “Kiss him!” and, well, Charles was always open to suggestions. He leaned over and gave Erik a soft, chaste kiss, sending the audience into fits of hysteria and making Ellen laugh.

“Are you two always like this?” Ellen said once the screaming had died down, resting her chin on her hand and grinning widely at them.

“I really do apologise, we can’t help it and forget ourselves sometimes,” Charles told her earnestly, before turning to grin at the audience. “Besides, people seem to like it when we kiss.”

More whoops and cheers, and Ellen glanced down at her cards. “Amen to that. There’s not been a moment when I haven’t seen you two being hounded by the paparazzi. It seems like people can’t get enough of you guys!”

“I think it’s Charles,” Erik said, reaching over and squeezing Charles’ hand. “Everyone seems to love him, and it’s easy to see why.”

There was applause, but Charles barely heard it as he stared at Erik, filled with the overwhelming urge to tackle this man with a kiss and rip all his clothes off and shag him on national TV. Thankfully, before he could act on that urge, he heard Ellen mentioning his name. “Well, Charles was in love with you way before that,” she said, as Erik raised his eyebrows.

“What do you mean?”

“You see, Charles and Portia once worked together on a movie, and we’d go out to tea together. And Charles was all ‘Erik Lehnsherr this’ and ‘Erik Lehnsherr that’, so Portia and I had a running bet on whether you two would end up together,” Ellen declared with a huge laugh.

“For God’s sake, Ellen,” Charles muttered, both embarrassed and pleased as a smile slowly dawned on Erik’s face.

“So when you two started filming together, I was rooting for you guys to get together,” she told Erik excitedly. “And I’d tell Charles that ‘Well, it’s totally your choice but you should be together’ and he’d blush and deny he ever had feelings for you. Now, you’re Hollywood’s hottest couple.”

“Not hotter than you and Portia, surely,” Erik said charmingly, and Ellen laughed out loud.

“I see you’ve taken Charm 101 lessons from Professor Charles Xavier,” she said, as Charles blushed even more. “Anyway, as much as I enjoy watching Charles turn as red as a tomato, we need to start
talking about the movie before my producer has a stroke. Let’s watch this clip.”

Thankful that the focus was now off their romantic lives and on the movie, Charles turned to watch the background screen, but he froze when he realised it was the Halloween footage of Erik and himself onstage with Gaga, all three of them hollering ‘Bad Romance’ together drunkenly. “Oh my goodness,” Charles said, a hand over his mouth as the audience started applauding and cheering again. Erik was surprisingly calm, his mouth crooked in a little smile as he watched himself on the video, sashaying around onstage and flipping back his fake red hair.

Ellen got up and danced along to their atrocious singing, much to the delight of the studio audience. Well, his atrocious singing. Erik, the talented bastard, could still carry a tune while pissed drunk. When the video was done, Ellen was giving Charles the biggest shit-eating grin. “The last I checked, your little home movie had over 100 million views and a dance remix.”

“Oh God,” Charles rested his head on Erik’s shoulder, laughing.

“So tell me, who was in-charge of wardrobe for that particular movie scene?” Ellen asked.

Charles bit his lip, trying not to smile as Erik pointed at him. “Charles picked everything, from the dress to the exact shade of the eyeshadow.”

“I have to say you have excellent taste, Charles,” Ellen conceded, looking surprised. “I mean, not that I’d ever wear something like that, but it is a pretty dress. Where is it now?”

This time, Erik turned just as red as Charles’ face probably was at the moment. “It...got destroyed,” Erik said shortly, ignoring the catcalls of the audience. “Just an accident.”

“A sexy accident?” Ellen teased with a wink.

“Not exactly,” Erik said, with not quite a straight face. “But I have to admit that the dress did feel surprisingly comfortable. It was very...airy.”

Ellen’s eyebrows shot up mischievously. “So...Erik, are you saying you like wearing women’s clothing?”

Erik sighed, visibly defeated, but at least he was reaching over for Charles’ hand again for support. “Yes, you could. I can see it now: ‘Erik Lehnsherr feels very comfortable in women's clothes.’ It'll be all over the Internet by the afternoon.”

Ellen made a show of taking out her phone and checking something. “You’re wrong, buddy. Because I just checked Twitter and it’s already a trending topic.”

Erik pretended to groan, burying his face in his hands while Charles laughed and wrapped his arms consolingly around his groaning boyfriend. It was all for show, Charles knew. If Erik had been truly upset, he would have just gotten up and walked off the set, stone-faced. But the fact that Erik was playing along good-naturedly and hamming it up for Ellen and her audience proved to Charles that Erik really was a changed man, and it was definitely for the better.

* * * * *
FIRST CLASS DUO VISITS ELLEN!

The main stars of "First Class" dropped by Ellen's show to talk about their new film, an action-packed thriller that has a sizzling sex scene between both the male leads, and their chemistry on-screen and off-screen.

First Class Duo Visits Ellen

hot TOPICS:  First Class  What's Wrong with These Photos?! Photos

Behind-The-Screens: First Class Sneak Peak

Thursday, July 26th 2012 • Behind-The Scenes • (30 Comments)
“Erik, you cow! I told you not to get the tasting menu,” Emma reprimanded as she shoved him and Charles through the backstage area of the El Capitan Entertainment Center, where they had just arrived to tape ‘Jimmy Kimmel Live!’ - a whopping fifteen minutes late.

“You’re the one who insisted I gave all of you a treat at Katsuya for ‘the months of psychological trauma’ that Charles and I allegedly inflicted on you. And I got the tasting menu because I know Charles always wants to try everything,” Erik insisted, looking over to Charles for back-up.

Charles nodded, hooking his arm around Erik’s and quickening his step. “I really don’t see what all the fuss is about. It’s not as if our segment’s started yet-”

“Our next guests tonight need no introduction. Their new movie, ‘First Class’, just made a killing at the box office this past weekend, and your own mother probably has a coffee table book on either one of them sitting in her living room. Please say hello to Charles Xavier and Erik Lehnsherr!”

“Oh, bloody hell,” Charles cursed, and Erik would have laughed if not for the fact that they had broken into a mad dash towards the stage door, arriving there just in time as it slid open to the deafening screams of the studio audience. God, did he loathe interview circuits.

Erik led the way across the stage and shook Kimmel’s hand, who had walked over to greet them, while Charles waved to the fans in attendance before doing the same. Erik waited for Charles before they both sat down on the couches together, with Erik taking the seat closer to their host.

“Congratulations on the biggest R rated opening of all time,” Kimmel said to loud cheers from the audience.

“Thank you very much,” Charles replied delightedly, and Erik turned to him to share a private smile. As much as he pretended to not care about publicity and promotion, the truth of the matter was that the commercial success and critical reception of ‘First Class’ meant a great deal to Erik. After all, if not for this film, he and Charles would never have met.

Kimmel whistled, and Erik returned his attention to him with an eyebrow slightly raised. “Erik, I’ve got to hand it to you, those are some serious abs you’ve got there. Unless that was a body double
they used for the love scene?”

Erik fought the urge to roll his eyes, and failed. “Honestly, do you think I would let another man get naked between the sheets with Charles?” he rebutted in a deadpan voice, while Charles hid his laugh with his fist.

“I assure you, everything in that scene was very authentic,” Charles added, blushing when that earned him catcalls from the studio audience.

“Speaking of other men, Logan said something very interesting to me backstage earlier. Shall we bring him out again?” Kimmel asked as the musical cue began to play.

Erik leaned over to Charles, frowning slightly. “Am I supposed to know who the heck this guy is?” he whispered. He hated it when interviewers sprung surprises on him, worse still when said surprises wanted to make small talk.

Charles had his eyebrows knitted as well. “I’ve never heard of him, either. But the last time I read the Hollywood Reporter was before we left for Asia so maybe-” Charles paused, looking up as the stage door slid open. “Oh! Logan.”

Erik followed his gaze, squinting at the tall, well-muscled brute that was stalking towards them. He had no recollection of him whatsoever even though he had a nagging feeling that the name sounded somewhat familiar, and was about to ask Charles to elaborate when it finally hit him like a bullet through the brain. 

He’s that lumberjack from the bar.

Erik had no control over the low growl that escaped his throat. He rose to his feet with Charles, standing at his full height when Logan reached the couches and nodding his head up then down, eyes fixed levelly on the scruffy redneck with a clear lack of personal hygiene.

“Hello, Logan. It’s very nice to see you again,” Charles greeted a little too cheerfully, extending his hand. Then Erik almost lunged at the low-life scum when he pointedly ignored Charles’ proffered hand and crushed him in his vice-like arms in a hug instead. Remembering their audience, Erik tried to view the situation as an exercise in self-control, and stood there grinding his teeth as he glared daggers at the object of his affliction. The bastard actually smirked.

Since Kimmel only had two couches, Charles came over to Erik’s seat, and Erik gladly made room for him while Logan settled into Charles’ vacated spot, seeing as the alternative did not bear thinking about. “Guys, Logan was up earlier promoting the film adaptation of ‘Les Misérables’ that he’s starring in,” Kimmel started the moment they had settled back down.

Charles snuggled over at that, patting the back of Erik’s hand lightly, and Erik felt some of his outrage fading away. “See, Erik? I told you he probably did musical theatre,” Charles said triumphantly, winking as his face broke into a grin, and Erik found himself conceding with a shrug and a small smile. At least Charles was enjoying this.

“So, Logan, tell everyone the juicy gossip you spilled to me backstage!” Kimmel instructed, and Erik swore their host looked like he was about to start rubbing his hands together with glee.

“Oh, this is a true story. Chuck here tried to pick me up at a bar once,” Logan paused at the murmurs from the audience, shrugging with his palms raised. “Big shocker, I play for the other team. It’s already all over the Internet, anyway.”

Erik had to hand it to him for the defiantly mellow way he was handling what seemed to be his official coming out parade, but that did not change the fact that he just made Charles sound like some
Texas Ranger. Erik took a deep breath, exhaling through his nostrils slowly.

“Charles, you slag. Is this true?” Kimmel asked, accompanied by laughter from the studio audience.

Charles raised a placating hand, eyes comically wide. “Well… yes, technically. But you see I was just-“

Kimmel interjected, laughing. “Logan, let me get this straight. You went, ‘Here’s my number, so call me maybe?’, and all this went down in front of Erik?”

Logan grinned. “Do I look like a man who exaggerates?”

Erik gripped his armrest, knuckles going white at the smug look on Logan’s face, and contemplated how he could go about strangling Logan with his own ripped-out spine. “I promise you, if I had thought for one second that Charles was the least bit attracted to you, you would not be sitting here today,” Erik said, his voice low and steely.

Charles must have sensed the rage in his voice, because Erik immediately felt him sliding his hand in long, soothing strokes down his back. Erik released his hold on the couch, stretching his other arm out so he could drape it proprietarily over Charles’ shoulders. He could already hear Emma’s impending lecture about behaving like a caveman on national television.

Logan raised an eyebrow, nonplussed. “I’m just gonna let that one slide. But you’ll be happy to know that he left me out in the cold.”

“I am truly sorry, Logan. You see I was just trying to prove a point to Erik, I do apologise that I got you wrapped up in my little social experiment,” Charles said guiltily.

“No hard feelings, Bub,” Logan answered, then turned to Kimmel, clucking his tongue. “For the record, I could smell that Chuck and Shark were together. They were that obvious, even back then.”

Oh, that did it. No one disrespected Charles. Erik straightened in his seat, shifting Charles slightly back so he could face Logan fully. Erik leaned forward, punctuating each point with a jab of his index finger. “His name is Charles. Not Chuck, not Bub, Charles. Now get that into that thick, metal skull of yours.”

Charles shifted in his seat, resting a hand against Erik’s chest in what appeared to be a bid to both hold him back and calm him down. ”Settle, petal,” Charles said quietly, soft enough that it no one else would hear.

“I’m trying, but he’s making it so difficult,” Erik replied under his breath, and tried to focus instead on the comforting press of Charles’ body against his, and how his skin smelled so much like how it always did first thing in the morning, when the two of them were no more than just a tangle of limbs, now that most of his cologne for the day had faded away.

It was proving to be quite effective, and he was about to relax back into the couch when Logan shot back, challenge clear in his voice, “Yeah? Make me.”

Erik tensed and would have sprung forward if not for Charles’ firm grip on his arm. Erik took a deep breath, reminding himself that facing his attorney over the legal mess from punching Logan on national television would not be worth it. Thankfully, Kimmel broke the tension then, laughing a little too loudly, “Guys, ease up. We’re not on the set of ‘Teen Wolf’.”

The audience bought it, laughing along. “I don’t know about you, Jimmy, but I quite enjoy having two alpha males fighting over me. It is doing wonders for my self-esteem,” Charles added good-
naturally, eliciting more laughter and applause.

Kimmel nodded, his lips pursed. “Yes, until they start ripping apart the upholstery with their claws. Do you know how hard it is to find a good couch? Charles, help me out here.”

“Only because you asked so nicely,” Charles said, and Erik barely had a moment to process it before Charles climbed into his lap, arm slung comfortably around his neck as the audience lost its head screaming. Charles giggled at the response, cupping Erik’s face and placing a soft peck on his lips. Erik blinked when he reopened his eyes, and it was as though all that rage had simply disappeared. He cast a glance at the dejected Logan and smirked smugly, chuckling when Charles peppered a couple more kisses on his temple.

“Okay, we’re going to take a break while we find Charles and Erik a room. We’ll be right back,” Kimmel announced amidst the loud cheers, and Erik noticed the red lights on the cameras going off before Kimmel broke down, laughing hysterically. “Jesus! Thank goodness this is a late-night talk show, or the Parents Television Council will have my head in the morning. I can’t wait to get this episode up on YouTube.”

“I meant what I said about finding this all very hot,” Charles whispered into his ear, still not making any move to climb off his lap as his thumb dragged along Erik’s collarbone, and Erik decided right then and there that he felt no sense of remorse over entire the situation. None at all.

* * * * *

Charles had been looking forward to being back on home soil. It was wonderful being able to blend in a little for a change, now that his accent no longer meant that anyone could pick him out in a crowded room, and not having to make sure he wasn’t standing on the wrong side of an escalator was nice as well. Of course, all thoughts of flying under the radar had vanished the moment they stepped onto the red carpet in Leicester Square outside the Odeon Theatre for their London premiere, greeted by legions of screaming fans. He’d honestly never seen so many people in one place in his life, although it was very flattering that they had all come out to get a glimpse of Erik and himself.

This red carpet was going to be special as Erik’s parents would be joining them, and Charles was excited for Edie and Jakob to finally see the movie, although he was quite certain that Edie had been completely spoiled for the plot by now, seeing as she’d read more reviews than Raven by this point. Edie had called every day gushing over a new review she’d found, thrilled that the industry was saying good things about Erik’s performance, and Charles of course wholeheartedly agreed. Charles loved living vicariously through the Lehnsherr family, so full of warmth and genuine support for each other, although he did feel guilty about using Edie as a surrogate sometimes. Just a little.

“How much longer until your parents arrive, darling?” Charles asked as they made their way towards the barricades, trailed by their entourage that consisted of Darwin, Remy, Emma, and a slew of security detail.

Erik chuckled, shaking his head. “Mama told me they’ll be here in about half an hour. ‘I want to look nice for you and Charles,’ she said. I don’t think she’s ever fussed so much over attending any of my premieres before, so I’m pinning this one on you.”

Charles grinned and tiptoed up to kiss Erik’s freshly shaved cheek. “Nonsense, she’s just excited to finally see her punim,” Charles teased, giggling when Erik pretended to groan.

The screams rose to a crescendo when they reached the fan barricade, and Charles happily took out his Sharpie to sign all the photos and posters of himself or the two of them together that were being passed over, pausing occasionally to pose for pictures with Erik for a sea of camera phones. Erik
Charles stopped when he was passed a photo of Erik and himself sitting at the Berthillon ice cream café in the Île Saint-Louis on the River Seine during one of their filming breaks, Erik grinning as Charles fed him a spoonful of French vanilla. Charles knitted his eyebrows, puzzled. They hadn’t been disturbed while they were there, and the popular café had been more quiet than usual due to the cold weather that day. In fact, Erik had chided him for wanting ice cream while it was practically freezing outside. And the only other person that had been there with them was…Raven.

He looked up and scanned the crowd, spotting Raven immediately even though she had gone incognito, her usual long, golden tresses tied up and tucked beneath a camel coloured bowler hat. The fact that Hank was carrying her on his shoulders helped, of course. “Raven! Come over here, my dear,” Charles shouted over the din.

“Raven’s here?” Charles heard Erik ask from where he was off to the side, as he too began making his way over to say hello.

“I thought you said you had plans,” Charles commented when Hank finally managed to find his way to the front of the barricade. Erik kissed Raven’s cheek in greeting on his behalf, and it was times like this that Charles felt decidedly vertically challenged.

Raven nodded, adjusting her bowler hat. “This is my plan. I wanted to be part of the pandemonium for a change. Sometimes a girl gets tired of dressing up for the carpet.”

Hank grinned, raising his eyebrows incredulously as he shook his head in disbelief. “Is it always like this? It looks crazier than when they closed the Olympics last week.”

Raven petted Hank’s thick head of hair. “It’s more than usual, that’s for sure, but we’ve always had strong turnouts for London. Her Majesty’s subjects are all here to see their other favourite queen.”

Charles laughed, slapping Raven’s knee playfully as she mimed a curtsy. “Just so you know, I’m not jumping out of a helicopter.”

Erik snorted beside him. “I’m not letting you jump out of a helicopter.”

“Fine, just hurry up and sign my picture, you two,” Raven instructed, tapping the glossy print-out in Charles’ hands. He and Erik autographed it dutifully, and Erik handed the picture back to her when they were done. “Thank you,” Raven said. “I’m going to sell this on eBay to pay for the bet that I lost to Emma because of you knuckleheads. Now go on, your kingdom awaits.”

Charles blew her a kiss goodbye before making his way further down the red carpet with Erik, signing as many autographs as possible at each stop they made. Emma came over then, looking stunning as always in a plunging ivory gown and her hair teased back. “Empire Magazine wants to do an interview with the two of you,” Emma announced, gesturing for them to follow.

“Oh, all right,” Charles said, pausing when he glanced up and saw the disappointed looks on the faces of the fans around him. “Tell you what, why don’t you and Erik go ahead and kick off the interview first? I’ll go over once I’m done signing these last few autographs.”

“Suit yourself,” Emma replied, dragging a reluctant Erik away.

“Okay, loves. Let’s make this quick. I need to go over there and save my boyfriend from the evil reporters,” Charles told the crowd, which promptly burst out laughing.

He was almost done signing everything when he suddenly felt a pair of large, muscular arms that
most certainly did not belong to Erik circle tightly around his chest, and before Charles knew it, he was being picked off the ground by a burly chap at the front of the barricade amidst surprised gasps from the other fans.

"Charles!" he heard Erik’s distressed shout, just as the bloke that was carrying him licked his face. Charles sighed in resignation. Oh, brother. Erik is never letting me out of his sight again.

It look only a second or two for Erik to bulldoze his way over and rip Charles from the other man’s arms, and only when Erik had returned him to the ground did Charles realise the overly enthusiastic fan was a whole head taller than Erik. Not that it mattered to Erik, of course, who was understandably furious and about to throw a punch. Charles hurriedly held him back, and thankfully Darwin and Remy had appeared as well, Remy gripping Erik tightly by the arm while Darwin placed himself between him and the fan. “Calm your mind, Erik. Crazy things happen on the red carpet all the time,” Charles soothed, running a palm over Erik’s chest.

Erik still seemed riled up, but at least he no longer looked like he was ready to lunge at the poor sod, who appeared quite terrified by Erik’s reaction. “Does Charles look like a fucking lollipop to you?” Erik shouted at the fan, and Charles burst out laughing despite the situation, much to Erik’s dismay. “Charles, you can’t possibly find this funny.”

“I’m sorry, love. But that’s not what you said last night,” Charles managed to gasp out, and Erik must have remembered their little romp the night before, because he now snorted as he rolled his eyes.

Erik shook his head, pulling Charles away from the barricade while security escorted the fan off the premises. “Remy, hand me a bottle of water,” Erik instructed as he pulled out his silk handkerchief.

“Right here, mon ami,” Remy said, passing him a bottle before adjusting Charles’ suit. Erik immediately poured some of it onto his handkerchief and got to work on Charles’ face, lips pressed into a thin line as he removed all traces of the other man from Charles’ skin.

“I’m really quite all right,” Charles insisted when Erik was done wiping his cheek clean and began inspecting him for any injuries instead. “Truly, no harm done, darling. Now why don’t we get back to that interview we abandoned before they…oh, hang on, my phone is buzzing,” Charles paused, digging into his pocket for his iPhone. The name on the caller ID caught his by surprise.

“Hello? Father?” Charles answered tentatively. Erik stopped his fussing immediately, full of concern as he locked eyes with him.

“Charles! Excellent, I was hoping I’d be able to get hold of you,” came his father’s voice. It felt like years since Charles last heard it. “I’m just calling to let you know that your mother and I will be attending your premiere.”

“You’re coming for the premiere?” Charles repeated, causing Erik’s eyebrows to shoot up in surprise. “Yes, right, that’s wonderful. When will you be here?” Charles enquired, slightly shell-shocked.

“The car’s just pulling up now. We’ll be there shortly,” his father replied cheerfully.

“See you soon, Father,” Charles said before he ended the call, slipping his phone back into his pocket and looking up at Erik. “My parents are here.”

“They were coming and didn’t think to tell you in advance? Did they think they could just waltz into a premiere and there’d be seats waiting for them?” Erik questioned, incredulous.
Charles sighed running his fingers through his hair in a bid to neaten it out. “You have to understand that my parents are very used to dropping by high society parties unannounced. In fact, the hosts are always thrilled to be graced with their presence. Oh God, how do I look?” Charles asked, trying in vain to adjust his tie.

Erik stepped forward, and Charles relaxed as Erik bent down to straighten his tie for him before proceeding to neaten the lapels of his jacket. “You look very handsome, Liebling, don’t worry about it. Remy, give Charles your tickets.”

Remy nodded, pulling them out of his inner coat pocket, and Charles was once again ever grateful that Erik had one of the best assistants on the planet. “Thank you, Remy, my good chap. You’re a lifesaver.”

“I am sure your parents will enjoy the movie very much, mon cher,” Remy said as he handed the premiere passes over to Charles. “Anyway, this is very good news for me. I get to look for a pretty English Rose tonight, much better than staring at Erik’s naked behind for a third time.”

“Get lost, Remy,” Erik shot back, smiling when Remy walked off with a wave.

Charles took hold of Erik’s hand, tracing the veins on the back of it with his thumb. “Come along, darling. Let’s go meet my parents.”

They reached the start of the carpet just as Charles’ parents arrived, stepping out of the limousine to a burst of flashes. Erik seemed a little taken aback, leaning in to comment, “I didn’t know your parents were treated as celebrities here.”

“Yes, unfortunately,” Charles said with a sigh. “Mother used to say to me while growing up that we should always practice due decorum in public. The power the Xavier name carries in Britain is second only to the House of Windsor, according to her. Anyway, here they come.”

Charles walked towards his parents, each foot forward like a step back into the past. He found himself hard-pressed to remember the last time he had seen his parents together, his father’s presence by his mother’s side having been slowly replaced by a half-empty bottle of alcohol in recent years. Charles found that he empathised with her now, after that taste of separation he had experienced while he and Erik had been filming apart, and he could not imagine having to live with being away from the person he loved for years on end, the only respite being stolen, sporadic visits that were over before they began. Charles stepped up to her, and it felt like the first time he had truly looked at her, read the lines on her face and the sadness in her eyes, and he wondered why he had ever let those walls be built between them. “Good evening, Mother,” he greeted, foregoing their customary air-kiss and leaning in to brush his lips against her left cheek and then her right, kissing her in benediction and forgiveness. “You look very beautiful.”

His mother did look stunning in her empire waist burgundy dress, her hair done up in a chignon. “Thank you, Charles,” she said as a smile crossed her features.

“Father,” Charles greeted, stepping forward to embrace him in his arms.

His father held him tightly. “Charlie.”

“Brian, when will you stop calling him that? Charles is a grown man,” Mother chided, but Charles could see her lips quivering ever so slightly, like she was holding back a laugh.

Charles turned to Erik, placing a hand on the curve of his spine as he brought him forward. “Father, I’d like you to meet Erik Lehnsherr. Erik, this is my father, Brian Xavier.”
“It is a pleasure to finally meet you,” Erik said as he shook Father’s hand. He paused uncertainly when he turned to Mother, and Charles felt a brief moment of awkwardness as he remembered the way they had left on Boxing Day without a word of goodbye, while Mother was still sleeping off her hangover. “Mrs. Xavier,” Erik acknowledged as he held out his hand.

Charles released the breath he had been holding when Mother took Erik’s hand and they shook lightly. He turned his attention back to Father, “I had no idea you were back.”

“I just flew in last night. I finally managed to get some time off now that we’ve had a breakthrough with the Collider, and your mother and I wanted to be here for your big day,” Father replied.

“You did?” Charles asked as he looked at both his parents, feeling his eyes beginning to burn.

Erik wrapped an arm around his waist and Charles found himself resting his weight against him immediately. “Charles told me you head one of the two teams operating the detector in the Large Hadron Collider. We watched the live webcast that day when they announced the discovery of the Higgs-like boson. Charles was very proud.”

Father smiled. “I do regret that I had to cancel on you for Christmas, but I’m back now for a bit.”

They were in the middle of catching up with one another when Erik’s phone beeped, and he was smiling as he read the message on the screen. “Is that Mama?” Charles asked.

“Yes. Why don’t you wait here while I go get them?” Erik suggested. Charles nodded and Erik gave his shoulder a comforting squeeze before heading off to collect his parents.

“You call her ‘Mama’?” Mother asked when Erik was gone, her eyebrows raised. Charles instantly felt guilty.

“Come on, Sharon. Let the boy call her whatever he wants,” Father said jovially, stroking her back. Mother nodded in consent, letting the issue slide.

A delighted squeal broke the tension, and Charles had barely turned to face its source before he found himself with an armful of Edie, bursting with warmth and excitement. “Charles!” she squeaked, before she smothered his face with kisses as he laughed.

“Mama, I’d like you to meet my parents,” Charles said when Edie finally released him. Now that they were facing Mother, he could see a strange, tremulous expression clouding her face, but her eyes were razor-sharp as ever as they raked over Edie from head to toe, dismissive and envious in equal parts. Charles could definitely sense the undisguised disdain in his mother’s eyes and in the displeased twist of her mouth: who is this plain, frumpy woman who has won over my son’s heart?

To her credit, Edie happily offered Mother the warmest of smiles and an outstretched hand. “Hello, I’m Erik’s mother.”

“Charmed,” Mother said politely, shaking Edie’s hand as decades of British societal etiquette kicked in. Father was more relaxed, heartily clasping Jakob’s hand and patting him on the back, asking him about his flight. Charles bit his lip, wondering how to make the obvious tension between them dissipate.

Thankfully it was Erik who saved the day when he returned to Charles’ side, fitting against him like a magnet. Erik was gesturing at Mother’s burgundy dress with a grandiose wave of his hand. “Mama, doesn’t Mrs. Xavier look gorgeous?”

“Ach, she is a vision!” Edie said with a broad smile, before leaning in to confide, “And you really
look like Charles, especially around the eyes.”

Mother seemed a little taken aback, as though she had just been thrown a curveball. Charles watched her anxiously as she chewed on her lip, biding her time for a reply. Even as a young boy he had been witness to her shredding her society nemeses to bits with a well-placed insult or a frosty glare, and he was praying that Edie would be spared all this unpleasantness. But there was enough doubt in his mother’s face to reassure him that she wouldn’t try a stunt like that, and Charles sagged against Erik in relief when Mother chose to compliment Edie on her dress. “Where did you get that, Mrs. Lehnsherr? It’s absolutely stunning,” she murmured, and there was a genuine glimmer of appreciation in Mother’s eyes.

Edie proudly smoothed a hand over the fabric. “It’s Chanel. Charles is friends with Karl Lagerfeld and the dear boy got him to design this dress for me. Isn’t he das beste?”

Mother’s face was now a frozen mask. “That is indeed lovely of Charles.” Every single one of her words was encrusted in ice.

Edie must have spotted the slight distress on Charles’ face, because she was now rubbing Mother’s shoulder the way someone would soothe a spooked horse. “Charles is such a wonderful boy,” she said softly. “You raised him so well.”

Something softened in Mother’s face, and she was staring hard at Edie as if to ascertain whether there was any sarcasm in the remark, but Edie only smiled earnestly at her, mother to mother. And suddenly the tight line of Mother’s shoulders relaxed, and her eyes glimmered when she tentatively glanced over at Charles.

“He is indeed a very good boy,” she said, her voice so soft that it would have been lost in the din of all the clamour and background screams had Charles not been paying absolute attention. "He has always been so kind to others and I've always been very proud of him for that."

Charles was biting down so hard on his lip just to prevent his overwhelming emotions from bursting through. This was the first time Mother had ever said she was proud of him. “Thank you,” he whispered, before wrapping his arms around her and clinging on tightly, and Edie quietly faded into the background to give them space. It occurred to Charles that the last time he had hugged his mother, he had been only up to her hip, and she had had to bend down to soothe him after he had scraped his knee.

He had never meant for Edie to be her replacement, and he wished that Mother understood that. And from the tentative way she slowly - but surely - hugged him back, he sensed that she knew.

“All right, you two.” Father’s kindly, booming voice was a welcome distraction. “We can catch up later, Sharon, I think that chap over there wants to interview the boys.”

Edie must have heard him, for she was waving Mother and Father over, shouting, “You can sit with us!” Now a little embarrassed, Mother offered Charles a watery - but real - smile and followed Father along the red carpet, the parents making their way into the theatre first in a noisy group.

A little overwhelmed, Charles instantly relaxed when he felt Erik’s arm sliding home around his waist. “Are you all right?” Erik murmured against his temple.

“My mother said she was proud of me.” Charles blinked, taking in deep breaths so he wouldn’t be a mess on the red carpet. “She’s never said that before.”

Erik’s smile was soft and affectionate as he brushed Charles’ hair back, and they were both
temporarily bathed in a flash of light as someone snapped a picture. “Maybe she’s never said it, but I’m certain she’s always felt it.”

Now Charles hurriedly wiped his eyes with the back of his hand. “You’re such a sap, Erik.”

“Well done.” Erik said with such incredulity that Charles almost believed him. “You’re the most talented, kindest, nicest person I know. You always have time for everyone. I may appear to be jealous, but deep down I love you for making me a better person. You’re always putting others before yourself. Tell me, again, why your mother wouldn’t be proud of you.”

“Dammit, Erik.” Charles hid his face in Erik’s shoulder to conceal his wet eyes, and he took a few quivering breaths before he was certain he could face the crowd again. He could do this, for fuck’s sake. He was an actor. “All right, I’m ready. And thank you, darling.” Charles leaned up on his tiptoes and kissed Erik soundly, inciting shrieks and cheers from the watching crowd.

It was rare that they had the First Class section all to themselves whenever they flew, but on the flight from London to Berlin, Charles was amazed to see that they were indeed the only four passengers in the entire section. Earlier, Erik had quietly suggested that Charles invite his parents along as well, so Charles had done so, albeit a little awkwardly (years and years of tension between him and his mother were not going to magically disappear overnight). Thankfully, Father and Mother had turned him down, because they wanted to spend some time reconnecting, so Charles was more pleased than ever to give them his blessing. It meant enough to him that both his parents had surprised him at the London premiere.

Besides, it also translated to more quality time with Edie and Jakob, whom Charles genuinely loved with all his heart, so maybe it was for the best. Charles could always catch up with his own parents later.

When the flight attendant accompanied them to their seats, Charles sat down by the window seat (which Erik never failed to concede to him) and Erik was about to sit down beside him when they spotted Edie hovering in the aisle, a pleading look on her face as she spoke to Erik in German. “Can I sit next to Charles for a while?”

Surprised, Erik turned and looked at Jakob, who shrugged. “Don’t you want to sit with Papa?” Erik asked his mother, and Charles bit his lip, hiding that little thrill that arose whenever Erik spoke German.

Edie gave Erik a flat look. “Punim, I see your father day in and day out. I barely see Charles because you keep hiding him from me.”

Erik looked indignant. “I am not hiding him from you! It’s not our fault we have to work in the US.”

Jakob’s resigned voice floated from the seats across the aisle. “Just let your mother sit with Charles before we all get thrown off the plane, Erik.”

Shaking his head with a barely concealed grin, Erik just sighed. “Fine,” he said, as Edie clapped excitedly. Erik bent down and gave Charles a farewell peck on the lips. “Enjoy yourself, Liebling. Just nudge me if you need anything.”

“That’s what flight attendants are for,” Jakob said wryly. “Come on, son, we can watch ‘Die Hard’. Oh wait, they also have ‘Cyborg Cop’ under the classics, too!”

As Erik sat next to his father and started discussing the choice of inflight movies, Charles got up so
that Edie could sit by the window, and she gleefully strapped herself into the seat, pulling Charles down. “I feel like I haven’t talked to you in ages, my dear,” she said, patting Charles’ cheek.

Charles leaned into her warm, maternal touch. As loyal as he felt to his own mother, there was something about Edie that was welcoming and comforting and felt like home. “Erik and I have both been busy with work, but we have a bit of a break now,” he said apologetically.

“That’s good, because you should not overwork yourselves,” Edie said seriously. “Always make time for family, punim.”

“I know, Mama.” Charles patted her hands before squeezing one, and he listened attentively as Edie rattled on about how much she had enjoyed the movie and how she always loved the unique experience of walking down the red carpet.

“How about your parents, Charles? Did they love the movie?” Edie asked, as the flight attendant set down two glasses of pinot noir in front of them.

Charles shrugged as he took a healthy sip. “My mother said she really liked it, while my father, of course, couldn’t resist pointing out a few scientific errors. Like the explosion scene, for example.” He grinned to himself. “I suppose it’s just the job hazards of being a scientist.”

“That’s what parents are for,” Edie reassured him. “It means that they’re paying attention. And that’s good, isn’t it? At least they came for your premiere.”

“I know,” Charles said, before smiling broadly at her. “And I’m glad you and Papa came too.”

* * * * *

A slight bout of turbulence woke Charles up an hour later, and he blinked, wondering when he had nodded off. There was a warm weight on his shoulder, and he looked down to see Edie snoozing blissfully against his shoulder, clinging onto his arm. Charles couldn’t help smiling down at this wonderful woman who had taken care of Erik his whole life and raised him to be a smart, considerate, loving man. He left Edie where she was, not having the heart to wake her and disturb her rest.

Gazing out of the window, Charles could only see darkness. It was hard to tell if it was Berlin, or some other European city they were flying over. Right now, in the heart of their press tour, he sometimes couldn’t tell the various cities apart, especially after they had been through the wringer with the media and sat through dozens and dozens of interviews. The string of questions were starting to blur together and sound repetitive, and so were the interviewers’ faces, save for the ones who had been unique or truly bizarre. Even then, Charles couldn’t shake off the weariness manifesting in the tightness of his shoulders. Leading a nomadic lifestyle like this - travelling everywhere and going through endless airport security searches - was exhausting. Charles just wanted to be home at Westchester with Erik, enjoying a quiet game of chess (real, actual chess) or in Erik’s LA home, curled up together in bed and watching ‘Once Upon A Time’ together.

Charles turned slightly in his seat, where he could see Erik and his father engrossed in some inflight movie, Jakob quietly making the occasional comment and Erik grunting in response. Then Erik’s eyes met his, and the smile that lit his face was extraordinary, softening the sharp angles of his face and making him look much kinder and happier. Charles of course smiled back, then straightened in his seat again when he felt Edie stirring. She didn’t wake up, though, so Charles continued looking out of the window and thinking about how Erik had been his one constant during the entire press tour. It had all been bearable only because Erik had been there with him, constantly by his side, listening to all his rambling and getting him endless cups of tea and protecting him from any
overzealous paparazzi. Erik made all the difference.

Charles stared down at the Cartier watch Erik had given him, and its weight was a solid presence on his wrist, reminding him of their time together, and how important Erik was to him. No matter how strange and foreign the city, Erik’s presence set everything right again, like a compass that always pointed home. Hell, Erik was home. That was why Charles hadn’t minded the torrent of alien, spartan hotel rooms devoid of warmth and personality, and cities filled with strangers who wanted to know everything about their lives. Erik made it all worthwhile.

Charles was startled out of his thoughts when Edie stirred again, moving off his shoulder and turning to slump against the window. Charles gently arranged an airline pillow under her head, then drew a blanket over her and tucked her in. She seemed so peaceful that he didn’t want to disturb her at all, so he got up and tiptoed over to where Jakob and Erik were sitting.

“Mama is sleeping, so I thought I’d let her get some rest,” he explained, as Erik and his father pulled off their headphones. “She seemed tired.”

Jakob unbuckled his seatbelt. “I’ll change with you, so you can sit with Erik for a while,” he said, and Charles thanked him. Once Jakob was gone, Charles slipped into the window seat and it only took 0.2 microseconds for Erik to wrap his strong, warm arms around Charles again.

“Missed me?” Erik teased him, and Charles smiled against his chest, taking in a deep whiff of that familiar cologne.

“Not really, I was having far too much fun with Mama, gossipping about you,” Charles said, as Erik rolled his eyes.

“I hope she wasn’t telling you more stories about how I took off my pants and ran into my neighbour’s house again,” Erik said with a sigh as Charles cuddled against him.

“Would you rather I tell your mother stories about you taking off your pants now?” Charles said wickedly, as Erik groaned into Charles’ hair.

“Not now, Liebling, stop giving me ideas when my parents are right in front of us and we’re on a plane with no...privacy,” Erik grumbled, stroking back Charles’ hair.

Charles leaned into his touch, before smiling mischievously at Erik. “You know...I did promise you that we’d both join the Mile High Club someday,” he whispered into Erik’s ear, before nipping at his earlobe.

Erik’s eyes went wide, but Charles could sense the moment his breathing stuttered. “Right now?”

Charles nodded, biting his lip. “We’re the only people in first class, so the bathroom - which is quite spacious, by the way - is bound to be empty. And whoops, how did this small tube of lubricant end up in my pocket?”

Erik fought the losing battle with his grin, chuckling as he pressed a kiss to Charles’ temple. “Come on then, Liebling. I’ll go first, then meet you there.”

Charles was so glad that Erik had agreed to this. He smelled so good, and his body had been so warm and enticing as he wrapped himself around Charles that it would have been hard to resist him and sit still throughout the remainder of the flight. Watching those powerful thighs and that spectacular arse as Erik made his way down the aisle, Charles managed to wait for an impressive record of five seconds before hurrying down the aisle after him, checking to make sure that the lube was still in his pocket and none of the flight attendants were watching them, and thankfully none
were as Erik yanked him into the bathroom, peppering his face with kisses as they both chuckled.

* * * * *

Berlin was just as Erik remembered it: vibrant, bustling and extremely multicultural, almost on par with New York or London. But the red carpet was so much more orderly and relaxed in comparison. The screaming fans were still there, but at least none of them tried to pick Charles up and lick him, and Erik was profoundly grateful for that. As they walked down the red carpet with Raven and Hank behind them, Erik stopped to sign a few autographs before Charles waved him over to where an interviewer and her cameraman were standing.

“Thank you, Charles and Erik. How are you?” The interviewer had such a thick accent that Erik could see Charles was straining to listen closely. “How are you finding Berlin?”

Charles grinned before replying, “Very well, my dear. Unfortunately I haven’t had the time to explore, but I did have a marvellous breakfast this morning.”

“Oh, what did you have?” The interviewer was beaming, but then again, she didn’t know Charles the way Erik did, and Erik could sense some mischief about to come, judging from the amused, naughty grins Charles was flashing him.

Erik was right, as Charles licked his lips before answering, “I had a very large bratwurst for breakfast this morning.”

“Ah, do you like German cuisine?” the interviewer said, happily oblivious even though Erik was mortified, heat suffusing his face in embarrassment.

“Oh yes, I enjoy putting it in my mouth,” Charles purred into the mic, making Erik burst out laughing at the poor interviewer’s confused expression.

“What about you, Erik?” The mic shifted to him, and Erik forcibly stifled his laughter, wrapping an arm around Charles’ shoulders and pulling him in close. The interviewer seemed to have recovered, smiling at him again. “What did you have for breakfast?”

“I very much enjoyed my...muffins,” Erik said, as Charles started chuckling against his shoulder. He would have specified ‘English muffins’, but that would have been too blatantly obvious and they would have been banned from their own premiere.

He felt a firm hand on his shoulder, and it belonged to a red-faced Raven who was obviously trying to keep her cool. “We’d best be getting inside the theatre, don’t you think?” she said through her teeth, and Erik nodded immediately, not willing to incur her wrath. He was about to steer Charles towards the theatre when the interviewer stopped them with a hand on Erik’s arm.

“Before you go, I just wanted to ask something about the movie,” she said, looking at both of them. “How do you feel about the reception so far?”

Charles chewed thoughtfully on his lower lip. “We’ve been surprised at the buzz, I must say,” he admitted, glancing at Erik for support. “Since the movie has homosexual themes, we thought there would be a lot more controversy involved.”

“I agree with Charles,” Erik said, nodding valiantly. “We expected more of an outcry. But instead, the response had been remarkably welcoming. I think it’s a great example of how general movie audiences have matured. Movies like ‘Brokeback Mountain’ paved the way for acceptance, of course, and that was such a well-made film.”
“Yes, it was,” Charles chimed in. “And people chose to focus on the quality of the film instead of the fact that it has gay cowboys. I think the same thing is going on with our movie, and how people are talking about Bryan’s work and Erik’s acting, to be precise. It’s definitely one of Erik’s best roles, and I’m glad people recognise that.”

Now Erik could feel himself blushing for a different reason; he could hear the pride in Charles’ voice, and even Raven was smiling now.

The interviewer was beaming too. “So do you think this will translate into industry recognition, perhaps? A Golden Globe? Or maybe even an Oscar nod?” she asked conspiratorially, with a wink.

“I hope so!” Charles said with a laugh. “Erik worked really, really hard, and I would love to see him be rewarded for his efforts.”

“Charles was absolutely brilliant too,” Erik hastily added, wanting Charles to share the limelight as well. “He really threw himself into the role, and he was so professional. It made me want to keep up with him, to work just as hard and prove myself.”

“Sounds like you two really enjoyed working together,” the interviewer said warmly.

“I did. And I really love him,” Erik said, making Raven roll her eyes and the interviewer flutter her hand emotionally. Charles was just grinning at him, his eyes soft and slightly reddened, and after saying their goodbyes, they walked down the rest of the red carpet hand in hand, joining Erik’s parents in the theatre.

* * * * *

The movie had a successful reception in Berlin, if the reviews by the notoriously hard-to-please critics were anything to go by, with many reviewers noting that he and Charles gave stellar performances together, accomplishing much more than what they had been previously capable of on their own. Erik scanned most of these reviews in bed with Charles reading over his shoulder and making approving noises, both of them trading frequent comments and kisses. Erik did not have Shaw’s innate gift of predicting which movies were going to be blockbuster hits (and then backing them) so it came as a total surprise to him that ‘First Class’ had such an overwhelmingly positive reaction. As far as he was concerned, the movie was already a gift and blessing in itself for bringing him and Charles together.

Erik’s eyebrows shot up as a review in the *Berliner Morgenpost*, one of the most respected local newspapers, proclaimed that Erik was a definite candidate for a Best Actor nod. He had to read the review three times, all of them in disbelief, and then Charles took over the paper and read the review aloud in his halting, English-accented German, and Erik tackled him with a kiss for his efforts.

Later that afternoon, Erik and Charles managed to crawl out of bed to send his parents to the airport, where they would be flying home to Munich. Erik desperately wished that they could stay longer, and Charles seemed very sad to let them go as well. Maybe a visit home to Munich was in order, once their press circuit was over and they finally earned their vacation.

As expected, Erik’s mother was a mess at the airport due to the thought of letting both her darlings go. Erik could only sigh as he watched her hug a red-eyed Charles, covering him with motherly kisses and wrangling promises out of Charles to visit soon, and often. Then she finally released Charles and nudged him towards Jakob before holding out her arms to Erik.

“My little *Schatzi*,” she said fondly in German, rubbing the back of his head like she did when he had been much younger. “I’m so proud of you and how far you’ve come. I used to worry about you,
did you know?”

Erik only held her tighter, shaking his head. She sighed.

“You were so angry all the time. And lonely. But now, you have Charles, and you have friends. You’re doing so well in your career, too.” Although Erik couldn’t see her face, her voice was thick with tears. “Now I’m not worried anymore.”

“I love you, Mama.” Erik closed his eyes, stroking his trembling hand up and down her familiar back. “You don’t have to worry about me ever again.”

“Because I know Charles will take care of you when I’m not there,” she said, lowering her voice to a hush. “Don’t ever let him go. Do you hear me?”

Erik stared at Charles, who was laughing fondly and helping Jakob with his bags. “Never, Mama. He’s stuck with me for the rest of our lives.”

“So make it official.”

Pulling back, Erik stared at his mother seriously. The thought had been haunting him for months, causing him to wander into a hundred jewellery stores, then wander out again with nothing but a headful of dreams about getting down on one knee and proposing to Charles. Only Emma’s warning about short-lived Hollywood marriages had stopped him, but even then, Erik only grew more and more certain everyday about whom he wanted to spend the rest of his life with. And his family already loved Charles as one of their own. Erik’s mother was right: he should make it official. “I already have the ring design in mind,” he confessed, making his mother burst into a wide grin. “That’s my boy. Now, go make Charles an honest man,” she said, and they hugged for one last time before Erik took her luggage and accompanied her to the security checkpoint, thinking hard about what his mother had said.

Notes:
1. The title of this chapter is a quote from ‘Almost Famous’.
2. Red ruby dessert, shot glass chess, and Hello Kitty vibrators.
3. James McAvoy was recently seen on the set of ‘The Disappearance of Eleanor Rigby‘ sporting Banana Republic underwear.
5. Justin Bieber was involved in a paparazzi car chase.
6. Michael Fassbender and James McAvoy interview each other.
7. A quintessential interview with James and Michael where James wants to play Cupid and says that if he made Michael fall in love with him, they could spray love all over the Universe.
8. Einstein’s Garden Room at The Willows in Palm Springs.
9. James McAvoy saying that he “fingered (himself) with one hand in the end”.
10. The interview with Ellen was inspired by this post on Tumblr.
11. Michael Fassbender saying he feels very comfortable in women’s clothes.
13. Hugh Jackman will be starring in the upcoming film adaptation of ‘Les Misérables’.
15. Some of Logan’s lines were taken from ‘X-Men Origins: Wolverine’.
16. Jennifer Lawrence on Nicholas Hoult’s shoulders at the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee.
17. The Queen parachuting in for the London 2012 Olympics opening ceremony.
18. Benedict Cumberbatch’s account of an occasion when James McAvoy was “walking through Leicester Square and this big guy just picked him up and licked his face.”
19. Physicists at CERN recently announced that they have found what many believe to be the Higgs boson.
And the Award Goes to....

Chapter Summary

Charles and Erik celebrate their anniversary in style and awards season rolls into town.

Chapter Notes

We would like to thank Afrocurl for helping set up the initial LA chapters and Etharei for all her hard work through the middle of this story. Thank you also to xsilverdreamsx for doing the cover of Vanity Fair and the ‘For Your Consideration’ ad, and CrystalRei for the lovely holiday photo!

We also would like to shower Nan with lots of love and appreciation for illustrating the scene where Remy gets Erik ready for his big romantic date in Paris, and also this adorable drawing of Raven buying Charles the boyfriend pillow in Japan.

And of course thank you to everyone for taking a chance with this story, which is really just a blatant excuse to send Charles and Erik on fantasy dates, and for sticking with us until the end. We appreciate every kudos and comment you’ve left behind, and always enjoy hearing from people who have gotten a chance to visit some of these places.

This last chapter is about 37,000 words long, and might require a trip to your dentist.

Soundtrack: Frank Ocean - ‘Thinking About You’

Erik couldn’t remember the first time he had started to think of Los Angeles as ‘home’. He hadn’t liked the city when he had first arrived, wandering around LAX with a backpack and some loose change in his pocket. LA seemed disorganised and completely alien, a large, confusing sprawl of a city with numerous neighbourhoods that clearly showed the divide in the income gap. Erik had looked up a friend who was staying in a ratty apartment downtown, then started taking jobs in bars while going for auditions in the day. His thick accent hadn’t done him any favours, so he had worked hard on it while bartending at night and calling his parents every weekend. It had been so tempting to give up and accept his father’s offer of a plane ticket home, but Erik had stuck with it. He had instinctively known there was something good in the future waiting for him.

Of course, it hadn’t helped that working in the bar and nightclub industry meant he had been witness to the seedier side of L.A, dealing nightly with drunks and brawlers and customers who got a little too handsy with him. He had gritted his teeth and bore with it, telling himself that his big break would come and his career would take off. Of course, thanks to Sebastian Shaw, it had, and Erik had worked hard, putting his love life on hold. Romance was for chumps, he had decided. Besides, seeing how this was L.A, attractive people were never in short supply, but Erik hadn’t really been interested even after fame had come knocking.
When he finally had the money to move to a better neighbourhood, Erik had slowly begun to warm up a bit more to LA, but it had still been missing something; a sense of belonging for Erik. He didn’t fit in there, with its plastic people and sprawled-out disconnectedness. He had always unabashedly thought of Germany as home, and he had bought his parents a lovely house in Munich, fully intending to buy the one beside them when he had retired. That was, if he was still single.

Then he had met Charles. Suddenly, home was a lot easier to define.

That was when he had stopped thinking of Germany as ‘home’, and he started putting down roots in Los Angeles, proper. Decisions now had more permanence and weight; Erik happily began buying furniture and art pieces, discussing with Charles which would fit better in their home in Hancock Park and which would better suit the mansion in Westchester. Charles now rarely returned to his place in Bel Air, and even if he did, Erik was right there with him (Erik hadn’t really admitted it to anyone, not even Charles, but it was hard to sleep when he didn’t have Charles wrapped around him like the world’s warmest living blanket).

Erik no longer hesitated when filling out immigration forms on planes or insurance forms. Once Charles had moved his things permanently into the Hancock Park house, Erik quietly told Remy to get Charles’ name put on the lease. His accountant would have had a stroke, but Erik didn’t care. He was happy now. Life was good in Los Angeles, and Erik had finally fully eased out of the unsettling sense of displacement that plagued most immigrants. He wouldn’t deny that Charles had a very large part to play in that, and already Erik was thinking ahead about their future together, hopeful but pragmatic.

This revelation only hit him during one of their long drives around the city, with Charles rolling the windows down and chatting happily about a new brunch place they had discovered in Santa Monica, his hair ruffled by the sea breeze. Erik was shooting fond sideways glances at him, thinking Charles had never looked more gorgeous like this, bathed in the afternoon sunlight of Venice Beach, his eyes a bright, sharp blue like handblown Murano glass. As Charles continued talking and rubbing Erik’s thigh, Erik blinked and realised, with a slow dawning of understanding, that he truly loved LA now, and it was very much his home. He loved LA because it had brought him and Charles together, and that stood for everything important in his life now.

“Erik?” Charles was amused, but a little concerned.

“Yes, Liebling?”

“I’m flattered that you keep staring at me, but keep your eyes on the road, darling.”

“Oh.” Erik instantly jerked back to face the front, grinning as Charles chuckled throatily beside him. “Sorry, just...having an epiphany.”

He could feel Charles’ hand moving up his thigh. Not to grope, but just to settle there comfortingly, a way of saying ‘I’m here.’ “I hope it was a good one,” Charles said, sounding contented and a little sleepy now. Glancing at his watch, Erik thought now would be a good time to start heading home for a quick Sunday afternoon nap, their limbs tangled in bed as the ceiling fan whirred lazily above them, his nose buried in Charles’ soft, thick hair.

“Das beste,” Erik said, as Charles’ smile widened, leaning over and resting his head on Erik’s shoulder, tucking himself against Erik’s body. Erik placed a loving kiss on the top of his head, staring ahead at the Pacific in the background. It was blue and glittering and expansive, and it was home now.

* * * * *
Darwin was aware that slowly, over the past year, Charles had ceased to call on his services more and more. Inversely, Remy was the one now running around like a madman, fulfilling Erik’s demands while Erik himself waited on Charles hand and foot. It was very disconcerting for Darwin to watch himself gradually get replaced by someone who would willingly do it for free, but Charles had assured him that he would never fire Darwin or force him to leave. It had been a relief, because his sister was going to college next year, and Juanita had hinted that she wanted to apply to the Ivy League schools. Darwin knew his mother would be counting on him to help financially, so Charles’ reassurance was much-needed.

The problem was, what was Darwin going to do? He didn’t like to idle or laze around, preferring to keep himself busy and useful. Ironically, it was Erik who suggested his next course of action. “You should help Alex with his next script,” he said, while checking Charles’ calendar. “Go on, take a break for a while. I believe Charles will only really need you when he’s doing press for his Japanese indie movie in New York. What do you think, Charles?”

“I agree completely,” Charles said, coming over and exchanging a kiss with Erik, and Darwin vowed to himself never to wander into their love nest again. Why enter the lion’s den unless it was absolutely necessary? “Take a break and visit your family, Darwin.”

Darwin eyed the two of them. A break back in Williamsburg did sound good. “You guys sure?” he asked tentatively.

Erik flapped an impatient hand at him. Darwin knew that gesture by heart; it was Erik’s patented ‘go-away-so-we-can-have-sex’ gesture. “Yes, take Alex with you so he’ll stop moping around about the fact that Sean ditched him for Moira.”

“Yessirree.” Darwin wanted to thank both of them, but Charles had now perched himself on Erik’s lap and Erik had that unmistakable gleam in his eye, and there was no way Darwin wanted to be treated to a free show. He hurriedly fled and made travel plans accordingly after checking with Alex, who was unsurprisingly very receptive to a paid vacation.

In exactly a week, Darwin and Alex were on their way to LaGuardia. Needless to say, Darwin was excited about getting to show Alex the neighbourhood in Brooklyn where he grew up. Darwin’s family still lived in East Williamsburg, right smack in the middle of the Italian enclave. Darwin remembered growing up amidst several Italian-American families and going to church with them at Our Lady of Mount Carmel. Sadly, the last time Darwin had visited, he had been shocked to find out just how much the neighbourhood had changed. It was now gentrified, flooded with hipsters, young professionals, artists and even the odd celebrity or two. The ubiquitous Italian groceries and restaurants had now been replaced by gourmet bistros, art galleries and wine stores. It was wholly different from the Williamsburg of his childhood, but no matter what, it was still home.

Alex said he was glad to come, although he had not made a secret of his dislike for New York. “Is it true that Williamsburg is the hipster capital of the world?” he asked Darwin as they were struggling with their luggage at LaGuardia.

“Don’t be a jackass,” Darwin said with a laugh. “Besides, you’re forgetting to count in Portland.”

Since Darwin wanted a little more privacy during their trip back home, he checked Alex and himself into a fancy serviced apartment on Charles’ dime (a guilt-ridden Charles had insisted on picking up the bill). It was clean, spartan and obviously skewed more towards the business traveller, equipped with an iMac, flip charts, a whiteboard and all kinds of stationery. It was the perfect place for Alex to get started on writing his script, and Darwin promised not to unnecessarily distract him (unless, of course, Alex seemed in need of a ‘distraction’).
It was a good, idyllic break. They filled the apartment with the sounds of The National and Frank Ocean, and Darwin had a ball of a time testing out recipes that his mother had sent over. Alex would sometimes pull his hair and stare blankly at his laptop, grumbling about Sean ditching him and writing being the most difficult thing ever. Darwin learned to stay out of Alex’s way when he was in these moods, knowing that sooner or later, Alex would be seized by a fit of inspiration and start frantically typing on his keyboard.

But today, the frenzy of inspiration hadn’t arrived yet, and Alex’s brow was furrowed as he chewed on his lip. “What’s with the face?” Darwin asked as he finished filling in the last square of the New York Times crossword.

“I’ll never get this script done,” Alex said with a sigh. “I mean, if Sean were here, we’d be bouncing ideas off each other--”

“But Sean isn’t here,” Darwin reminded him with a grin. His patience was infinite, and he could do this all day. A brooding Alex was nothing; Darwin had survived a perpetually sad-eyed, pouting Charles when he had been shooting in Japan, forcibly separated from Erik. Compared to that horrendous experience, Alex was a cakewalk. At least Alex wasn’t saying, ‘I miss Erik,’ every five seconds, tempting Darwin to seriously consider looking up the Japanese laws for manslaughter.

Now Alex was tugging at his hair again, letting out a grunt of frustration. “I can’t,” he said in a rush, his tone flat and defeated. “I can’t do it. Not here.”

“Hey, come on.” Darwin dropped a kiss on the top of that surly head before going to grab the whiteboard, rolling it across the living room so that it was displayed in front of the desk Alex was working at. “Okay, I’m gonna help you.”

Alex rolled his eyes. “Whatever.”

“You’d better do what I say, or you’re sleeping alone tonight,” Darwin said with a laugh as Alex suddenly looked panicked. Charles was right, it was an extremely effective technique.

“Okay, okay.” Alex sat up now, doing his best to school his features into something resembling attention. “I’m listening.”

Darwin grabbed a whiteboard marker. “So tell me where you’re stuck in the script.”

Alex tapped at his laptop, his frown deepening. “Um, it’s a scene between the main character, Mark, and his girlfriend. It’s kinda important because it’s the catalyst for the events that transpire in the movie.”

“Okay, cool. So what’s the issue?” Darwin asked, leaning against the board.

“I need them to have a fight that leads to them breaking up,” Alex said, scrunching up his nose. “Damn, why is writing so hard?”

“Don’t look at me, you’re the one who picked it for a profession.” Darwin grinned at Alex’s epic eye-roll. After thinking hard for a while, Darwin started writing on the board, the marker squeaking as he went. In a few minutes, he had managed to write three ideas side by side on the board, then turned to face Alex, who looked very thoughtful.

“Maybe you just need to start somewhere. See these three prompts?” Darwin asked, as Alex nodded. “Now I want you to write the one in the middle. Just the middle, mind.”

Alex quirked an eyebrow at him, but he only sighed and started pecking at his keyboard.
Reluctantly, at first, but after a slow start, Darwin could see that Alex was starting to pick up momentum, his frown easing into rapt concentration. It was good to see Alex get his groove back, and Darwin would be more than glad to help him and be there for him whenever he lost his way. Dropping another absent kiss on the top of Alex’s head, Darwin went into the kitchen to prepare dinner, smiling when he heard a yell from the living room, “Love you, Dar!” It was nice to be useful to someone.

* * * * *

Erik stretched his neck, yarning as he curled his fingers around Charles’ broad, relaxed shoulders, kneading them gently as they made their way down to the living room. Erik trailed behind him, the soft thumps of their bare feet filling the quiet spaces of Erik’s LA home as they padded down the parquet stairs. He blinked his bleary eyes, still not quite awake yet and already missing huddling under the warm pile of blankets with Charles. However, as much as he enjoyed living the rockstar life, they were both responsible adults and it was almost 11 A.M., which was much too late for two men in their thirties to still be passed out in bed like a couple of teenagers. Besides, Charles had announced that he was hungry. Erik had been forced to get up or choose between either convincing the love of his life to starve in a cocoon of silk sheets or wallowing in misery as his bed rapidly grew cold while Charles got himself something to eat - neither of which were options.

“Darling, I’ll fix breakfast today,” Charles declared cheerfully, removing Erik’s right hand from his shoulder and threading their fingers together before kissing his knuckles.

“Are you sure you don’t need my help?” Erik asked as he ran his left thumb over Charles’ shoulder blade reverently, tracing patterns along the fabric of his pyjama top. Well, technically it was Erik’s pyjama top, but they all belonged to Charles now, not that he was complaining.

They usually prepared breakfast together, save for the times when they brought each other breakfast in bed, but Charles shook his head, and Erik could make out that he was smiling, “I’ll be fine in the kitchen on my own. Why don’t you just relax on the sofa and read the papers?”

Well, Erik couldn’t really say no to that. He bent down to kiss the nape of Charles’ neck when they reached the bottom of the staircase, lingering longer than he had to just so he could inhale the calming scent of Charles’ skin. He was unable to stop the undercurrent of lust from curling in his belly when he felt a shudder ignite at the point where his lips met the curve of Charles’ neck, the tremors travelling halfway down Charles’ spine. “Don’t take too long, I’m starting to feel extremely hungry,” Erik murmured into Charles’ skin, his intentions very clear even as he nudged Charles towards the kitchen.

Erik headed out onto the driveway, collecting the morning papers from the spot three paces to the left of the front gate that the newspaper boy always left them in, ever since the morning that Erik had approached him and stated in no uncertain terms that he would take great pleasure in using non-lethal force the next time he found his papers soaked through by the lawn sprinklers. He tucked the bundle under his arm, smiling when he re-entered the house to the aroma of cinnamon in the air. Whatever Charles was whipping up smelled wonderful.

He skimmed through the headlines. There was always a war going on in some part of the world. Humans and their guns, one could say. Mankind had begun waging war from the moment of its inception, the struggle for supremacy and power at the very core of what it meant to be human, and it was Erik’s opinion that no amount of legislation or peace enforcement would ever change this basic human nature. He rolled his eyes upon reading the article on Clint Eastwood’s rambling speech at the Republican National Convention, and was finally at his favourite Sports section getting up to speed with all the standings in the football leagues when Charles emerged from the kitchen with a tray of
French toast and two glasses of chilled white wine.

Erik arched an eyebrow, the corner of his mouth crooked up in a smile. “Charles, isn’t it too early in the day for alcohol?”

“Rubbish, tell that to the person who invented the champagne brunch,” Charles replied, setting the tray down and picking up the glasses. Erik seized the opportunity to admire Charles’ pale, bare legs.

“Funny, I could have sworn it was you,” Erik retorted, chuckling when Charles tried to look indignant. He took the glass that Charles handed to him, pulling him in by the waist for a kiss that soon escalated to a sensual dance of tongues and moist lips as Charles climbed in and straddled Erik’s thighs, his free hand cupping the back of Erik’s neck. Erik dragged Charles’ lower lip between his teeth when they pulled apart, placing one last kiss on the swollen flesh before looking back up into his eyes. God, he was beautiful. “Thank you for making breakfast, Charles. It smells delicious,” he said, rubbing Charles’ thigh fondly.

Charles grinned, and Erik had memorised enough of Charles’ smiles to catch the devilish glint in his eye. Charles clinked their glasses together, all the while holding his gaze coyly. “Santé, darling.”

Erik raised his eyebrows at Charles’ word-choice but followed through with the toast, finishing off half of it along with Charles, the wine dry with wonderfully delicate floral and fruity notes. He passed the glass over to him so that Charles could place them on the coffee table, the glasses clinking pleasantly on the metal surface. “You’re behaving very suspiciously, Liebling.”

"I have no idea what the devil you're talking about," Charles retorted as he scrunched his nose playfully, and Erik let himself indulge in counting the freckles scattered across its bridge. He chuckled, smacking Charles’ firm, naked ass lightly and sliding him closer, the motion causing Erik's pyjama bottoms to ride up and bunch around his groin, which was rising to the festivities now that Charles was in such close proximity. Charles yelped and wriggled in his grasp, shaking his head as he reached out to grab a slice of French toast that really did smell fantastic. "At least try your breakfast before it gets cold. I know how much you love French food, Monsieur Lehnsherr."

He took a large bite out of the slice that Charles was holding out to him, a pleased sound escaping his throat as he savoured it. The bread was thoroughly infused with the sweetened eggs and delectably fluffy, and Charles had sprinkled a generous helping of ground cinnamon over it knowing Erik’s fondness for the spice. Between this, the excellent wine, and the lapful of Charles, Erik very much regretted ever considering spending the rest of the morning in bed. "This is the best French toast I've ever had."

Charles smiled delightedly, leaning forward to drop a kiss to the corner of Erik’s mouth. “Flour is the secret ingredient; it makes the toast extra fluffy. And I used challah for the bread,” he said, taking a bite when he was done.

“Look at you, you're even better at cooking than me now,” Erik said proudly, a warm smile creeping slowly across his face.

“Well, I had a most excellent teacher.” Charles winked, and the two of them proceeded to finish the rest of the slice, with Erik making a show out of licking Charles’ fingers clean one at a time when they were done, curling his tongue around each digit in his mouth and releasing it with an obscene ‘pop’. Charles traced his fingertips over Erik’s lips with hooded eyes, then tilted Erik’s head back and licked the curve of his lip with the barest tip of his tongue before he bent down and claimed his mouth. Erik felt light-headed when Charles finally relented, and it was most definitely not due to the alcohol. Charles steadied himself with a hand on Erik’s bare torso, reaching over again to the coffee table to shift the plate of French toast so he could pull something out from underneath. “Do you have
any commitments in the second half of the month, love?”

Erik tried to grab for whatever Charles had in his hand, but Charles held them out of his reach, both of them laughing when Erik bowed his head and put his hands up in surrender. “You know I have September off,” Erik said, now extremely curious.

“Brilliant! I thought we could go to Alsace for our anniversary.” Charles grinned with excitement, flashing a pair of first class Air France tickets departing from LAX with a connecting flight to Strasbourg Entzheim. Erik gaped in awe at the tickets while Charles carried on happily, as he always did whenever he was sharing his pet projects or grand schemes with him, “We could spend a week or so in Alsace after I’m done attending TIFF, I hear it’ll be just in time for the wine harvest and I’m sure this Riesling would taste even better at the source. Then we could cross the border and visit your parents, Mama keeps texting me to ask when we’re going over for a visit. And we just need to be back in time for when I have to get ready for the press circuit with Yuriko. What do you think, darling?”

Erik blinked, completely overwhelmed that Charles had already planned everything out. “I love you. And I hardly deserved you,” Erik whispered, wrapping his arms around Charles and silencing any protests with a passionate, all-consuming kiss. Charles moaned softly as Erik’s hands travelled down to cup his naked ass, clinging on when Erik lifted him up and flipped him onto the couch.

Erik continued to devour Charles’ mouth, chasing the last traces of butter and cinnamon on his lips as his fingers wandered down Charles’ chest, popping the buttons of his shirt with practiced ease. Erik slid the fabric out of the way, nipping and sucking on the spots that never failed to drive Charles mad, like the jut of his collarbone, the hard nubs of his nipples, the pale slip of flesh just below his navel, humming in satisfaction with each gasp that escaped Charles’ lips as he made his way down.

“Oh, God. Erik, your mouth,” Charles groaned, squirming when Erik ran his right hand down his thigh and began tracing circles on the inside of his knee.

Erik hooked one of Charles’ legs over his shoulder and rubbed his stubbled cheek against the inside of Charles’ thigh, a pleased grin spreading over his face when Charles’ hips thrust upwards, his almost fully erect cock searching for friction. Here was where Charles’ scent was strongest, a clean, undeniably male musk that could get Erik hard immediately. Erik pressed kisses to the crease where Charles’ thigh met his groin, and he could feel Charles’ fingers sinking into his hair, tugging it urgently in a request for Erik to take him into his mouth and drive him crazy.

“I love you,” Erik whispered against that pale skin starting to glisten with a sheen of sweat. He couldn’t hold in those words if he tried, even if he had a gun to his head. Charles’ breathless, gasped out, ”Love you, too” made Erik chuckle, leaning up to suck on the inside of Charles’ knee, a hidden erogenous zone that had surprised both of them during a particularly wild and steamy romp in the sheets a few months ago.

Erik now surveyed the beautiful, panting man laid out on the couch below him, a lovely rosy flush starting in his cheeks and spreading down his chest. Tempted, Erik rested a hand on Charles’ abs, revelling in the heat brought about by the increased blood flow due to the blush (and other things, of course). Charles immediately started writhing under Erik’s hand, biting his lip and letting out a wanton moan.

“I know you want my mouth,” Erik whispered, kissing that flat stomach and finally moving down to the main event, as it were, before Charles started begging him. Charles was fully erect now, the plum head of his cock nudging against Erik’s chin and leaving a wet smear. Erik kept his gaze fixed on Charles as he licked his lips while tucking them over his teeth, and then took Charles into his mouth, their fingers twined together. Charles cried out, his voice low and hoarse with pleasure, rubbing the
pad of his foot against Erik’s shoulder in a silent plea for more as Erik gently cupped his balls. Well, he was never one to deny Charles. Erik widened his mouth and swallowed him as much as he could. This, he thought, is the breakfast of champions.

* * * * *

Charles always enjoyed the quiet serenity offered by the idyllic villages and medieval towns of Europe, safe havens from the screaming crowds and cities teeming with millions of scattered minds, each calling out to him desperate for just a little bit of his attention. They were part and parcel of his job, and Charles often felt exhausted from attempting to connect with as many people out there as he possibly could when he was on promotional tours. It had been such a relief to finally leave the pretence of Hollywood behind and go on this escapade with Erik, a chance to disengage from the rest of the world and focus entirely on the man in his arms, the one person that always held him together when it felt like everything else wanted to tear him into a thousand little pieces.

He had discovered Château de L’Île thanks to Remy, nestled amidst a magnificent ten-acre park of splendid gardens and woodland by the slowly winding L’Ill River. The place was beautiful with its striking 19th-century architecture and Franco-German design influences, the magical turrets and towers housing richly coloured interiors, and Charles had been so happy with their room that he almost couldn’t bring himself to leave their wonderful bed that morning. After some very enthusiastic coaxing methods implemented by Erik, they were finally in their rented Peugeot and making the short drive to La Petite France in Strasbourg with the top down, taking in the fresh country air as music from a local station broadcasting in German dialect wafted through the speakers.

Charles looked over to Erik and laughed. “Darling, your hair is flying everywhere,” he said, leaning over to smooth Erik’s unruly tresses down. It was to no avail, and Charles was thankful that his own locks were being pinned back by his beloved pair of Ray-Bans that Erik had given him, temporarily being worn on the top of his head for the car ride.

Erik smirked, chancing a glance his way. “Are you going to run off with a Frenchman because I’m having a bad hair day?”

“Nonsense, I happen to find this just-been-fucked look very appealing, especially since it’s true,” Charles replied, tilting Erik’s face closer so he could kiss his cheek. “I can’t speak for Emma, though. What time are we meeting her for lunch?”

“She had trouble getting out of bed as well, so I told her to text us when she’s done curling her hair. Knowing Emma, it’ll probably be around 2:00.” Erik winked conspiratorially, and Charles giggled as he swatted at Erik’s thigh, all the while never shifting his eyes from Erik’s face, taking the time to admire how the strands of his hair were tinged with red as they caught the late morning sunlight.

They arrived in La Petite France soon after, and Erik pulled over to a secluded parking spot before they got out and explored the town, grabbing Charles’ palm in his warm hand and smiling when Charles did his best to tidy up Erik’s wind-swept hair. The region was experiencing an Indian summer, and Charles loved being able to walk the streets in just a light cardigan. Situated on the Rhine River border with Germany, Alsace was undeniably beautiful, and this part of Old Strasbourg in particular felt like something straight out of a fairy tale book, with its baroque sandstone buildings and medieval half-timbered townhouses leaning out over narrow cobbled streets. Breathing in the scent of freshly baked gingerbread, Charles couldn’t help admiring the lovely view of shophouse windows accented by colourful flower boxes as they strolled along the waterfront promenade, swans rippling the reflections of the buildings as they swam along the riverbend. Charles marvelled at the medieval architecture as they wandered up and down the tiny streets that connected Rue du Bain-aux-Plantes and Rue des Dentelles to Grand-Rue, listening attentively to Erik while he told him
about the culture of the region and its tumultuous past.

They had just gone by a stop for the river cruise when Charles spotted a quaint little shop selling men’s hats and accessories. An idea struck him, and Charles tugged on Erik’s hand, guiding them across the street. “Erik, let’s take a look at that shop. I want to get something.”

Erik looked at him warily. “Okay, Liebling. Just don’t go overboard like when we were at Champs-Élysées, who knows how long we’ll have to carry everything around until Emma gets here.”

Charles laughed. “You can’t hold that over my head, I was just doing my Christmas shopping,” he protested, then lifted their joined hands to press a kiss to the back of Erik’s hand. “Come on, love.”

They entered the small shop, which was empty except for the two of them and the old shopkeeper, who thankfully did not seem to recognise them and instead chose to carry on sipping his cup of coffee in the corner. Charles tapped his lips as he scanned the store, imagining Erik in the felt fedoras, the woollen French berets, and the pork pie hats with their turned-up brims and flat crowns. It was only when he glanced back at Erik that Charles noticed Erik was staring at his mouth, and Charles quirked his lips in amusement, breaking into a grin when Erik leaned in to steal a kiss. “Let’s go over there and try on some hats,” Charles said, stroking Erik’s arm.

Charles led Erik over to one of the racks and picked up a felt pork pie hat, frowning as he scrutinised it. “Try this on?” he said before reaching up and putting it on Erik’s head.

Erik must have caught on to his plan, seeing as he had smiled knowingly at him before inspecting his reflection in the mirror. He turned back to Charles with his eyebrows raised, a long-suffering expression on his face. “I look like a jazz musician.”

Charles laughed, taking the hat off Erik and putting it back on the rack. “You are very talented at the sax,” he teased, earning himself a smirk and a seductive quirk of Erik’s eyebrows.

“Am I?” Erik drawled, and Charles shuddered as Erik backed him up against the racks of hats on the table, knocking some of the hats off in the process. Charles heard the shopkeeper clearing his throat off to the side and blushed, the two of them scrambling to pick the fallen headwear from the floor. Raven was right: they really shouldn’t be allowed anywhere in public.

It was when they were putting the hats back that Charles noticed a black woollen beret with a leather band around its base. He slipped it onto Erik, humming with satisfaction as he adjusted the beret to fit Erik’s head and taking the opportunity to sidle up to him, Erik’s arms instinctively going around his waist when Charles slipped himself between Erik’s legs. “It looks very good on you, darling.”

Erik took a cursory look over Charles’ shoulder at himself in the mirror, idly running his hands up and down Charles’ back and smiling. “I do trust your taste in headwear.”

“Of course! Didn’t ‘Us Weekly’ love that fedora I got you? But anything’s better than that magenta and red tinfoil helmet you used to wear as a child. I wonder how much I’d get if I sold that picture to ‘People’,” Charles said, laughing. “Anyway, I think you look very handsome. It’s very la Résistance Française. I would drop everything and follow your sexy arse on your crusade around the world if you were wearing that,” he added, running a finger down from Erik’s unbuttoned collar and meandering it slowly around the buttons of his shirt, finally hooking it over the front of the waistband of Erik’s pants and tugging playfully.

“Charles… If you carry on like this, I’m going to have to use this beret to hide something other than my messed up hair,” Erik warned under his breath, gently prying off Charles’ errant hand and kissing his wrist.
“All right, let’s go pay up and take this somewhere else,” Charles said coyly, grasping Erik’s hand and leading them to the cash till. Charles fished out his wallet when they got there but Erik started pulling out his as well and saying something to the shopkeeper in French, resulting in the man ignoring Charles and serving Erik instead. “Erik, what is the meaning of this? I’m getting the beret for you.”

“It’s fine, Liebling.”

“No, I will hear none of this,” Charles insisted, batting away Erik’s wallet. He remembered that most of the older generation here still spoke a German dialect and tried his luck, seeing as his French was abysmal, “Ich zahle! I’m paying. This was my brilliant idea.”

Charles shoved a wad of cash into the shopkeeper’s hands and the poor man proceeded to open the till, smiling as he shook his head in amusement. Erik chuckled and kept his wallet, and Charles relaxed against him when Erik tucked him under his arm and buried his nose in his hair, always craving the warm haven that Erik offered. They said goodbye to the shopkeeper and exited the building, carrying on with their stroll along the river canals and wandering off into the little alleyways from time to time.

“Why are there wagon wheels on top of the chimney stacks?” Charles asked after he’d noticed his fourth one, pointing up at the roof of what looked like someone’s home and running his palm up and down Erik’s back.

Erik had a hand resting on Charles’ shoulder and Charles sighed with contentment when Erik began massaging it tenderly. “Storks are a symbol of happiness and fidelity in this region. They fly here from Africa every spring and the locals encourage nesting by putting a wagon wheel on their roof.” Erik paused, tucking a stray lock of hair that Charles hadn’t even noticed behind Charles’ ear before continuing, “They say having a stork build a nest on your roof or chimney is a sign of good luck.”

Charles grinned, tiptoeing up to give Erik a quick peck on the lips. “Then we should install one when we get back to Westchester. I’d like for storks to come visit us.”

Erik looked thoughtful for a moment, and Charles wondered if Erik was imagining the future as well. The Westchester mansion was stunning and impressive, but the large dining hall and numerous sitting rooms could also get cold and lonely. Charles indulged himself with the idea of having them filled with children’s laughter someday, more and more often in fact, and Charles felt somewhat guilty each time he caught himself wondering what it would be like to hear the pitter patter of little feet filling the corridors. He allowed himself to daydream about a little boy with Erik’s pale blue eyes, an adorable girl with Erik’s sharp intellect.

Erik was now smiling wistfully. “I think it’s quite hard for these storks to migrate to America, Charles.”

“Well, any birds would be lovely, they don’t have to be storks,” Charles said softly, and somehow got the feeling that neither of them was talking about migratory birds.

Erik held him closer and they continued with their walk through the cobbled streets, Charles casually slipping off his cardigan at some point now that the sun was high in the sky. They were on a bridge across one of the canals on the main island when Erik stopped in his tracks suddenly, looking off to the side at something in the water, and Charles could hear the distant sound of machinery kicking into gear. "Charles, come take a look, they're letting out the water in the canal," Erik said as he led them to the railing.

Charles rested his weight against the rails as Erik surrounded him from behind, and Charles rubbed
the arm Erik had secured around his chest when Erik kissed the shell of his ear, thinking he could never possibly tire of the comforting sensation of Erik’s solid body pressed up against his back. He listened with rapt attention as Erik explained, “The water level in the navigation canals is higher than that of the \textit{L’ill} River, so all traffic going into and out of \textit{La Petite} France must pass through locks.”

Charles watched as the gate on the lower side of the water opened, allowing the waiting boat to enter the lock. Water then filled the lock when the gate closed, lifting the boat with it and finally releasing the boat to carry on with its journey when the water level was high enough. "Fascinating," Charles said, then turned around so he could face Erik instead. Erik looked remarkably at peace, smiling softly as he gazed back at Charles, and Charles silently wished Erik could be this contented always.

Charles cradled Erik’s head in his hands, guiding him down for a slow, gentle kiss. A press of mouths, a slide of tongue along parted lips, a quiet sigh as Erik leaned in for more, the heat from Erik’s palm like a brand on the curve of his spine. “I love you,” Charles breathed out, less a declaration and more a daily devotion, whispered reverently against coveted skin.

“I love you, too,” Erik replied, and Charles closed his eyes as he rested his head against Erik’s chest, glad they had gotten to spend the morning together exploring the town, absently thanking Emma at the back of his mind for sleeping in.

* * * * *

Emma took her time making her way down to the Michelin starred restaurant that Remy had recommended, instead indulging in having a masseuse come to her suite first thing in the morning for an in-room massage. As far as she was concerned, she hadn’t lied when she told Erik that she was still in bed. After finally settling on a white peephole cotton mini-dress, she’d then proceeded to head over to a nail salon to have her French manicure and pedicure done before texting Erik at a quarter to two to say that she was on her way. It was all part of her grand plan to avoid inflicting any further psychological trauma upon herself, and Emma prayed that Erik and Charles would at least not still smell of sex by the time she arrived. However, as soon as the \textit{maitre d’} rounded the corner, Emma knew that all hope was truly lost.

There they were, more than halfway through their platter of two dozen freshly shucked half shell oysters, Charles leaning so far over to Erik while holding one out for him to sip on that he might as well have been sitting in his lap like that night on ‘Jimmy Kimmel’ – something Emma still hadn’t completely forgiven them for, and sadly just another horror in what Raven and herself now termed ‘The Press Tour That Shalt Not Be Named’. Unfortunately for her and Raven, fans of the two exhibitionists ate their torrid love affair up with a spoon, which basically meant that both Erik and Charles had seen no reason to keep their hands off each other. Emma had suffered through that because it was her job, but she’d be damned if she let them get the better of her on her vacation.

Emma cleared her throat when it became obvious that Erik and Charles were once again too engrossed in each other to bother with the rest of the world, seeing as Charles was busy wiping the small trail of juice from the corner of Erik’s mouth off using his thumb and then licking that finger clean with what Emma had to admit was quite a fair amount of skill. Both Erik and Charles jerked their heads up at the intrusion, and Emma rolled her eyes with her right arm akimbo. “Good afternoon to you, too,” she said dryly.

“Emma! My goodness, you look stunning. And your skin is practically glowing. I think I should try and convince Erik to let me have a little beauty rest sometimes as well.” Charles said earnestly as he stood up to pull out her chair, and Emma didn’t have the heart to tell him that she really only had the massage oils to thank.

“Emma, how wonderful for you to finally join us,” Erik said sarcastically, but Emma caught the
amused smirk on his face.

“You’re lucky I put up with you, Erik. At least Charles knows how to make a lady feel appreciated.” Emma paused, taking in Charles’ flushed face. “And I hope Charles is red because of the champagne and not because you just blew him under the table.”

Charles spluttered, and Emma had to hold back a laugh when the tips of his ears turned crimson. “We did absolutely no such thing!”

“Well, I wouldn’t put anything past you two degenerates at this point,” she said airily. “I’m just here to make sure you’re not terrorising the locals before I make a run for the south of France. So please, keep it down until I’m at least out of range.”

“Be quiet, Emma. Have some Bélon oysters,” Erik said, sliding the plate over.

Emma picked up a circular shell of one of the rare, flat oysters, the succulent flesh sliding smoothly into her mouth as she sipped from the shell. The oyster flesh had a deliciously potent coppery taste and tannic accent, and Emma was reminded why she had been attracted to the business in the first place. She had always enjoyed the finer things in life, and being an agent gave her a valid excuse to be wined and dined on someone else’s tab. She was being courted now even more than ever as ‘First Class’ had been so well-received, with studio execs practically falling over each other trying to get her to show Erik their latest scripts. And of course, she was always guaranteed a good meal whenever Erik had his ‘Liebling’ around – which was all the time, really. “This is very nice, but I don’t want you accusing me of ruining your depraved plans because I ate one too many of your oysters. God knows any normal person would need some help getting it up four times a day,” Emma said, signalling for the waiter to bring the menu.

“Emma, I’m insulted. Four times since this morning, you mean?” Charles chimed in, and the worst part was that Emma wasn’t entirely sure whether he was joking or not. Charles gave her no time to ponder further, deftly picking an oyster off the plate and slurping it down. He threw his head back and swallowed, making an obscene sound as he ran his tongue along the seam of his lips like a bona fide porn star.

She shuddered, then glanced sideways at Erik, who was staring intently at Charles and looking like he was torn between pouncing on him and surrendering to the incredulous smile that was threatening to spread across his face when Charles finally burst out laughing. He leaned against Erik’s chest, Erik wrapping his arms around him and chuckling as well, and Emma threw her hands up in defeat. “I swear you two have become even worse since getting here. It’s the damn French air.”

“Then maybe we should buy a house here. What do you think, Charles? I hear the south of France is quite exceptional,” Erik said before bending forward to kiss Charles’ forehead.

Charles grinned and brushed his nose against Erik’s chin in response. “Sounds like a stupendous idea. And we’d be so close to Emma.”

“I’m not being paid enough to put up with this,” Emma announced, holding up her menu to block the two of them out, but smiled behind it when they started laughing again. Raven was right – they were stuck with the two biggest trolls in all of Hollywood. That being said, despite her alleged “bitter, frozen heart”, she had to admit that they were adorable together (in small doses). Emma scanned the menu and picked out the salade vigneronne for herself, knowing full well that the two of them surely ordered enough to feed the entire town again.

“Erik, before it slips my mind, Raven and I sent a large package of scripts over to Charles’ place in Westchester, you can take a look at them when you’re done ravishing Charles across Europe,”
Emma said after she’d placed her order.

Charles raised his eyebrows at that. “Raven?” he asked, visibly intrigued.

Emma nodded coolly, taking a sip of her champagne, which was excellent. Always trust alcoholics with drink selection. “Yes, Raven. There are quite a few casting directors that have requested for the both of you, probably also because Erik made me state that he wouldn’t take any projects that clashed with your schedule. Congratulations, you’re the next Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor.”

“Charles’ eyes are more beautiful that Elizabeth Taylor’s,” Erik declared, lifting Charles’ hand to his lips and kissing his knuckles.

“You’re so completely biased, darling,” Charles said between chuckles, then proceeded to give Erik post-coital moon-eyes as Emma rolled her eyes.

Mercifully, her salad arrived, and Emma distracted herself by counting the leaves on her plate. “I hear you have a portmanteau couple name,” Emma finally ventured after she had made it through half her salad and it became clear that she’d simply have to learn to live with the two of them clinging to each other like limpets. If you can’t beat them, join them.

“Oh, yes. ‘Cherik’, isn’t it?” Charles said, the smile on his face like summer.

“I like it, it sounds like ‘cherish’,” Erik added, sounding foolishly besotted, and earned himself a kiss on the lips from a delighted Charles.

Emma almost choked on a chunk of sausage in her salad. In retrospect, she only had herself to blame for this poor life decision of courting the devil. Emma put her cutlery down and nudged her plate away. “I think you should ask for a refund on this salad, because I’m about to throw up.”

* * * * *

“Where are we, darling?” Charles asked, giggling as he stroked the inside of Erik’s thigh affectionately, his head lolling a little to the side.

Erik reached over to tuck him under his arm, his other hand still on the wheel as Charles scooted over to nuzzle his shoulder. Charles was pliant and radiating warmth, his cheeks still flushed from all the wine he had earlier, and Erik had to admit that he had a certain fondness for a slightly inebriated Charles. “Still somewhere on the Route du Vin. Don’t worry, Charles, we’re not lost.”

“Oh, I wasn’t concerned about that; you always manage to find your way anywhere. I was just curious, that’s all,” Charles said, his hand making its way up to rub against Erik’s stomach.

Erik had to force himself to refocus his attention on the road and not on Charles’ fingers, which had managed to snake their way under Erik’s shirt and were now toying with the scattering of hair just below his navel. It also definitely did not help that Erik was feeling light-headed himself, although he was doing a lot better than Charles. “We’ll be there soon, I was thinking of pulling over at the top of that hill just up ahead. We’ll have a good view of the vineyards from there.”

Charles hummed in approval. “That sounds perfect.”

They had spent the morning exploring the village of Riquewihr near Colmar, which looked like a time capsule from the 16th century with its wells, fountains, and well-preserved houses. They had then adjourned to the Hugel & Fils winery nearby, participating in the wine harvest festivities before heading into the tasting room (and arguably the highlight of Charles’ trip). Charles had started out swirling the different wines and letting them breathe before sipping them slowly, but that all went out
the window by his sixth glass, with Charles opting to immediately knock the glasses back instead. Erik had tried to pace himself seeing as he still had to drive, even asking Charles if he wanted a spittoon, to which Charles had scoffed and said, loud enough for the other patrons around them to hear, “Erik, you of all people should know that I don’t spit. I swallow.”

And that was how Charles had ended up slightly tipsy after he was done with just the first batch of Rieslings, Gewürztraminers, and Pinot Noirs, so everything he tried after that was “simply delightful, isn’t it, darling?”, which essentially translated into them practically purchasing all the bottles in that very fortunate winery’s cellar. Erik had packed as many as he could into the boot for the rest of their trip, planning to unload whatever they couldn’t finish on his parents, although he wasn’t sure how they were going to ship everything else back. Well, that was Remy’s problem now.

They arrived at the knoll that Erik had picked out and got out of the car, Erik retrieving the picnic basket filled with the food from L’Auberge de L’Ill that they had detoured to collect after they had finished with the winery, while Charles selected a bottle each of Riesling and Tokay Pinot Gris from their newly-acquired collection. Erik wrapped his spare arm around Charles’ waist, pulling him gently along as they strolled off the small lane. He took in a deep breath of the cool mid-September air, smiling at the familiar scent of Charles’ cologne and the soft weight leaning companionably against him as they took their time making the short walk uphill.

“Oh, Erik. This is absolutely stunning,” Charles said when they neared the top, giving a gentle squeeze with the arm he had around Erik’s torso as he gazed at the Vosges mountains in the distance. “I bet you bring your dates up here all the time,” he added jokingly.

Erik chuckled deep in his throat, bending down to kiss Charles’ temple. “Only the ones that I’m celebrating our one-year anniversary with. I also make sure to ply them with alcohol first to get them drunk. Have you met Robbie Turner and Johnny Martin?”

Charles gasped. “My mother warned me about men like you. And, no, I don’t suppose I have, although I’m sure we’d find a lot in common.” Charles paused, nudging Erik with mock indignation. “Also, I am most certainly not drunk.”

Erik nodded his head slowly. “If you insist, Liebling.”

Charles laughed, nudging Erik with his shoulder playfully. It was not long until Erik picked out a spot that offered them a panoramic view of Riquewihr and the surrounding vineyards below, and they placed the items on the grass before spreading out the picnic blanket together. Erik had barely sat down when Charles crawled happily into his lap with the bottle of Tokay Pinot Gris, the complimentary glasses and corkscrew from the winery in his hands. Erik chuckled to himself, sliding his fingers into Charles’ hair to kiss him soundly before taking the bottle and corkscrew from him. Charles still tasted like wine. “Didn’t you have enough of this just now?”

Charles hummed, bending forward to lick and suck on that spot just behind his earlobe. “What can I say, Erik? I’m insatiable,” Charles replied, then nipped sharply on Erik’s earlobe, worrying it between his teeth. Erik gasped, hands trembling slightly as his twisted the corkscrew into the cork of the bottle.

A merciless Charles remained relentless in his quest to undo him, choosing to trail kisses down his neck as he smoothed his palms up and down the sides of Erik’s torso. “I know I always say this, but you are very gifted at screwing,” Charles murmured, canting his hips forward in deliberate, repeated movements that felt like they were executed specifically to drive Erik mad.

“Mein Gott, Charles,” he bit out without malice, steadying himself before he yanked on the cork.
He felt the soft rumbling of Charles’ laughter against his chest. “All right, love. I promise to stop taking advantage of you for now. Just so we don’t waste the wine.” Charles bent down to slip his tongue into Erik’s mouth for a slow, melting kiss before he eased back slightly, holding out the glasses for Erik to pour into. Considering he was already half-hard, Erik decided it was a small victory that he hadn’t spilled the wine all over their laps.

“I always knew you love the sauce more than me,” Erik quipped as he placed the bottle down somewhere safe. He turned back to find Charles smiling tenderly at him, eyes a mesmerising shade of blue in the late afternoon sun. Erik smiled in return, a familiar constriction seizing his chest.

Charles let out a breath and leaned forward, pressing their foreheads together, and Erik’s world narrowed down to a vortex of blue, in turn both captivating and utterly immobilising. “You know that’s not true,” he whispered.

Erik huffed incredulously, grinning without reservation. “Of course I do,” he murmured back, softly brushing his lips against Charles’. “I will never love anyone as much as I love you.”

“And I am yours always,” Charles said softly, smiling as he raised his glass. “Happy Anniversary, Erik.”

“Happy Anniversary, Charles,” Erik replied, and they both drank from their glasses. “Do you remember what you said to me that first day?” Erik asked after a while, prompting Charles to look at him curiously. “You told me we could take on the world together.”

Charles giggled, putting his glass down. “I did, didn’t I? Oh, what lofty plans I had.”

Erik chuckled as well, running a hand through Charles’ soft, wavy hair. “Well, the jury’s still out on our grand scheme for global domination,” Erik paused, expression turning serious. “But my world has been forever changed for the better because of you.”

Charles went very still for a moment, then took Erik’s wineglass from him and placed it firmly on the ground. His mouth was on Erik’s in an instant, crushing and demanding, one hand cupping the back of Erik’s head while the other pulled at his shirt. Erik let out a low moan, taking a moment to completely surrender to the kiss before he circled the sides of Charles’ throat with his hands and gave as good as he got. They were both breathless by the time Charles had popped open the last button on Erik’s shirt, and Erik stopped sucking on Charles’ tongue for a moment to pepper kisses along his abused lips. “Charles, are you sure you want to do this here? Someone might see us,” Erik asked as he began on Charles’ shirt, his voice trembling with need.

Erik shuddered when he felt Charles palming his erect cock through his pants. “I promise you no one will find us,” Charles answered confidently.

He grew frustrated with the last couple of buttons on Charles’ shirt, tugging at the fabric and grinning when that sent the pesky buttons flying into the grass. “Our food will get cold,” Erik stated offhandedly.

Charles huffed. “Darling, it’s already cold. And do I look like I give a fuck about mallard duckling right now? Three Michelin stars or not.”

An amused laugh escaped Erik’s throat, but that ceased the moment Charles pushed him onto the ground, Erik fumbling for Charles’ belt as Charles pinned his shoulders down, the two of them devouring each other, their breaths hitching with each scrape of teeth against sensitive skin.

“I have never wanted you more than I do now,” Erik uttered, closing his eyes as he dragged Charles
down for another kiss, his back warm against the blanket and his head cushioned by soft grass. He was enveloped by the heady mixture of Charles’ intoxicating scent and a whiff of damp earth, the two of them surrounded by the golden hues of the Alsatian vineyards as the late afternoon mist slowly descended upon the valley below.

* * * * *

Celebrating their anniversary in France had been a real treat (courtesy of the ever generous Charles, of course) but there was something about returning home to Westchester that was different from any other homecoming on Earth. The grounds were immaculate as always, thanks to the gardeners and landscapers, and the mansion was spick and span, the ancient windows thrown wide open to let in sunshine and the early autumn air. Erik loved imagining Charles spending part of his boyhood here, reading by the windows or walking around one of the many gardens. There was a pang in his chest at the thought of a young Charles being lonely and yearning for his parents’ attention, and Erik wished he could go back in time and give that boy a hug.

Overcome with a fierce, overwhelming need to protect Charles against anything that could possibly harm or neglect him, Erik quickly went and sought out Charles now, who was unpacking in their bedroom. His face brightened as always whenever Erik walked into a room. “Hello, darling.”

Erik marched over to where Charles was standing and grabbed him in an airtight hug, tucking Charles’ head under his chin. If they were lucky enough to have children via adoption or surrogacy, Erik silently swore to never, ever let them feel lonely or inadequate, as though giving them the best childhood would make up for Charles’ depressing one. “Erik, what’s wrong?” he heard Charles’ muffled voice against his shirt.

“Nothing.” Erik closed his eyes, rocking Charles back and forth in his arms. He didn’t want to spoil Charles’ mood; Charles was still on a high from their short visit back to Munich to join in on the Oktoberfest activities and say hello to Erik’s parents, and Edie had stuffed Charles full of home
cooking and German sweets, to the point where Erik had to stop her before Charles got diabetes. But Charles had never been happier to bask in her shower of maternal affection, so Erik had let it slide. Now, he was glad. After his sad, lonely childhood, Charles deserved happiness.

“You’re scaring me a little, love,” Charles said with a little huff of laughter, before pulling away and regarding Erik with serious, bright blue eyes. “Did bad news come in the mail or something?”

It was then that Erik remembered the stack of scripts piled high on the kitchen island counter, still in their FedEx boxes. “No bad news,” he reassured Charles, running a hand up and down his spine. “But we do have to look through the pile of scripts that Raven and Emma sent over to us.”

The worry in Charles’ eyes cleared as he grinned in excitement. “I’m really looking forward to seeing what scripts people have sent our way,” he said, half-patting Erik’s chest as well as taking the opportunity to stroke it.

Erik gestured at the half-empty suitcases lying around their room and on the bed, clothes spilling out everywhere. “After we sort this out, Liebling.”

Charles tilted his head, biting on his lower lip as he slid a finger into one of the belt loops on Erik’s pants, tugging him closer until their bodies were pressed flush together. “I’m not so good with clothes, Erik, except for when I get to take them off.”

Erik took in a deep, unsteady breath, staring at Charles with hooded eyes. “Fine, I’ll take care of this,” he muttered, planting a kiss on Charles’ nose. “Now go take a shower before I pounce on you and we don’t get anything done for the rest of the day.”

Charles raised a cheeky, questioning eyebrow at him. “You say that like it’s a bad thing.”

Erik soundly smacked him on the ass, earning himself a little yelp. “If you’re good, I’ll make it up to you later, I promise.”

Charles’ mouth was a round little ‘O’ of intrigue, and Erik forced himself not to stare at that perfect pink circle. “All right, I’ll hold you to that,” he warned Erik with a smirk before he headed into the bathroom. Erik shook his head fondly before rolling up his sleeves and getting to work.

It was admirable of Erik to resist jumping into the shower and joining a wet, pliant Charles in soaping up his body, but at least he managed to unpack all their luggage and dump the dirty clothes into the hampers for the housekeeper to take care of. By then Charles had sauntered out in a bathrobe, his hair damp and his cheeks pinked by the hot shower. When he wound his arms around Erik with the brightest and most hopeful of smiles, Erik couldn’t resist giving him a soft kiss, which turned into two, then three when Charles let out a small moan.

“Come on,” a breathless Erik said, smacking Charles on the ass again and canting his head towards the door. “The sooner we take care of work, the sooner we can play.”

Charles pretended to sigh. “You Germans and your work ethic,” he said teasingly, shifting his hips against Erik’s. “It’s always work first, then pleasure later, isn’t it?”

Erik chuckled before stealing one last kiss. “Ah, but Charles, with you, work is always a pleasure.”

They finally made their way downstairs (albeit with some groping and fumbling) and Charles filled the electric kettle - tea for him, coffee for Erik - while Erik ripped open the FedEx boxes and shook out the various scripts. By the time Erik had arranged them in a neat pile, Charles was coming over with a mug of steaming hot coffee, and Erik accepted it from him with a grateful kiss. “Thank you, Charles.”
Charles was now cradling his own cup of Earl Grey, casting a considering look at the stack of scripts. “Let’s get down to brass tacks then, shall we?” he said, offering Erik a bright smile as he perched himself on the banquette and slid in, then patted the seat beside him. Erik immediately scooted in, wrapping an arm around Charles’ shoulders. The banquette in the kitchen, by the window that offered a view of the back gardens, was one of their favourite places to relax when they were lucky enough to be home in Westchester. That and the king-sized, four-poster bed in their bedroom, of course.

From their vantage point by the window, Erik also had a great view of their latest addition to the back gardens: a magnificent, carved sandstone gazebo with an intricate steel dome, metal ribs radiating from the centre to the base. Erik had arranged for its installation before leaving for Alsace so that the gazebo would be completed by the time they returned from their anniversary trip, as a gift to Charles. He had helped Charles out of the car once they’d arrived at the mansion, guiding him immediately towards the back of the building, hands gently covering Charles’ eyes just before they rounded the final corner. Charles had laughed in amusement, asking him what the devil he was up to. “Patience, Charles,” he’d drawled, nodding his approval when he saw the structure with his own eyes, the sandstone pillars matching the exterior of the mansion perfectly. He’d left Remy in-charge of overseeing its construction and the scoundrel hadn’t let him down.

Charles had been speechless when Erik finally unveiled it to him, murmuring, “Happy Anniversary, Liebling,” while anxiously awaiting Charles’ reaction. Needless to say, Charles had fallen in love with his present, considering that he had wordlessly dragged Erik out to the gazebo and then proceeded to kiss him silly as they stood under the open-air dome, the two of them feeling more connected to each other than they’d ever felt before. If not for the fear of being walked in on by their gardener, Erik would have taken Charles right then and there on the curved sandstone bench that ran around the gazebo, but had to instead promise himself that he’d see to it once the old man left later in the afternoon.

They had remained standing under the hemispherical frame, and Erik fully intended on coming out here to gaze at the stars sometime, imagining that the spot would feel like a cosmic temple once the celestial bodies came out. Charles had then spun around, taking in the unobstructed view, the gazebo overlooking the distant woodlands with that looming satellite and the small stream that ran through the mansion’s grounds. “It’s perfect, I can’t believe you built this,” Charles had whispered, sounding overwhelmed as he ran his hand reverently over the table Erik had placed in the centre, a chessboard set in its surface. It was as close as they would ever get to playing chess undisturbed in the middle of Central Park, and Erik had had a brief image of the two of them spending the rest of their days hunched over the table, engaged in chess matches until they were old and grey.

Erik was startled out of his daydreaming when he felt Charles nuzzling his neck, and had to clear his throat before he threw Charles on top of the table and ravished him silly. “Uh, right, I’ll start on the first script.” Erik said, his voice wavering as Charles started pressing kisses along the curve where his neck met his shoulder. “Charles? Are you listening?”

Erik felt hot breath against the shell of his ear as Charles whispered, “I’m listening hard.”

Fuck. Erik ran his fingers through his hair before forcing himself to look down at the script in hand. He tried not to think about how easy it would be to turn his head and let their mouths meet, or how inviting the weather was outside, warm enough for him to finally carry Charles out to the gazebo and make love there. Erik fervently pushed these thoughts aside for later, squinting hard at the accompanying treatment. Erik used to detest the use of synopses, believing that coverage writers were simply there to perpetuate the rampant illiteracy ravaging Hollywood. The industry was filled with morons, and it was a well-known fact that nobody actually read anything in Tinsel Town. Now, he was grateful that these treatments meant he would have more time to spend with Charles instead
of poring over yet another bland script.

The summary on the cover page intrigued him enough to flip through the first few pages of the script, a smile broadening on his face. “What do you think of this script? It’s about an FBI agent who has to work with an inmate to find the inmate’s missing brother.”

Charles was curious enough to cease kissing Erik’s neck and blinked up at him, licking his reddened lips. “What roles will we be playing?” he asked, stroking Erik’s hair.

“I’d be the FBI agent, and you’d be the professor who helps him greatly in the case,” Erik told him, letting a hand rest at the base of Charles’ skull and massaging the back of his head with his thumb and forefinger, drawing a breathy moan from Charles. “What do you think?”

Charles had a long, considering look on his face. “It reminds me of the show ‘White Collar’. “His expression turned mischievous. “Is there any actual collar involved?”

Erik laughed out loud, leaning forward and pressing a kiss to his hairline. “Sadly, no.”

“Hmmmm, next,” Charles sniffed, making Erik chuckle. “You know I was just joking, love. What do you think?”

Erik perused another section of the script with raised eyebrows. “It really does look intriguing and seems well-written,” he said thoughtfully, “but I probably shouldn’t play another FBI agent. I don’t want to be typecast.”

“That’s true.” Charles pursed his mouth in disappointment. “Ah well, let’s see what else we have.”

Erik put the script aside and picked up the next one, lifting his arm so that Charles could cuddle him.

“All right, let’s see here.” Erik briefly scanned the summary, before he sat up in interest. “This is a gay rom-com, I think you’ll like this.”

“Continue reading, love.” Charles placed a kiss on Erik’s chest through his shirt before resting his head there again.

Erik skimmed through the first few pages. “You’re a wedding planner hired to throw a high society wedding in a museum. And they want me to play the lead architect who designed the museum.”

Charles was making agreeable noises. “That sounds quite promising. We could read that in detail later on?”

“Of course.” Erik placed it in the ‘KIV’ pile and moved on to the next one, shifting so that Charles could use his chest as a cushion and be more comfortable. He flipped through the pages.

“This one’s interesting,” he told Charles, who glanced up at him inquiringly. “It’s a sci-fi epic where you are playing a poor miner who doesn’t know he is a lost prince, and I’m the richest man on the planet whose life you save.”

Charles perked up. “I like this already. Go on.”

“It’s a very elaborate plot, much like ‘Star Wars’ meets ‘Children of Dune’,” Erik said. “We should probably read this together and see how it goes.”

“Agreed,” Charles said, taking the script from him and placing it in the ‘KIV’ pile. “Much later, though. I want to take my time with you. I must thank you properly for my gift, after all,” he added,
breath hot and damp against the shell of Erik’s ear. Erik felt his throat go dry. “What’s next, darling?”

“I’m a doctor in this one,” he told Charles, voice straining. “And apparently I also used to be a coma patient, whom you read Austen to every day. When I wake up, you’re not there, but somehow I always have your voice in my head and an inexplicable fondness for Austen.”

Charles took the script from Erik and flipped through it himself, murmuring in approval. “That sounds like a perfect mix of a modern day romance and a period piece. We definitely need to read this one,” he said to Erik with a grin. “You’ll notice I’m partial to those that have us falling in love onscreen.”

“Really? I hadn’t noticed,” Erik said wryly, making Charles burst out laughing, his body warm and vibrating with mirth against Erik’s. Erik chuckled as he held Charles closer, slipping a hand under his shirt just so he could palm his warm, firm stomach. Charles only nuzzled closer to him, his chuckles low and honeyed.

Erik decided they could stand to go over at least one more script before he inevitably carried Charles outside to the gazebo to soak in the last waning bit of sun. He brushed his lips quickly against Charles’ before picking up a script at random. He perked up when he saw the title. “Well, fancy doing a Hitchcock movie?” he said with a grin.

Immediately Charles sat up in interest, resting his chin on Erik’s shoulder as a perch so he could read it from behind. “Oh, they’re doing a remake of ‘Strangers on a Train’? That’s one of my favourites!”

“I can already imagine how handsome you’d look in those Fifties suits,” Erik said fondly. “And they’ll probably want me to play the murderer, and you the ladies’ man.”

Charles’ laughter rang throughout their kitchen. “Now that’s not fair, I’m sure I would make a fairly convincing murderer,” he said, vastly amused as his fingers trailed down Erik’s shirt buttons.

“I’m sure you’d convince any jury of your innocence,” Erik retorted, sifting his fingers through Charles’ unruly hair. “In fact, half of them will probably end up wanting to bring you home to meet their mothers.”

Charles was now weak with laughter. “Well, yours seems to like me,” he said with a quirk of his lips, which of course Erik had to soundly kiss.

“Of course Mama does. You have her and everyone else under your spell,” Erik said, his smile softening. “Me most of all.”

“Guilty as charged.” Charles was cradling his face tenderly, and that was the end of the script session as Erik yanked him up, both of them tottering outside to the gazebo as the sun sank in the horizon, filling the sky with pink and gold.

* * * * *

Charles had many rituals before bedtime, and one of them was curling up in bed with a good book before nodding off. Thankfully, he had managed to incorporate Erik into this ten-year ritual of his, since Erik was extremely fond of resting his head on Charles’ lap and listening to his voice as Charles read out loud. It was a very enjoyable addition to his daily habit, having the pleasant weight of Erik’s head pillowed on his thigh so that Charles could run his fingers through Erik’s smooth, fine hair. Charles was also in the habit of sneaking quick downward peeks, admiring the way Erik’s long eyelashes would fan out over his cheekbones, or the straight, elegant slope of his nose. It was a rare
chance for Charles to see him from above, since Erik had the advantage of height.

Now they were just settling into bed, Charles sitting up and leaning back against the headboard while Erik planted a kiss on his thigh before resting his head there and using it as a pillow. Charles flipped open the well-worn copy of ‘The Once and Future King’ that they were still going through. They hadn’t gotten very far because, to be fair, Erik was very distracting most nights with his wandering kisses and casual stroking of Charles’ legs. Most reading sessions ended with Erik reaching up to capture Charles’ mouth (or Charles leaning down) and the book in question falling off the side of the bed with a ‘thump’ as the kisses grew more and more vigorous. There was one afternoon when the housekeeper had handed Charles a stack of crumpled books and told him that she had found them scattered under the bed. Charles had never blushed so hard in his life, taking the books from her. It was already bad enough that the maids had to change and wash the sheets every day.

“Charles?” Erik’s voice startled Charles out of his thoughts, anchoring him to the present moment and to the man nestled between his legs. Erik was peering up at him curiously. “Why are you blushing?”

“Nothing, my love.” Charles stroked Erik’s hair, earning himself a contented purr. It was like owning a lean, muscular pet panther. “Where did we leave off yesterday?”

“Doesn’t matter,” Erik said, rubbing his cheek against the soft fabric of Charles’ pyjama pants. “Read from wherever you want, I just like listening to your voice.”

Charles chortled, sweeping his thumb over the curve of Erik’s ear and causing a pleasant shiver. Stealing a downwards glance, Charles could see Erik’s cheek muscles flexing; he must be smiling. Humming to himself, Charles flipped through the pages, forcing himself to bite back a smile. Earlier, he had hidden a piece of paper in the book, which was actually a hilarious e-mail from Raven that he had printed out. She had sent him several choice excerpts from fanfiction she had found online about both of them, particularly the really raunchy stories. Earlier that afternoon, Charles had laughed himself silly reading these when Erik had gone out to the bank, but when Erik had returned home, Charles had come up with a better plan of sneaking these passages into their nightly reading sessions, just as a silly prank on Erik.

Finally settling on one page with a passage that he liked, Charles curled his fingers in Erik’s hair before he began to read from the book:

“They had a year of joy, twelve months of the strange heaven which the salmon know on beds of river shingle, under the gin-clear water. For twenty-four years they were guilty, but this first year was the only one which seemed like happiness. Looking back on it, when they were old, they did not remember that in this year it had ever rained or frozen. The four seasons were coloured like the edge of a rose petal for them.”

Pausing, Charles glanced down and was pleased at the enraptured look on Erik’s face. “That’s one of my favourite passages,” Erik murmured, looking up at Charles, and again Charles was struck by the pale, blue-green hue of Erik’s eyes, reminding Charles of a mood ring he had when he was a boy. “Go on, please?”

“With pleasure.” Charles almost felt bad for the surprise he was about to spring, but he honestly couldn’t wait to see Erik’s reaction. He carefully kept a straight face as he flipped the page to Raven’s e-mail and segued into a particularly saucy passage:

“I released an exhilarated sigh as he approached me, taking hold of my knees and spreading my legs apart.” Charles could feel Erik tensing on his lap, then lifting his head in confusion. “He had a predatory grin on his face, leaning down to steal a kiss before he growled, ‘I’m going to fuck you
until you’re cross-eyed, Charles,’ and then Erik bent down and--”

“Wait a minute, what?” Erik demanded, rolling over to prop himself up on his elbows, a perplexed expression on his face. “That’s certainly not in the book. Did you write that yourself?”

Charles had perfected the most angelic, innocent expression that had previously gotten him off the hook with irate directors and grumpy co-stars, and he employed it now. “I’m just reading the words that are printed here, Erik,” he said smoothly.

Of course, Erik knew him far too well to fall for that. He reached for the book. “Here, give it to me.”

Holding it out of reach, Charles grinned at Erik who had given up on reaching for it. “Now, now, darling, I’m just reading some lovely fanfiction that some fans have written about us. Let me continue and I’ll make sure there’s a lovely reward for you at the end,” Charles said persuasively, making Erik’s eyebrows jump.

After a long moment, Erik finally conceded. “Fine, continue then,” he said, but curiosity must have gotten the better of him because otherwise, Charles knew Erik would have tried to distract him with sex. Erik was now staring expectantly at him, a cynical eyebrow raised, but the way the corners of his mouth were curved up was a familiar sign that he was trying to hold back his laughter. “I promise you have my full attention,” Erik said in that soft, slightly dangerous way that made the villains in his movies quake in fear.

“Ahem.” Charles winked at him before flipping back to the section where Raven’s e-mail was nestled in between the pages. Ah, this passage that caught his eye looked particularly riveting. "I climbed onto his lap and took his giant, throbbing erection in my hand. ‘Oh, Erik. Your cock is so big,’ I moaned, unable to even wrap my fingers around the girth. ‘I’m not sure whether all of that will fit into me, but we can spend all night trying.’"

Erik’s mouth had given up the battle and he was now laughing, absently running his fingers through Charles’ hair. “This fanfiction makes us sound like sex-deprived perverts,” he muttered, making Charles chuckle. “Where did you find this?”

“Where else?” Charles retorted, and Erik rolled his eyes as they both chimed the answer at the same time: Raven.

“I should have known,” Erik muttered, as Charles laughed and wrapped his legs around Erik even tighter. Erik was now sitting fully upright, his hair mussed from Charles’ ministrations, eyes gleaming wickedly as they raked over Charles’ prone body. “Go on, then, you might as well continue.”

Charles quirked a mischievous eyebrow at him. “You sure?”

Erik slowly leaned in, and Charles swallowed the dryness in his throat when he caught a whiff of Erik’s intoxicating scent, a mix of shower foam, aftershave, and minty toothpaste. Bloody hell, why did Erik have to smell so good? Charles quickly lowered the book so that it would cover his burgeoning erection, pretending to squint down at it. Now Erik was chuckling as he spotted the tongue-in-cheek title of Raven’s e-mail, which was ‘Fifty Shades of Gay’. His breath warmed Charles’ cheek, and Charles’ gaze flickered upwards. Erik was so much closer now, smiling teasingly at Charles, his eyes a bluish green blur.

All right, fine. Charles was only human after all. He allowed Erik to tease his lips open for a slow kiss, but he couldn’t hold back a moan at the unexpected sweep of Erik’s tongue into his mouth, claiming dominance. He instinctively chased after Erik’s mouth when Erik pulled away, but he laid a

Summoning all his years of training in drama school, Charles began to read the next few lines in a clear, steady voice. “Please, my body is ready. Take me now.” Charles’ voice suddenly hitched when he felt Erik dipping his head to plant slow, wet kisses along the curve of Charles’ neck, distracting him to no end. “For God’s sake, Erik--”

“Your body definitely feels ready to me,” Erik whispered in his ear, before sucking on his earlobe, making Charles cry out and drop his book, pinned between the headboard and Erik’s muscular body. Erik’s hand was diving between his legs, seeking out his cock and pulling it out of his pyjama bottoms, giving it a few firm strokes that were agonizingly slow and entirely designed to drive Charles crazy.

“Erik,” Charles panted, bucking up wildly into Erik’s hand and unable to articulate how much he wanted Erik to just hitch his legs up and fuck him, alternating between slow, gentle thrusts and hard, urgent pumping that would have both of them screaming the walls down. In the fanfiction that Charles had read, some of the writers seemed convinced that Erik was a tough, brutal lover who was excessively fond of smacking Charles’ arse, while the others firmly believed that Erik was the type to gently cover Charles completely with his body and make love to him slowly and tenderly until they both came all over the place. Ironically, both camps had been right and wrong: Erik was composed equally of both these beasts, and which one appeared each night always depended on how Charles wanted to bait him.

From the gentle way Erik was nipping at his earlobe, it seemed Charles had scored Mr. Love-Me-Tender tonight. He grinned to himself, slipping his hands under the waistband of Erik’s pyjama pants to get a nice good grope of that muscled arse. Charles was utterly familiar with it by now just from touch alone, since he often had to grip it and hang on for dear life whenever Erik was fucking his brains out. “Didn’t you want me to finish reading the story?” Charles said wickedly, burying his nose in Erik’s hair, the familiar scent of Erik’s mint shampoo clearing his mind.

“No need to, Liebling,” Erik whispered. Charles could feel Erik lifting his head, then gripping Charles’ hips, pulling him downwards so that he was now fully supine on the bed, and Erik climbed on top of him, whipping off his pyjama top. Charles absently wondered why they even bothered wearing clothes to sleep when they practically ended up naked in bed every night anyway. He ran his hands appreciatively down Erik’s muscled torso, tracing the lines of his six pack. When he felt Erik’s hand cupping his right cheek, Charles’ gaze jumped up, and he swallowed the lump in his throat at the fire in those stormy blue eyes. It was hard not to get consumed by that very fire, by the burning intensity of Erik’s love and devotion for him. This all-consuming look of rapture Erik was giving him made Charles feel important and needed, as though he were the sole axis in Erik’s life, and Charles wanted nothing more than to be that for him. Always.

Charles rubbed his cheek against Erik’s hand as Erik chuckled, adjusting their hips together. “I think I can tell you how that story goes,” Erik said with a smirk as he gave a slow, rolling thrust against Charles’ hips, and Charles gasped when he felt the hot, thick line of Erik’s cock burning against his own. Erik leaned down and gave him little pecks on the mouth. “For example, first I’ll start by kissing you until you’re breathless and squirming under me?”

“Yes,” Charles breathed out before Erik captured his mouth, their tongues sliding together in an obscene, sensual dance that short-circuited Charles’ brain. He could hear the soft ‘thump’ of a book hitting the floor but he honestly couldn’t care less, not with the way Erik’s mouth was trying to meld itself to his. He wrapped his arms around Erik’s neck, one hand sifting through the tufts of hair on the back of Erik’s head while the other caressed his shoulders, stroking the firm muscle Erik had built
at the gym and - let’s face it - hundreds of hours of bracing himself while he fucked Charles silly.

After that deliciously searing kiss, they finally broke apart for breath, Erik’s lips reddened and kiss-swollen. Charles traced them with a grin, delighting in the knowledge that it was him who had made them this way. “So what comes next in the story?” Charles lifted a challenging eyebrow at Erik, who was grinning down at him before letting a hand slide downwards, a thumb brushing against Charles’ nipple through his pyjama top.

“Hmmm, let’s see.” Erik pretended to ponder, but instead he was just teasing Charles’ nipple even more, rubbing it until it hardened under his touch. Charles wanted him so badly to put his mouth there, but he was too busy stroking the cords of muscle along the lines of Erik’s neck and shoulders to articulate his wants. He was also interested to see what Erik would say next. “I think,” Erik said, his eyes darkening, “that the next thing to happen would me for me to grab the lube and slick you up to get you ready for me.”

“Mmm, excellent idea,” Charles agreed, wriggling under Erik’s safe, familiar weight. “Get those long, elegant fingers inside me, please.”

Erik gave him another thorough kiss before getting up to rummage in the bedside drawer for the lube, fishing out one of the many tubes that Charles had stashed there. As it was, this one was already running out (most of them were, at any point). Charles watched Erik slicking his fingers, subconsciously running his tongue over his lower lip and earning a kiss on the nose from Erik. “What was that for?” Charles asked with a broadening grin.

“It’s to distract you while I do this.” Erik’s smile turned devious when he nudged apart Charles’ legs, and of course Charles gladly spread them for Erik, letting out a low moan when he felt Erik’s fingers breaching him, the ease at which his two fingers slid in a fortunate side-effect of adjusting to Erik’s massive size.

“All right?” Erik never failed to ask him this even though this must be the 2000th time they’d made love, and Charles laughed in his hair, stroking up and down that gorgeous, muscled back.

“Come on, darling.” Charles brushed a thumb against the lush swell of Erik’s bottom lip. “You know I can take so much more than this.”

Erik’s lips closed around Charles’ thumb, sucking sensually on it while he casually fucked Charles with his fingers. Both these actions drew shocked, delighted gasps from Charles, who was squirming under Erik, impatient for Erik to get inside him right now. He moaned softly when Erik curled his fingers, expertly thrusting them up against that spot inside him. Charles wasn’t sure how much more teasing he could take. He let his free hand comb through Erik’s long fringe, tucking it behind his ear and giving Erik the most beseeching look he could manage. “Show me what happens next,” Charles purred, arching up against the apex of Erik’s hips and dragging a low moan out of him, the vibrations going through Charles’ thumb and straight to his cock. “I need you to start fucking me.”

Erik dragged his tongue and lips over Charles’ thumb and released it wetly. “Fine, just to make you happy,” Erik replied, but his besotted grin took the heat out of his words, and Charles braced himself when Erik guided his erection inside him. He bit hard on his lip when he felt the thick head of Erik’s cock breaching him, taking a second or two before he relaxed and Erik slid home inside, wringing a groan out of both of them as Erik folded Charles’ hand in his, twining their fingers together.

“Happy now?” Erik huffed out, although he started chuckling when Charles let out a shuddery breath, still trying to adjust to Erik’s girth.

“Ecstatic,” Charles said with a grin, running his other hand over the sparse hair on Erik’s chest. He
lifted his hips to wrap his legs around Erik’s waist, causing Erik to slip in deeper as a delicious spasm ripped through Charles’ body. “Oh God, Erik...”

Erik moaned against his skin, squeezing their clasped hands together and starting to thrust harder and harder, making Charles’ toes curl against his sweaty back. The bed was beginning to creak as Charles held onto Erik’s shoulder hard enough to bruise, fighting for breath as Erik pounded into him, their hips slapping together, their bodies locked tight. Charles gasped, ridiculously thrilled at the sensation of being pinned to the bed like this under the weight of Erik’s lithe, muscular body.

“Harder, Erik, please.”

Erik’s mouth was now curling into a smug grin, which intensified when Charles couldn’t hold back a loud, wanton moan; a direct result of Erik grabbing his hip and thrusting against his sensitive prostate so mercilessly that he saw stars. “You can’t get enough of my cock, can you?” Erik asked breathlessly, teeth scraping against Charles’ neck. Normally Charles would have a witty rejoinder, but not when Erik was fucking him halfway off the bed. “Bloody hell, Erik,” Charles said through gritted teeth, “is this a line from one of the stories we were talking about earlier?”

“Maybe,” Erik said with a laugh as he kissed along Charles’ jaw. “But it also doesn’t help that you can’t seem to keep your voice down. I think the people in Times Square can hear you.”

Charles was breathless with laughter and arousal, curling himself even more around Erik. “It’s your fault for not letting go of my arse.”

There was a possessive glint in Erik’s eye. “That’s because it’s mine.”

Something naughty occurred to Charles, and he decided that Erik was in a good enough mood to take such a gamble. Charles looked up at Erik’s reddened face and arched a challenging eyebrow. Baiting the beast was his guilty pleasure. “Your expression is the same one Logan had when he was staring at me on Kimmel’s show.”

The guttural sound that this elicited from Erik was so loud that even Charles was alarmed for a moment, but that alarm quickly dissipated when Erik pinned Charles’ arms down and started driving his cock inside Charles so hard that Charles forgot how to breathe, whimpering in ecstasy with each sharp thrust. “God, Erik, oh fuck--”

“Mine, not his. Mine,” Erik growled, dipping his head down to completely ravage Charles’ mouth, leaving him raw and bitten.

Charles moaned into the kiss when he felt Erik possessively wrapping his hand around Charles’ cock and stroking it in time with his thrusts, making Charles dizzy with the dual sensations. Erik slammed into him even harder, a bruising crush of flesh and bones that sent him screaming with pleasure. “Yours,” Charles gasped. “And you are mine.”

He slid a hand down Erik’s sweaty back, squeezing his eyes shut and letting everything that was Erik surround and envelop him. Erik’s body, covering his own from head to toe. Erik’s clean, masculine scent of sweat and soap, as well as the heady smell of sex that clung to the air, intensified in Charles’ nostrils, Erik’s large, warm hand stroking him to orgasm, while Erik’s cock filled him the way Erik himself filled Charles’ soul, the long-missing piece finally fitting in its home. And Erik’s mouth, blotting kisses all over his, alternating between bites and soothing nuzzles. Charles couldn’t believe this man was in his arms, and he hitched his legs up higher, clinging onto Erik for support.

“Erik, I’m going to--” Charles was cut off by another kiss, sweeter and tender this time, and Charles
sank into it, moaning again when Erik’s thrusts became erratic, a sure sign that he was about to come as well.

“Charles—” Erik’s broken cry was mingled with a groan as he clung to Charles as tight as possible, holding him close as he spilled inside him. Charles could feel the burst of warmth, his hand joining Erik’s in stroking his leaking cock. Erik recovered just enough to properly kiss Charles again, and Charles came moaning into Erik’s mouth, his body jerking under Erik’s as he emptied everything he had between both of them. Erik’s head dropped down, their foreheads pressed together as they fought to regain their breath, one hand entwined with his while the other smeared come across Charles’ stomach.

“Now wasn’t real sex so much better than reading one of those stories?” Erik said, still panting a little. Charles couldn’t help but be smug; Erik was very fit, so if he was out of breath, Charles must have given him quite a workout.

“Clearly you haven’t read the one where we have sex on the ceiling,” Charles said teasingly, patting Erik on his backside when he snorted. Erik pretended to sigh in defeat and made as if to pull out, but Charles tightened his hold on Erik’s hand. “Wait, just...stay here a while? Please?”

Erik’s soft kiss felt like a benediction. “Anything you want, Charles. Besides, we’re supposed to spend all night trying to make me fit inside you, anyway.”

The laugh that came out of Charles was hoarse and surprised.

* * * * *

To be honest, Charles often preferred the informality of award shows like the MTV Movie Awards and the VMAs, as opposed to the SAG Awards and the Oscars, which were boring and stuffy in comparison. Charles faithfully attended the MTV Movie Awards year after year, bringing either Moira or Raven as a date. This year, he had never been more pleased - and proud - to attend with Erik by his side. They had both dressed simply enough, Charles in a tweed suit and a matching waistcoat. Erik had on a Dolce & Gabbana white tee with black jeans, and he had thrown on his favourite brown leather jacket (a present from Charles) over his ensemble. It was not fair how sinfully good Erik looked like this, all tall, lean and dangerous, smirking at the cameras with his arm possessively hooked around Charles’ waist. Charles couldn’t resist keeping a hand tucked inside Erik’s back pocket, his palm warmed by the heat of Erik’s tight arse.

“Don’t think I don’t know you’re using that as an excuse to grope me,” Erik whispered in his ear as they sauntered down the red carpet together, waving at their fans. Charles shivered as he fought the urge to pounce on Erik and tear that gorgeous leather jacket off him.

“Now, now, darling, why would I need an excuse to grope you?” Charles whispered back, looking up at Erik through lidded eyes. “You’re mine, and God help anyone who isn’t aware of that.”

The heat in Erik’s gaze was palpable. “You’re so easy for me, aren’t you?” he murmured, bumping their hips together and causing a volley of screams from the red carpet crowds.

Charles grinned before playfully singing in Erik’s ear, “Easy like Sunday morning,” and making Erik laugh out loud, scooping Charles even closer.

After a few candid interviews and recording a soundbite for MTV, an usher led them inside the theatre, where most people were either already seated, or standing around and catching up with old friends. Charles was amused to see Slash with his trademark top hat and glasses, chatting with Ke$Ha and Terry Crews. Over the years at various award ceremonies when he had been keeping an eye out
for Erik, Charles had been amused to observe all kinds of celebrities mixing together and knowing one another in the weirdest ways. Nothing really surprised him anymore, really.

The usher brought him and Erik to the aisle seats in the second center row, and Charles waved at Robert Pattinson who was sitting nearby. Rob was unshaven and his shirt was untucked, but he otherwise looked fine. He nodded back at Charles with a little smile of acknowledgement, while a rather subdued, unsmiling Kristen was beside him. Despite the scandal, Charles had guessed that Kristen would be in attendance, because she and Rob had always been mainstays of the MTV Movie Awards. He felt a little sorry for her, but not that sorry. Charles could never envision himself cheating on Erik, or vice versa. The thought was far too strange and alien.

“Scheiße,” he heard Erik mutter, and Charles turned to face a cavalcade of TV cameras and crew surrounding their seats, filming their every move. Erik’s hands were taut and stiff in his grasp now, and Charles gave them an encouraging squeeze before smiling at the cameras and giving them a little wave.

“Hey Charles, give us a little something for the pre-show highlights?” one of the crew suggested, and Charles shrugged before leaning over and coaxing Erik into a chaste, closed-mouth kiss which Erik slowly warmed up to. At least the camera crew seemed pleased, and were now getting ready to move on. Thankfully, Will Ferrell and Mike Myers had just made their grand entrance into the theatre, and the MTV crew took off in a hurry, leaving a relieved Charles and Erik huddled in their seats.

“I don’t know how I survived all this before you came along,” Erik said with a sigh, rubbing a thumb over Charles’ knuckles. “I had always just gritted my teeth and bore with it.”

“I know, darling.” Charles nuzzled against Erik’s neck, relaxing against the broad expanse of his shoulder. “But who says publicity can’t be fun? I think I’ve proven you wrong there.”

Erik shot him a deadpan look, but the corners of his mouth were twitching. “You’re lucky you’re good in the sack, you know?”

Charles couldn’t hold back the smug smirk. “You have your tricks, I have mine.”

Erik’s eyebrows shot up as he huffed in laughter. “I see, so you’re admitting that you use sex to convince me.”

“Really, Erik.” Charles put on the most innocent look he could manage, considering how he was holding back the urge to burst out laughing. “I’m surprised it took you this long to figure it out.”

At that point, Erik erupted in mirth, his body shaking with laughter as he hid his face in Charles’ neck. It was infectious, and Charles clapped a hand over his mouth to stifle his chuckles, even as they were attracting stares from some of the other celebrities seated near them. Eventually their laughter subsided as the host announced backstage that the audience should be seated as the awards would start soon, and Charles released Erik, pressing a kiss to his temple.

Chuckling deeply, Erik’s arms enveloped him in a tight embrace, and Charles could hear Erik taking in a deep whiff of his hair. “I always knew you were using me for sex,” Erik said, his voice muffled by Charles’ hair.

“But I only use my powers for good,” Charles replied with a grin. “I have a very strict code of ethics, you see.”

Erik’s deep chuckle resonated against his skin. “So the routine that we practised in case we won Best Kiss is for the purposes of ‘good’, then?”
“Of course it is.” Charles’ grin turned wicked. “I always believe in putting on a good show, don’t you?”

Erik’s amused expression and a warm kiss was his answer.

* * * * *

The awards were, of course, predictable. Erik could immediately guess the winners of each category based on how loud the audience’s screams were whenever each nominee’s name was announced. Still, Charles had a very good point: the MTV awards were infinitely more interesting than the Oscars. Erik very much doubted that the Academy would allow him to attend the ceremony dressed in a leather jacket. Also, MTV had come up with some very creative ways of introducing each category which all tied into the main theme.

Now, the Best Kiss category was up, and Erik could feel Charles’ hand tighten in his grasp. Erik was strangely a little nervous, although he groaned when those idiots One Direction stumbled out onto the stage to present the award. “Oh, look Erik, it’s your favourite boyband,” Charles whispered with a smirk, and if they weren’t sitting so upfront, Erik would have been tempted to put Charles over his knee and spank him.

The screams in the audience were reaching a deafening pitch now, and Erik almost had to cover his ears as the boyband members introduced themselves as well as the nominees. His irritation dissipated as the lights darkened and everyone focused on the screen, where MTV had some kittens dressed as the band K.I.S.S. Ah, very clever. Erik found himself grinning, tugging Charles closer when he heard Charles’ deep chuckle. Their fellow nominees were hard to beat, and judging from the screams that Rob and Kristen received, Erik supposed that they would be the ones taking home the award.

“And the winners for Best Kiss are...” The members of One Direction were climbing over one another to read the envelope, and the one with long curly hair whooped before shouting, “Charles Xavier and Erik Lehnsherr for ‘First Class’!”

Erik’s jaw dropped when the audience erupted in deafening applause and catcalls, and he was so stunned that he was only aware of Charles’ tight grip on his hand. And then, “Erik, darling, we have to go up on stage,” he heard Charles say, before he realised the camera crew had run over and were now trained on him and Charles. ‘What Makes You Beautiful’ was now booming throughout the auditorium, causing even more screaming and cheering. Erik was in far too good a mood to mind; after all, they’d actually won. He stood up shakily with a grin, remembering what he and Charles had rehearsed yesterday. The thing was, he hadn’t expected to win the award, seeing how the Twilight franchise usually swept this category every year.

The camera crew seemed confused when Charles broke off and headed to the far left of the stage, while Erik made his way to the opposite end. When he climbed on stage, he could see Charles already shedding his tweed jacket, extraordinarily handsome in his blue shirt and grey waistcoat. Erik shrugged off his own leather jacket, looking over at Charles and smiling dangerously. He stretched out a hand, beckoning for Charles to come forth.

Charles ran a pink tongue over his bottom lip, striding over to meet Erik in the center of the stage. Erik was gaining momentum, his gaze hungry and fixed on that sweet red mouth that he could never get enough of. He could still remember kissing Charles for the first time, both of them devouring each other in front of the cameras and Bryan and now, the whole world. It had been a primal kiss, one where Erik’s first instinct had been to mark his territory. Charles. Mine. Don’t touch.

Now was his chance to relive that kiss.
As Charles leapt up and pounced on him, Erik neatly caught his thighs with practised ease, keeping Charles lifted so he could wrap his legs around Erik. Which he did, right before he bent down and claimed Erik’s mouth, camera flashes going off like lightning around the theatre and the audience screaming with delight. But all he could really think about was how soft and plush Charles’ lips were against his, and how that sweet pink tongue was currently exploring his mouth.

And, in spite of the noise, Erik could hear it: a soft, lilting moan that Charles made, his hands tangling in Erik’s hair and tugging on it, a very clear *I-need-to-fuck-you-right-now* signal that made Erik want to carry him offstage and just take Charles on the nearest flat surface. Since that was impossible, Erik resigned himself to gripping Charles even tighter, hanging onto him even after Charles pulled away for breath with a grin.

Tottering to the podium with Charles still clinging onto him, Erik narrowed his eyes at the overeager One Direction members who were applauding their little stunt. Letting Charles down onto his feet again, Erik grudgingly said thanks as he took over the mic, while Charles happily shook hands with all five of them before accepting the award. All around the amphitheatre, both their faces were broadcast on several jumbo screens, and Erik couldn’t help staring at the nearest one. Charles looked so happy, so alive, his eyes a clear, blue twinkle, his cheeks tinged with pink.

Erik waited until the screaming and cheering died down a little. “Thank you very much,” he said tentatively, gesturing towards the golden popcorn that Charles was cradling in his arms. “We didn’t expect to win this, we thought it would surely go to the Twilight couple.”

More screams, and Erik grinned when he spotted Rob’s and Kristen’s relieved, smiling expressions. Maybe they were relieved they didn’t have to get on stage and kiss in public, after the recent scandal. It was probably for the best.

He felt an arm sliding around his waist, and he turned to find Charles entirely pressed up against him, gazing at Erik as though Erik were the only person in the amphitheatre with him. Unable to resist, Erik tipped his head down and caught that mischievous smile in a sweet kiss, eliciting a volley of hysterical screaming. Charles was now blushing again, fumbling for the mic, and Erik planted a hand in the small of Charles’ back in a silent show of support.

“Thank you, everyone,” Charles said a little shyly at first, and the girls in the audience went berserk. “It’s really nice that the first award that our movie won is one that we’ve won together, and we have you, the fans, to thank for that.”

More applause and flailing, and Erik heard someone scream, ‘Charles, marry me!’ Smirking, Erik pulled Charles closer to him. *Not if I get there first,* he thought.

Charles continued without skipping a beat as though he hadn’t heard it. “I have to say that from personal experience, Erik really is a fantastic kisser,” he said, a sly smile dawning on his face as the audience went completely nuts. “He is definitely the best co-star I have ever kissed.”

“You should make sure of that,” a voice said behind them, and Erik turned around, raising an eyebrow at five identical grins. Damn, he had forgotten that the annoying boyband was still there. They did have a good point, though.

Now the audience was shouting, ‘Kiss him! Kiss him!’ and Erik shot Charles a darkly amused look. “Well, you heard them,” Erik said dryly.

“You’re such an exhibitionist,” Charles murmured, before he looped his arms around Erik’s neck and brought him down for another fuck-me-now kiss that practically emptied Erik’s brain, sending all his bloodflow rushing south as Charles grinded his hips wantonly against Erik’s. Smiling into the
kiss at the audience’s shrieking, Erik grabbed Charles’ thighs and broke the kiss, breathlessly instructing Charles to hop up and fling his legs around Erik. Of course Charles did so, and Erik caught him, carrying Charles backstage while everyone clapped and Charles brandished the golden popcorn, laughing like a loon. Erik took in a deep whiff of Charles’ scent, the audience forgotten behind them even as the camera crew trailed after them all the way back to the dressing room. Charles promptly slammed the door.

Erik, of course, only ever had Charles on his mind, like always.

* * * * *
Sebastian considered himself a very fair man. Throughout his career, he had been equally willing to give chances to all sorts of actors, from ambitious newbies to washed-up veterans. Erik Lehnsherr had been his one main gamble who had paid off handsomely, at least until he had shacked up with that Xavier fellow and willingly outed themselves to the public. Sebastian had been prepared for that to spell the end of Erik’s career as an action star. The movie-going masses traditionally liked their action heroes rugged and manly, and while Erik still very much possessed these two qualities, it was hard to imagine Erik sweeping a floppy-haired British twit off his feet and running off into the sunset with him instead of some buxom blonde actress.

Which was why Sebastian was more surprised than anyone else when he caught wind of the Oscar buzz surrounding Erik’s and Charles’ performances in ‘First Class’. It started with the rave reviews at first, but Sebastian started paying more attention when other producers would thump him on the back and congratulate him on surely bagging at least two Oscars. By the time he was having lunch with Jerry Bruckheimer, who wistfully wished he hadn’t passed on the ‘First Class’ script, Sebastian was convinced that it was worth a shot to submit Erik, and possibly Charles. After much discussion with the studio and executive producers, Sebastian decided to submit Erik for Best Actor, and Charles for the supporting role.

After telling the news to Emma, who had actually given him a rare smile, for once, Sebastian was quite satisfied with himself, at least until Erik barged into his office one day like a raging bull, followed by Sebastian’s flailing, panicked secretary. “I’m sorry, Sir, I couldn’t stop him—” she stammered.

Sebastian held up a hand. “It’s all right, Linda, Erik is always welcome.” Once his secretary fled, Sebastian leaned back in his swivel chair and smiled at Erik. “What’s the matter? I presume Emma has told you the good news.”

Erik’s nostrils flared. “Good news? You mean the part where you submit Charles’ name for Best Supporting Actor?”

Sebastian was utterly mystified. “Yes, what of it? I assumed you two would be happy to hear about that.”

Erik slammed a hand on the table, startling Sebastian. “I didn’t care about myself, but you damn well should have submitted Charles for a Best Actor nomination.”

Sebastian’s frown deepened. “Now why would I do that?”

Erik seemed utterly stupefied, staring at Shaw with an open mouth. “Because Charles is a better actor than me, that’s why. Change the nomination and put him in my place, right now.”

Sebastian silently cursed this Xavier fellow under his breath. Before Xavier had come along, Erik had rarely questioned Sebastian or demanded anything of him. Now Erik looked like he was entirely capable of crumpling Sebastian into a ball with his bare hands and stuffing him under his own desk. “I’m afraid I can’t do that, Erik,” Sebastian said coolly. “Nominations are final.”

Erik’s jaw was taut and stiff, his eyes blazing with fury. “Then you’re doing Charles - and me - a great disservice.”

“A great disservice’?” Sebastian echoed with a snort. “Is Xavier making you do this, Erik?”

“Lucky for you, he isn’t,” Erik growled. “He assured me he didn’t mind because he didn’t want to
go up against me in the same category. But I don’t care, because I want him to get the due respect and recognition he deserves.”

“Too bad you can’t change anything,” Sebastian said shortly. “Now get out of my office.”

Erik’s expression was absolutely livid, his fists clenched. “Not until you apologise for what you did to Charles.”

“Me, apologise? Maybe you should remember your place, boy,” Sebastian snapped, and Erik was almost shaking with fury. There was the high possibility that he would have to call security, but not before Sebastian said what he had to say. “You were a nobody when I found you. I saw the promise in you, I saw the potential. Everything I did, I did for you. To unlock your talent, to make you embrace it.”

Erik was still seething with rage, his shoulders heaving up and down with the deep breaths he was taking. But his face was stricken with a crashing realisation filled with dismay. He had been responsible for Erik’s career, and now Erik looked like the dog that bit the hand which had fed him.

Sebastian decided now was the best time to go on the offensive, to win Erik back to his side. "And you're just starting to scratch the surface. Think how much further we could go, together. You and me, son. This world could be ours.”

Sebastian now had a hand stretched out, an obvious offering at keeping the peace. But Erik only looked flatly at his outstretched hand, not at all attempting to grasp or shake it. Then he looked back up at Sebastian, his mouth a firm, grim line.

“I know I owe you a lot,” Erik said in a low, even voice that had just a touch of menace to it. "Everything you did, made me stronger. Made me the actor I am today. It's the truth. I've known it all along. You are my creator.”

Sebastian’s hand wavered, and he lowered it as Erik only gave him a scoff. “But you slighted Charles. You know he deserves the nomination just as much as I do, if not more.”

Sebastian couldn’t believe this. “Erik--”

But only the sound of the door slamming answered him.

* * * * *

The problem with their bed, Erik had realised, was that it was too luxurious, a blissful cocoon of Egyptian cotton sheets, fluffy down pillows that smelled of Charles’ shampoo, and a silky duvet that kept them warm in cold weather. It made it extra hard to get up in the mornings, particularly when Erik would stir awake and find a warm body wrapped around him, or his nose buried in the soft, thick silk of Charles’ hair, their legs tangled together. Resisting Charles was futile.

It was through a thick haze of sleep that he felt Charles gently shaking him awake, then peppering his face with kisses. “Darling?”

“Mmmh?” Erik cracked an eye open, groaning inwardly when he realised it was still dark outside. The red numbers on their digital alarm clock were glowing brightly enough that Erik could see it was 5 in the morning here in LA. Why was Charles waking him up so early? “What is it? Sex?”

A laugh, then he felt Charles’ warm lips on his forehead. “Get up, sleepyhead, I have news. Excellent, excellent news.”
Blinking blearily at him, Erik struggled to focus and pay attention to what Charles was saying. He could feel Charles practically buzzing with excitement beside him. “What news?” Erik asked with a yawn, propping himself up with an elbow. It was only now that Erik realised Charles had his phone in hand, the little oblong screen glowing in the dark. “Who are you talking to, Liebling?”

Charles winked at him, his fingers sifting through Erik’s sleep-mussed hair. “I’m on the phone with Emma and Raven, and they have the most wonderful news.”

The realisation hit Erik like a thunderbolt. “You got nominated?” Erik said hopefully, unaware that his fingers were digging into Charles’ arms in excitement.

“Erik, we both were,” Charles declared with the biggest smile, dropping his phone and rolling over to snog Erik soundly. Shocked and beyond stunned, Erik returned the kiss in a daze, at least until he could hear muffled shouting coming from the speaker of Charles’ abandoned phone.

“Hey, perverts!” Erik heard Emma yelling over the line, so he reluctantly broke away from the drugging kiss, picking up Charles’ phone.

“Thanks for the good news, now go away,” Erik growled, his voice still hoarse with sleepiness.

“Ingrates,” Emma said scornfully, while he could hear Raven laughing in the background. “Why do I even bother calling?”

“If you want to listen to me and Charles ‘congratulating’ each other, you’re more than welcome to stay on the line,” Erik replied, chuckling when he heard Emma’s hurried “bye” before the line was cut off. Tossing it aside, he returned his attention to Charles, who was practically vibrating with excitement, kissing a path up to his earlobe.

“I told you that you would get nominated,” Charles’ voice in his ear was teasing, joyful. “And you didn’t believe me.”

Erik blinked sleepily at him. “But you got nominated too, Liebling.”

Charles waved a dismissive hand at him. “A bonus. But more than anything else, I really wanted it for you.”

“Congratulations are in order for both of us, then.” Erik was still fighting off the last vestiges of sleep, trying to let the news sink in properly. An actual nomination each for both of them, and neither he nor Charles had ever received such honours from the Academy before. Clearly, this was the result of them working together, complementing each other in countless ways. Then again, Erik’s mother was always fond of saying that Charles brought out the best in him.

Erik shifted onto his side so that he could face Charles, whose eyes were wide and pensive. “This is all because of you,” Erik told him, running a hand through his hair. “Not once in my career have I ever gotten a nomination, until you came along. Unless you count my Razzie nominations, of course.”

Charles laughed, scooting even closer to Erik. “I’m afraid I’m not responsible for those, darling.”

“Of course not.” Erik buried his nose in the curve of Charles’ shoulder. He smelled like soap and salt, and Erik inhaled his scent deeply. Nothing ever smelled as good as Charles. “You’re responsible only for the good parts.”

“You utter mushball.” Charles sounded amused, and Erik could feel Charles’ fingers sifting through his hair. “Feel like celebrating the good news?”
Now Erik pressed a kiss against that pale, freckled shoulder. “With you, I always feel like celebrating.”

* * * * *

It was easy to tell when awards season was coming, because all the major fashion houses would be calling to offer their latest designs for Erik to parade down the red carpet. He usually stuck to Armani out of loyalty, and occasionally he would put on Christian Dior because Charles claimed he liked running his fingers over the fabric. Charles himself often stuck to Burberry, which suited Erik fine because, in his opinion, there was nothing better than an Englishman wearing a British designer. The only thing possibly better was peeling said suit off the aforementioned Englishman.

Now that their wardrobe was settled, Erik looked forward to attending all these with Charles on his arm. It was wholly different from his past experiences where he had been forced to attend, either going stag or bringing his mother. This time, the whole experience might actually be fun, especially if Charles won something. Then again, Charles was the type of man who made everything fun, which was why people liked being around him.

As usual, the Golden Globes kicked off awards season with style and pizzazz, and Erik was very grateful for the more relaxed, casual atmosphere. Many industry people wanted to say hi to Charles, and he happily obliged with Erik staunchly beside him, refusing to let go of Erik for even a second while he caught up with his old co-stars and directors. Most of them only smiled at Erik, although he was on the receiving end of a few curious looks and a long, envious one from an actress whom he suspected had a bit of a crush on Charles during filming. The crestfallen expression on her face when she looked at their joined hands was obvious, but then Erik couldn’t find it in himself to be jealous. If he had lost Charles to someone else, he would be completely inconsolable.

Mostly everyone from the principal cast and crew of ‘First Class’ was in attendance at the Globes, including Sean and Alex who had brought along Moira and Darwin. Camera crews started to orbit them, following them around like vultures. Erik kept an eye just in case any of them started harassing Charles, but the media at award shows were usually more restrained, as opposed to a pack of paps lying in wait outside a grocery store. Every now and then, Charles would look over and give him the sweetest, sunniest smile, and Erik didn’t even have to think about returning it, his lips curving up of their own volition, savouring the sight of Charles in his navy Burberry suit.

As Erik expected, ‘First Class’ did not pick up any of the acting awards, most of the awards going to the cast of ‘Lincoln’ and ‘The Master’. Erik was equally pessimistic about their Best Picture nomination, but he was gladly proven wrong. The applause was thunderous when ‘First Class’ was announced as the winner for Best Picture. Erik was stunned when the words first echoed throughout the auditorium, and then Shaw was heading up to the stage and Charles was tugging him up, pressing kisses all over his face and leaping into his arms. Alex and Sean were hugging each other in near tears and running up to the stage as well, waving at their respective partners.

Of course, it was Shaw who monopolised the thank-you speech, talking about the next era in filmmaking and cinema, and Erik spotted Emma in the audience, rolling her eyes while someone beside her almost nodded off. Grinning to himself, Erik simply kept his arm around Charles’ waist and when the mic was passed around, he simply said, “Thank you.”

Thankfully, there was no Shaw at the Screen Actors’ Guild awards, so Erik and Charles were the sole representatives for ‘First Class’. After having failed to collect an award at the Globes, Erik honestly saw it as an excuse to grope Charles in public and watch other actors win the accolades while having a good time.

No one was more shocked than him when they announced his win for ‘Outstanding Performance by
a Male Actor in a Leading Role’. It was only when Charles grabbed him and kissed him soundly that he realised he had to go on stage to receive his award, and he made his way there in a daze. Kissing Meryl on both cheeks, he quietly received the award with shaking hands. It was an odd mix of elation and sorrow; while he had been extremely flattered with his win, he had wanted it even more for Charles, who was the truly deserving one.

He managed an awkward speech, thanking Charles and his parents, of course. It was a little hard for Erik to concentrate, what with the way Charles was gazing up at him, absolute love and a spark of pride in his eyes, and it was something that would be forever ingrained in him. Returning to his seat later, Erik firmly placed the award on Charles’ lap, as if to share it, then kissed the back of Charles’ hand gently. They held onto each other tightly, all the way until the ceremony was over, and they proceeded to have a hell of a time at the after-party. There wasn’t much Erik could remember of that night’s debauchery, except for making out with an equally drunk Charles in a dark coatroom at the venue while the rest of the world carried on without them.

They recovered in time to head back to London, where Charles had been nominated for a BAFTA, and Erik was extremely confident that Charles would go home with the prize now that he was on home ground. “Oh Erik, there are so many other actors who are far more deserving,” Charles said when Erik told him this in the limo. “I won’t be taking anything back with me.”

Erik had been never more glad to see Charles proven wrong when, later on, he scooped up the BAFTA award for ‘Best Actor in a Supporting Role’. Charles was still in disbelief even during the after-party, clutching his award and surrounded by well-wishers and camera flashes. He looked flustered, but ecstatic, and Erik thought this warmth in his chest was far superior to the feeling of winning an award for himself. Seeing Charles this happy and finally getting his due recognition was like winning the lottery ten times over. Erik gladly let well-wishers whisk Charles away, contented to stand in the sidelines for the evening with a drink while Charles basked in adoration.

“Where’s the man of the hour?” Raven asked when she came by, lifting a flute of champagne from a passing waiter’s tray.

Erik took a generous swig from his own half-empty glass. “Helen Mirren kidnapped him a while ago, I think they’re over at the canapés table,” he said, gesturing with his glass. Sure enough, an embarrassed but giddy Charles was posing for pictures with Helen Mirren and Judi Dench, while Daniel Craig was snapping pictures with his iPhone. The BAFTAs after-party was not as rambunctious as the one for MTV or the Globes, but the Brits were definitely having their fun.

Raven was now openly smirking as she followed Erik’s gaze. “Be careful, they might want to bring him home and introduce him to their granddaughters.”

Erik couldn’t help chuckling. “I can imagine Charles being pinched on the cheeks by a gaggle of old ladies and young giggling girls,” he said wryly, signalling a waiter over to deposit his empty glass. He was about to make another joke when he felt a tap on his shoulder, and he turned to face a smiling Tom Hiddleston towering over him. “Tom! Good to meet you again.”

“You’re looking very well!” Tom patted him heartily on the back, while Raven smiled and excused herself after saying hi. “Congratulations to Charles on his win, though, where is the bugger?”

“Surrounded by his fanclub,” Erik replied, pointing him out to Tom, who was shaking his head with a huge grin. “Let’s get a drink while we catch up.” Erik guided Tom to the open bar, gesturing for two glasses of scotch.

“It’s all right, my good man, I shouldn’t imbibe quite so much,” Tom said with a wave of his hand, and Erik shrugged, tipping Tom’s share back as well. No point wasting good scotch.
Tom was watching him with a huge, knowing grin. He had what Raven called ‘anime eyes’ - large, bright, and expressive - although they could never compare to Charles’, at least in Erik’s opinion (which he kept to himself). Now those eyes were scrutinising Erik closely. “Celebrating Charles’ big win tonight?” Tom asked with a smirk.

“You know it,” Erik said with a smile he simply couldn’t hold back. “He’s such an amazing actor and I’m so glad that he is finally getting the recognition he deserves.” Maybe it was the scotch loosening his tongue, but he just couldn’t stop waxing lyrical about Charles’ talent. He rested his elbow on the bartop, leaning against it as the image of Charles blushing and accepting his BAFTA award replayed in his mind over and over again. “Charles has a way of just entering a room and commanding every last ounce of your attention, and he does it in such a subtle, persuasive way,” Erik said, the admiration clear in his voice. “He is one of those ageless actors who knows how to use his eyes, his hands, his body language to convey something meaningful.”

Tom was nodding with a rather indulgent smile, then his eyes slid to the side to focus on something behind Erik. Curious, Erik turned and realised Charles was standing behind him, his eyes so wide and blue and guileless as he stared at Erik, his bottom lip tucked beneath his teeth. He looked so touched that Erik felt rather embarrassed, wondering how much Charles had heard. “Hello, Liebling,” he ventured, just to test the waters.

Tom’s laugh was long and loud as Charles flung himself at Erik and attacked his mouth ruthlessly, hooking his arms around Erik’s neck and valiantly attempting to scale his body. Erik’s protests were muffled by Charles’ soft, sweet moans, and it didn’t take long for Erik to forget where they were and why he wanted to protest in the first place. When Charles finally pulled his mouth away, Erik was gasping for breath and grinning madly at the same time. “I guess you overheard what I said?”

“Of course,” Charles said, adjusting both their bodies so that his hips were lined up with Erik’s. They both heard a choked-off noise, and Erik turned to find Tom pretending to gag.

“If it's all the same to you, I think I'll have that drink now,” Tom said somberly, making Charles burst out laughing while Erik rolled his eyes and signalled to the bartender for another round of scotch.

* * * * *
It had been a whirlwind couple of weeks between the BAFTAs and the Oscars, a mad dash for interviews and fitting sessions and ridiculous photoshoots from the second they had landed in LAX.
In his darkest moments, Erik had considered simply taking the money and his dignity and just getting the hell out. The only thing keeping him from doing that was of course Charles, who never really seemed to mind any of the bullshit that came with show business, so Erik had sucked it up, trying his best not to lose his patience as that what’s-his-face celebrity hairstylist Emma had scheduled them with wasted three hours of his time trimming off half an inch of hair. At least Charles had been keeping him company as he waited in the chair right beside him for his turn, which of course had ended up as another four hours of his life that Erik would never get back. By some act of divine intervention, neither he nor Charles had been forced into presenting any awards or being involved in the opening skit, and Erik had been immensely relieved to not have to be put through the unspeakable torture that was the Oscar dress rehearsals. Despite everything, he had somehow survived the gauntlet. In Erik’s opinion, the fact that it he would be done with the insanity this time tomorrow was reason enough to celebrate.

“Erik, you don’t have to look quite so smug about it,” Charles said, shoving at Erik’s knee lightly when Erik affected a look of innocence.

They were in Erik’s bedroom getting ready for the Oscars, and Shaw had sent Angel over to take care of their hair and makeup for the event. She had already finished with Erik, and he was now leaning against the dressing table, watching her work her magic on Charles in amusement. Erik raised his hands in mock surrender. “I apologise for my appalling lack of self-control this morning. This is me looking contrite and very ashamed of my terrible behaviour.”

Although, upon reflection, Erik was honestly not sorry at all. He had always thought Charles possessed enough enthusiasm to make up for Erik’s lack thereof, and Erik was ever contented to simply take a step back while Charles entertained reporters or fawned over fans on the street. However, the Charles he’d found in his arms this morning had been a completely different creature altogether, a bundle of unsuppressed eagerness, not unlike a child on Christmas Day, counting down the minutes to when they could get dressed for the big party. Erik adored having Charles that hopeful and deliriously happy, so when Charles had kissed him in their living room, giddy with excitement as he declared that today could be one of the best days of their lives, what else was Erik supposed to do besides take him right then and there on the faux bear rug? Towards the end, Charles had slung one leg over Erik’s shoulder, his knee pressed against his own chest while his other leg gripped the small of Erik’s back, and half-laughed, half-gasped when Erik had thrust into him particularly hard, choking out something about ruining Winnie and being the first pretzel ever to get a rug burn. Erik had huffed out unintelligibly, unconsciously sinking his teeth into Charles’ neck as they both came, and had later silently thanked the Academy for the fucking amazing sex.

“Baby, you’re smirking,” Angel said when she stole a glance, giggling as she went back to concealing the angry love bite on Charles’ throat.

Charles laughed as well, and gave Erik’s knee a fond squeeze. “Fortunately for you, darling, the Academy has already voted.”

Charles was staring up at him with such conviction in his eyes that Erik let himself get swept along for one sweet moment, even though he knew he didn’t have a snowball’s chance in hell of winning. He grinned and leaned in, cupping Charles’ cheek with one hand, gentle and comforting, and placed a kiss to his forehead.

Erik flinched when that earned him a sharp tap on the back of his wrist with the handle of a powder brush, courtesy of Angel. “I said air kisses only tonight or you’re going to smudge everything. And if I catch either of you running your fingers through each other’s hair before the red carpet, I’ll burn your hands off,” Angel harrumphed before lightly dusting Charles’ neck. “There, all done.”
“Thank you, Angel. I promise to try my best to keep my hands off Erik for the next hour,” Charles announced as he got up, offering her a bright smile and a warm hug.

He followed silently as Charles showed her out of their bedroom. “Best of luck to you cats,” she said with a tilt of her head, blowing a kiss each to both of them. They thanked her and Erik nodded goodbye, and then she was on her way, sashaying down the corridor towards the stairs.

Erik strode towards their bed to pick up Charles’ silk bow tie, faintly aware of the sounds of Charles closing the door behind him. Charles had made his way over by the time Erik turned around, fingers busy as they buttoned the collar of his double-cuffed white shirt. Erik smiled in approval, slipping the bow tie around Charles’ collar and knotting it in the front. “Mein Gott, Charles. You look magnificent,” Erik said as he ran his hands slowly down the black silk shawl collar of Charles’ tuxedo, glad that they were finally alone together.

It was taking everything he had not to rip Charles’ clothes off, and Erik had to remember that Giorgio Armani himself had designed their tuxes for them, so the least he could do was show a little respect for the threads. Charles had been delighted when they’d received the call, going on in the background extendedly about how wonderful it would be to finally match on the red carpet. Erik had been unable to keep the laughter out of his voice when he told Giorgio that, yes, Charles was not opposed to wearing him for the Oscars. It had taken many sessions of fittings and alterations, during which Erik had had to occasionally drag Charles away and personally engage Giorgio in conversation for fear that Mama would disown him for allowing the old Italian designer to adopt Charles before her. It had all been worth it just for the smile on Charles’ face each time he asked Erik if he looked all right, and it was really just a bonus that Erik had gotten an immaculately tailored tuxedo out of it as well. Charles’ shawl-collared design came with a waistcoat in contrast to Erik’s jacket with black satin peaked lapels and cummerbund, but Giorgio had made sure that the fine details in their designs matched, like the sash pockets and white silk pocket squares. Charles hadn’t stop gushing over Erik in his tuxedo for a whole week after their final fitting.

“You’re the most sinfully gorgeous man I’ve ever laid my eyes on, and I can’t wait to untie this tonight,” Charles replied, hooking his index finger over Erik’s cummerbund and sliding it across Erik’s waist teasingly. He gazed up at Erik through his dark lashes and licked his lips, and Erik couldn’t help but chase after Charles’ errant tongue, pulling him in for a kiss that promised hours and hours of passionate lovemaking when they got back.

Charles broke the kiss, laughing. “So much for keeping my hands to myself. Right, shall we go collect your Oscar?” he asked, eyes twinkling, a broad grin lighting up his face.

Erik snorted. “What’s the plan? I knock Daniel Day-Lewis unconscious while you grab his Oscar and make a run for it?”

Charles stilled, his eyebrows knitted in a frown. “You don’t think you’re going to win.”

“Why should I? Daniel is a much better actor and played one of America’s most beloved presidents. He has it in the bag.”

Charles shook his head firmly. “Erik, you’re a brilliant actor. I personally feel you surpass Daniel, but you’re going to accuse me of being supremely biased so let’s just focus on the other factors in this equation. ‘Rule of Capture’ slaughtered at the box office, so that can only work in your favour. You’re leading most of the Oscar polls and they’ve already awarded Daniel ‘Best Actor’ twice in the past. No one has ever won it thrice. And let me remind you that you took home the SAG.”

“But the SAGs were voted by our peers. They wouldn’t have batted an eye at the subject matter, but a good portion of the Academy is made up of old men who aren’t so readily swayed by the times.
There’s a lot of politics involved, and I’m not exactly Mr. Popularity.” Erik had to acknowledge that there had been a concerted campaign by the press and the industry to get both him and Charles nominated, and it would have been so easy to give in to the hype leading up to the Oscars. Erik hated to admit it, but after a while it did penetrate. Still, he never let himself believe it. Nothing in his life had ever been handed to him on a silver platter; everything he’d achieved had been hard-fought for, the culmination of endless casting calls and bit roles barely enough to cover his rent before he’d gotten his big break. This was precisely why the past year and a half had felt like a dream. He was finally gaining the recognition he had sought and, above and beyond anything else, he had Charles. It was almost too good to be true, and winning an Oscar on top of it all seemed preposterous. Erik had to be realistic, and it was better to not let the award become important to him than get upset when he inevitably lost it.

Charles smiled, running a hand up and down Erik’s bicep. “‘Not exactly Mr. Popularity?’ Oh, darling, what do you think I’ve been trying to do all this time?” He chuckled slightly, eyes lighting up. Erik knew that look - loved it, actually. It was the look Charles always had when he was about to share a secret. “Raven said I turned you from a grizzly into a teddy bear.”

Erik hunched forward, laughing until Charles kissed him silent. Raven was right. It was alarming how often he got hugged on the streets these days, although he was sure they were all Charles’ fans trying their luck with him after successfully tackling the object of their affection. Emma told him once that Charles had done more for Erik’s public image than all of his past publicists combined, and he completely agreed.

“The world is moving forward, Erik. Just look at America, they re-elected Obama despite everything he was up against. Besides, people vote with their hearts, not their heads. The Academy Awards are about affection, sentiment, and right now the world loves you,” Charles whispered, their faces inches apart. “You’re going to win this, Erik.”

It was somewhat ironic that Erik would have used exactly that argument for why he thought Charles would be doing interviews in the press room tonight. He realised that this also made him quite the hypocrite. But Charles deserved this, more than anyone else, even aside from the fact that Charles had narrowly escaped spending the rest of his life in a wheelchair because of the film. Erik searched Charles’ face and was stunned when the conviction in his eyes remained unflinching. “You’re serious.”

“I’m very serious. I have complete and utter faith in you,” Charles answered with such certainty that Erik was overwhelmed by a sudden tightness in his chest; as though the love he felt for Charles was threatening to conquer him, undo him, transform him from the man he knew himself to be into the man that Charles deserved.

Charles was a dreamer, hoped in ideal scenarios and perfect worlds, and who was Erik to take that away from him? Erik kissed him, hard enough that Charles’ lips would still look swollen when they got in front of the cameras, and held him closely to himself. “You believe in impossible things, Charles.”

He felt the gentle brush of Charles’ hair against his ear as Charles shook his head softly before he wrapped Erik tighter up in his arms. “No, just you, Erik. Only you.”

* * * * *

The past few months had seen Charles and Erik walk down an endless stream of red carpets and be interviewed by hundreds of reporters, but now it all seemed like nothing compared to the mother of all events: the red carpet at the Oscars. The roads leading up to the Dolby Theatre (although it would always be the Kodak Theatre in Charles’ mind) were jam-packed with limos and luxury cars with
tinted windows, all trying to get ahead in the crawling traffic. Of course, the slow drive was nothing compared to what the fans who were lining the streets and standing in the bleachers must have endured, probably having spent all day waiting in hope of catching a glimpse of a celebrity they loved.

They eventually reached the red carpet drop-off point where their limo let them off, their driver telling Erik to call him once they were ready to head home. However, Charles didn’t intend on making this an early night, especially if Erik or ‘First Class’ won something. Charles was happy enough with a nomination, and would be extremely surprised if he did end up taking something home. He was much more excited on Erik’s behalf, though.

Screams filled the air when he and Erik stepped out onto the red carpet together, their hands entwined as they waved to the crowd. The red carpet was a sea of black and white tuxedos, as well as glimmering gold gowns and an occasional splash of colour by a more fashion-forward actress. The lone gigantic Oscar statuette towered above everyone on the red carpet, from the busy executives directing the flow of human traffic along the carpet to the celebrities stopping to say hi to one another and catch up. It was then that Charles spotted Moira, who was posing for a gaggle of photographers. She looked resplendent in the white Gucci cut-out Grecian gown that she had told him so much about, accented with gold trims and a criss-cross back.

Charles felt Erik nudging him. “Go say hello to her,” Erik urged him. “I’ll join you in a bit.”

Charles fought back his sigh. Despite his hopes, he knew that Erik and Moira had never really hit it off, and they only ever tolerated each other for his sake. He supposed they had gotten off to a rocky start, especially with their first lunch date at The Ivy. Squeezing Erik’s hand, Charles got on his tip-toes and kissed him. “I’ll come find you later, love.”

Erik managed to get in a quick grope. “Go on now, I see Ryan Seacrest and his red carpet team from E! calling us over. I’ll fend them off,” he joked, making Charles laugh as he snuck off to surprise Moira.

Moira was more than delighted to see Charles, although he didn’t miss the way she warily scanned his surroundings for a brief moment. “Erik’s not with you?” she asked as they exchanged air-kisses. Charles gestured further down the red carpet, where poor Erik had a long-suffering expression on his face as he was cornered by Ryan and his camera crew, all of them trying to get him to pose for their Glam Cam. “Erik is rather preoccupied at the moment,” Charles said diplomatically, and Moira gave him a narrow-eyed, skeptical look until they both burst into giggles. It was easy for Charles to remember why they had become such good friends as emerging young actors, and how Moira would tease him about his crush on Erik as they had sat and watched ‘David 8’ together for the millionth time just because Charles had wanted to see the scene with a shirtless Erik.

“Erik sure looks like he’s enjoying it,” she said dryly, before tugging Charles along to where Sean was trying to hide behind a pillar, awkward and stiff in a rented tuxedo. “Anyway, have you met my date for the Oscars?” she asked, gesturing towards Sean with a grin.

“You look positively uncomfortable,” Charles said with a laugh as he hugged Sean. “Tuxedos do not become you, my friend.”

“Hey man, if I could get away with wearing my Ramones T-shirt to the Oscars, I would,” Sean argued, tugging awkwardly at his collar. Charles caught a glimpse of Moira’s agent, Levene, watching them from the sidelines with a bored expression. It was fair to say that there was no love lost between him and Levene, since Charles had barely exchanged ten words with the man despite having known Moira all these years. Catching Charles’ eye, Levene gave him a brief nod, which
Charles duly returned out of politeness before turning back to Sean and Moira.

Sean cleared his throat and crossed his arms, a teasing smile spreading across his face. “Anyway, where’s your other half?,” he badgered Charles. “Isn’t he supposed to be attached to your hip or something?”

Charles rolled his eyes in exasperation as Moira and Sean exchanged a high five. “Can’t I be on my own without Erik from time to time?”

Moira and Sean considered this for a second before chiming, “Nope,” in unison.

“That was a rhetorical question anyway.” Charles pretended to grumble, even as he turned for a sneak peek at Erik, who was actually grinning as he chatted with Ryan, the genuine smile softening the stern edges of his German features.

“Hah, see?” Moira said triumphantly, elbowing Charles. “You’re gone two seconds and already you’re giving him moon-eyes.”

“Oh, like you two are any better,” Charles said with a scoff, watching Sean turn red while Moira arched an eyebrow. “I heard Sean hasn’t had time to write with Alex because he’s shacked up with you in New York while you’re on Broadway.”

Moira laughed while Sean pretended to be busy on his phone. “Anyway, I know you’re itching to go back to your ‘darling’. Go on, I’ll catch you later.”

“All right, my dear. Have fun presenting later. I’ll be crossing my fingers,” he said, kissing her on the cheek again before heading down the carpet to where Erik was standing with Ryan. He could hear the rising and falling inflection of Erik’s voice, indicating his excitement, and he could also hear his name, every syllable pronounced tenderly with utmost love. This made him run up to Erik and jump on him from behind, surprising a laugh out of Erik as well as the gleeful E! team. “Hello, everyone,” Charles said as he wrapped his arms around Erik’s waist, grinning at a very amused Ryan. “Were you all bad-mouthing me?”

Ryan pretended to wince and shake his head. “Erik was saying the most horrible things about you, Charles,” he said with an absolutely straight face. “He said he was going to run off with Charlize Theron, not Angelina Jolie.”

Erik tutted at him, waving a warning finger. “Now Ryan, you know that’s not true. I said I’d run off with Charlize Theron, not Angelina Jolie.”

“Whoops, my bad,” Ryan said with a laugh. He now pointed the mic at Charles. “How do you feel about Erik running off with Charlize?”

Charles chuckled as Erik wrapped his arms around him, staring down at him fondly. “I suppose I’d be terribly heartbroken for a while, but I’d get over Erik after I adopt 47 cats,” he quipped, making everyone laugh as he felt Erik pressing a kiss to the top of his head.

“But all jokes aside, you two are clearly in love,” Ryan said, gesturing between the two of them. “It’s been over a year, right? Any wedding bells?”

Charles kept his face as neutral as possible, not wanting to give away any hint of the ideas that had been swirling around in his head recently. He deferred to Erik instead, who was simply giving Ryan the same kind of exasperated look he’d give Sean or Hank whenever they were rambling on about something he didn’t understand, except that he was smiling a little. “I don’t see why everyone keeps asking when we’re getting married,” Erik said, with a raised eyebrow as he tugged Charles a little
“Well, you two do have quite a following,” Ryan reminded them. “You’re one of the ‘It’ couples, like Brangelina or Robsten. Obviously your fans want a grand wedding and hundreds of babies.”

Charles buried his face in Erik’s chest as he erupted in laughter, and Erik was shaking with mirth himself. “Unfortunately, technology has not quite caught up with male pregnancy yet, Seacrest.” Erik said, sounding vastly amused. “But we promise you’ll be the first to know if either one of us gets knocked up.”

“Glad to hear that,” Ryan said, extending a hand. “Anyway, good luck for both your nominations, I hope you have a speech prepared.”

“Thank you, Ryan, have fun on the red carpet,” Charles said with a grin, tucking himself under Erik’s arm.

“That was relatively painless,” Erik murmured as they made their way down the carpet and posed for the photographers. “Good thing Ryan has a time limit on these interviews or I think he would have stood there, grilling us until the cows came home.”

Chuckling, Charles cupped a hand over the hard curve of Erik’s hip, just stroking up and down proprietarily and thinking absently of how nice and firm Erik’s body always felt. “The man was just doing his job, we can’t begrudge him for that.”

“I suppose you’re right,” Erik said with a sigh, kissing Charles on the forehead. He didn’t mention Ryan’s questions about the lack of impending nuptials, and there was a faraway look in his eyes that made Charles curious. Erik had not openly mentioned marriage before, although Charles had no reason to doubt his commitment; Erik had said several times inasmuch that he wanted to spend his life with Charles. Then again, Charles would be lying if he said he had never thought about marriage.

“Come on, time for the security check,” Erik’s voice in his ear jolted Charles out of his thoughts, and he mustered a bright smile as he stepped forward first. Tonight was a big night for him and Erik, and these thoughts could wait.

* * * * *

Charles couldn’t lie. His stomach was a taut ball of live nerves, and if he hadn’t been squeezing Erik’s hands tightly, he might have panicked and run to the bathroom to heave. But Erik’s presence beside him was very calming, his familiar cologne a soothing balm for Charles’ frazzled nerves. He wanted so badly for Erik or ‘First Class’ to win something, anything, and despite the cheerful front he had been putting up all day, it would have been devastating for the entire cast and crew to go home empty-handed.

He practised the deep, calming **ujjayi** breathing techniques he had learned when following Raven to yoga classes, and it helped to settle the butterflies in his stomach, at least. He tried to concentrate on Joseph Gordon-Levitt on stage, who was doing some very cute song-and-dance routine with his co-host, Emma Stone. They had a natural chemistry between them that seemed genuine, and it gave the show a much-needed spark that had been missing in recent years. There was the soft rustle of fabric, which explained itself as Erik wrapped his arm around Charles’ shoulders, and automatically Charles pillowed his cheek against the broad, safe span of Erik’s chest.

The audience applauded once Joseph and Emma finished their act with a bang, and as the ceremony cut to a commercial break, Charles felt Erik stroking his hair. “Are you all right?” he asked Charles.
“Just nerves,” Charles murmured, pressing his cheek against the lapel of Erik’s suit. Erik didn’t say anything because a camera crew was now hovering nearby, but he tightened his one-armed hold around Charles, seeking out his other hand and twining their fingers together. It had an instantaneous calming effect on Charles that transcended mere words, and Charles was glad Erik didn’t simply brush him off or attempt to soothe him with empty phrases. Erik understood, and was here for him. That was enough.

First were the more technical awards for things like Cinematography and Makeup, just to get the event started, but people sat up a little when one of the major acting awards was announced.

It was the award for Best Actress in a Supporting Role, which was won by an elated and tearful Amy Adams. He and Erik had bonded with Amy during their photoshoot for Vanity Fair, and Charles was truly glad that the Oscar had gone her way, beaming broadly at her as she gave her speech. She mouthed ‘good luck’ at him before she was guided backstage, and Charles simply flashed her a congratulatory smile in reply.

“Well, I like her,” Erik declared, adjusting the lapels of Charles’ suit even though they were fine. It was just one of Erik’s habits, a need to touch Charles every now and then. Charles couldn’t very well complain, since he was guilty of the exact same thing. “And I think she’s rooting for you, too, just like I am.” Erik’s smile was wide and brilliant.

“Oh hush, Erik.” Charles laughed as he ran his thumb over the ridges of Erik’s knuckles. “I’m just happy to be here.”

He felt Erik’s lips on his temple, warm and reassuring. “I’m happy wherever you are.”

After directing a fondly whispered ‘you sap’ at a grinning Erik, Charles settled in to watch the rest of the awards. Now, as predicted, there was another spate of more technical awards, mostly editing, sound and animation. It was only when he realised Erik’s hold on him had turned into an iron grip that he was aware his category was coming up. He reminded himself to stay calm, paying no heed to the camera crew who was staking out a position near him so they could film him when they announced the nominees.

Charles took in a deep breath as the words ‘Actor in a Supporting Role’ flashed on the giant screen, and Octavia Spencer elegantly walked out on stage towards the microphone, the golden envelope in her hands. Charles tried not to look at it, keeping a smile on his face instead as they began filming him. He was so nervous that he didn’t catch much of what Octavia said, up till, “And the Oscar goes to....”

Octavia opened the envelope, then her eyes flickered up to meet his with a broad smile. She said his name. Charles just stared at her in shock as applause erupted in the auditorium, and then Charles vaguely became aware of Erik happily whispering his name and lifting him to his feet for the longest hug. Some people wore expressions of utter surprise, but there were many cheers and smiles for him as well. Charles had known he was the dark horse in his category, but he hadn’t really expected to actually win.

Still shell-shocked, Charles found himself on stage (thanks to Erik’s urging and guidance) and he accepted the award with shaky hands, thanking Octavia before kissing her on both cheeks. “Oh my word,” he said into the mic, wishing he wasn’t so flustered. “Thank you very much, my friends.”

More thunderous applause, and Charles just gazed at the golden statuette currently in his clammy hands. It didn’t seem real, and he didn’t think he would ever receive one of these in his lifetime. His
gaze naturally shifted to Erik, who was staring up at him with so much love and pride that Charles could feel the tears burning in the back of his eyes, threatening to spring forth. However, the audience’s expectant looks reminded him that he had a speech to give, and he took in a few more calming breaths before trying to proceed.

“I can’t believe I’m here, not with the amount of talent I was up against,” he said honestly, gesturing towards his peers in the audience. “Leonardo DiCaprio, Alan Arkin, Philip Seymour Hoffman…oh goodness, the very great Robert De Niro.” Charles paused here to applaud his fellow nominees along with the audience. “I just… I am extremely overwhelmed right now, to be here in such great and respected company.”

Charles took this moment to collect himself, unable to take in the fact that so many of his respected, seasoned peers were applauding him. Erik was applauding the loudest, clapping so hard that his palms were red, his eyes shining a little too brightly. Something in Charles’ heart sang at how proud Erik looked, his jaw tight with barely restrained emotion. Charles blew several kisses to him, and the audience cheered even louder.

“Of course, I couldn’t have done this without Erik,” Charles said, aware of the tremor in his voice. “He set the bar with his amazing talent, and it was so easy to get into character right alongside him.” He kept his gaze on Erik, addressing him directly now. “Darling, you are my life, and I love you. This,” Charles paused to hold the award up high, “is for you, and is because of you.”

Erik’s head dipped a little, and Charles didn’t miss the single tear that tracked down his cheek. Charles quickly wiped away the moisture that was threatening to spill from his own eyes with his thumb while his other hand continued to grip his award tightly. He bit his lip, willing himself not to turn into a sobbing mess. He was all too aware of the dozens of video cameras trained on both him and Erik, and he wanted to hold it together. It wouldn’t do to have a meltdown in front of the millions of people watching around the globe.

He took a deep, affirming breath to still himself. There were a lot of people to thank, but it was hard to think with the jumble of names in his mind clamouring for attention. He decided to start with the easy, obvious ones. “I would also love to thank the cast and crew of ‘First Class’. Bryan Singer was absolutely amazing, because not many directors would have been so enthusiastic and flexible about changing the script halfway through the shoot,” he said, bowing his head in Bryan’s direction gratefully. “Speaking of scripts, I must thank Alex Summers and Sean Cassidy for writing a gem of a screenplay. Thank you also to our fantastic producer, Sebastian Shaw, and my heartfelt gratitude to Jean Grey, our casting director who put together this amazing cast. And of course the rest of the crew. You all contributed to the film with your professionalism and hard work. None of this would have been possible without you.”

More applause, with Erik clapping the loudest of all. It helped that he was actually right there in front of Charles, those familiar pale eyes burning into him and helping him concentrate. He flashed that beloved crooked grin at Charles, instantly relaxing him and making him smile.

“Of course, I also have to thank Hospiten Bellevue for taking such good care of me when I got injured in the Canary Islands,” he said softly into the mic. “And for being susceptible to bribery when it came to ignoring visiting hours for special visitors,” he added, grinning as a murmur of amusement rippled through the staid audience. “Erik and I will always be grateful for that.”

Charles paused for a moment to collect his thoughts. “Most of all, I must thank my long-suffering agent, Raven Darkholme, for putting up with me all these years and being the sister I never had, as well as my equally suffering assistant, Armando Muñoz, for truly adapting to every possible situation.” Charles smiled ruefully before raising an apologetic hand. “And if I’m forgetting anyone, I
sincerely apologise, and there’ll be a bottle of Dom Pérignon on me in the morning,” he added animatedly. This prompted quite a response from the audience, and he blushed when he noticed Darwin and Remy laughing particularly loudly. Well, after having drunk half the people in attendance under the table, Charles supposed he only had himself to blame if his reputation now preceded him.

After a moment, Charles bit his bottom lip and motioned for the theatre to quiet down. “And now if I may, I’d like to address something near and dear to my heart. I want to take the opportunity to say to all of the gay and lesbian community watching tonight, that you are all wonderful, beautiful individuals of value, worthy of praise and love. Since the dawn of existence, there have always been moments when the course of history shifted. Such a turning point is upon us now. And this is why I stand here tonight filled with the hope that the day when there will be equal rights for all is coming very, very soon.”

His little speech was met with resounding applause, but Charles could hear the soft orchestra music begin to play, signalling that he had exceeded his time limit, but he was determined to get in a few more words. “Once again, Erik, thank you. I love you, but you’ll have to share the bed with another man now.” Charles cheekily waved his Oscar in the air to much laughter, and Erik’s face was red with amusement as he laughed in that maniacal way of his that displayed the full range of his teeth and frightened the paparazzi.

Finally Charles was being gently ushered backstage due to time constraints, and a stage manager directed him to a waiting room, where Charles would remain until the advertisements came on and he could return to his seat in the front row. He stared at the award in his trembling hands, still in disbelief. It was hard for him to absorb everything; it had all happened so fast, and he couldn’t stop wondering if he had truly left anyone important out. But the most prevalent desire simmering within him was the need to return to Erik, hold him tight, and never let him go.

* * * * *

The calm that followed the initial euphoria of winning was short-lived, and it was not long before Charles once again found himself plagued by nerves, although they were somewhat overpowered this time around by excitement on Erik’s behalf. Charles wanted Erik to win, more than anything, and if there was any justice in this world, Erik would take home the trophy. Charles tried his best to contain himself, checking his watch from time to time and mentally cursing that the Best Actor category was one of the last of the night. Erik, on the other hand, was the perfect picture of nonchalance, insisting that the award he was most interested in had already been given to the rightful winner. The irony was not lost on Charles.

Thankfully, there had been moments that managed to take Charles’ mind off the waiting, like when a very charming Sir Patrick Stewart introduced the montage for ‘First Class’ (which further showcased why Erik deserved to win as far as Charles was concerned) and when Alex and Sean won their trophies. They had been shocked when their names were announced for Best Original Screenplay, and Sean would have spent the rest of the night rooted to the spot if Erik hadn’t shoved him stumbling forward, the moment captured on camera for all the world to see. Alex looked as though he was bursting with enough happiness and energy to blast a hole through the roof, while Sean was screaming like a banshee and hugging everyone on the stage. The entire auditorium had laughed in amusement, and Charles was filled with a sense of pride at the two writers whom he had always known, right from the early days of production, held so much untapped potential just waiting to be developed. They were now so accomplished both in their professional and personal lives. Charles knew how wonderful that feeling was.

The wait seemed to drag on forever and ever, but finally Moira was emerging on stage, resplendent
in her elegant ivory Gucci gown. Charles’ throat went dry when he spotted the golden envelope in her hands, his palms turning clammy.

Moira’s smile lit up the stage when she finally stood behind the microphone. “Ladies and gentlemen, it is my personal pleasure to introduce this year’s nominees for Performance by an Actor in a Leading Role,” she said demurely into the mic, to much applause. “There was such a wide range of roles this year, from a tormented detective to one of America’s greatest presidents.”

Charles clapped heartily at her reference to Erik, aware that the cameras were already trained on both of them for reaction shots. He forced himself to breathe steadily as Moira first started talking about Joaquin Phoenix, who was seated further down the row and beaming brightly at the camera. As always, Erik was the epitome of complete indifference beside him, the only giveaway being the tight grip he had on Charles’ hand.

Charles barely registered the proceedings, drowned out by the drumming of his heartbeat in his ears, but he sat up with immediate alertness when Moira spoke Erik’s name. “Erik, your portrayal of a closeted gay detective battling homophobia in the Sixties reminded us of a time when attitudes were hostile towards those who are different,” she said, smiling warmly down at Erik. “Your depiction added immense depth to the struggle of a man seeking his own identity in a society that rejected him and his partner. You brought a sense of fragile vulnerability to a man who had closed himself off to others for so long, and it was so easy and thrilling to get absorbed in your performance.”

Charles was applauding so hard that his palms were starting to smart, touched beyond words at the wonderful, heartfelt compliments Moira was showering upon Erik, who was smiling back at her, a faint sheen of red tainting his cheeks. It was rare for Erik to be embarrassed, and Charles knew it was only because of the endless barrage of praise.

Moira took a deep breath and smiled at the audience. “And the Oscar goes to...” she paused, opening the golden envelope and sliding out the results. Before the show, Charles had worked out a signal with her. If Erik was the winner, she would give Charles the briefest of nods before announcing the victor, so Charles watched her like a hawk now, his hands clamped over Erik’s as he chewed nervously on his lip.

Charles couldn’t quite believe it when Moira’s gaze met his for a fraction of a second before her chin tipped down in a discreet nod, and he fought back the urge to leap up and scream, squeal, throw confetti all over the auditorium, jump on Erik, anything. Moira’s announcement confirmed what he had already known deep in his heart, Erik’s name echoing throughout the theatre before it was rapidly followed by thunderous applause. Charles saw the shock and disbelief on Erik’s face, his lower lip trembling as he turned to face Charles.

Charles couldn’t hold back the surge of utter joy and ecstasy wanting to burst forth. “Erik, oh, my darling, you won!”

Erik’s reaction was only a dazed, “Charles?” before Charles grabbed him and sealed his mouth over Erik’s, kissing him so long and so hard that they were both breathless when Charles pulled away. And then it was Erik who yanked him in the second time, the kiss loving and thankful and desperate. Charles could taste bitter salt, and he didn’t know if the tears were from him or Erik, or possibly even the both of them.

Moira was grinning and urging Erik to come up and take his award, and Erik planted one last kiss on Charles’ swollen lips before striding up to the stage, accepting his Oscar with slightly shaky hands and kissing Moira on both cheeks. Then Charles’ jaw dropped slightly when Moira pulled Erik in for a long, tight hug, whispering her congratulations in his ear. Erik’s arms only tightened around her, and if Charles hadn’t been so floored by the overwhelming emotions within him, he would have
whipped out his phone to take a picture of two of his favourite people hugging each other with mutual respect and admiration. Belatedly, he realised he didn’t have to; he could always catch a recorded telecast of the Oscars, and there would surely be lots of photographs floating around.

Erik was now holding his award and staring at the audience in amazement, and Charles turned to follow his gaze. Almost everyone was on their feet, still applauding and nodding in approval. The sight of so many people appreciating Erik and affording him the recognition he deserved made something loosen inside Charles’ chest, his eyes a little too full as his vision turned blurry. Charles blinked, ignoring his wet cheeks as he gazed up at Erik with fierce pride.

Erik was staring down at the Oscar in his grip, which was so tight that his knuckles had gone white. “Well, this is a surprise,” he said into the mic, holding up his award as the applause grew stronger. “This sounds trite, but I mean it when I say there were so many respected actors in this category that I didn’t even prepare a speech.” Erik was now craning his neck to look at someone in the audience. “Amy, could I borrow yours?”

There was scattered laughter amongst the audience, and the jumbo screens were now displaying a giggling Amy Adams pretending to offer Erik her thank-you speech. Erik only grinned back at her, and Charles couldn’t get over this softer, far more playful version of Erik finally emerging in public, in front of the cameras. Now the rest of the world could finally get a glimpse of the wonderful man Charles got to experience in private every day.

Taking a deep breath, Erik seemed to be steeling himself for his impromptu acceptance speech. Outwardly, Erik looked calm, but Charles had long since memorized every nuance of Erik’s expressions, perfectly capable of catching even the slightest shift in mood as it flickered across Erik’s face. Charles did not miss the tight, firm twist of Erik’s mouth, a sign that Erik was trying to rein in his emotions. His gaze sought out Charles’, and Charles smiled reassuringly at him, wishing Erik could read his mind.

You can do this, my darling.

Erik cleared his throat before speaking in a low, quiet voice. “One thing I can say for sure is that I did not achieve this alone,” he said, raising his award in his hand. “I want to thank Bryan Singer, who is an extraordinary director. What makes him extraordinary? The fact that he listens to his actors and his scriptwriters, even if they’re just kids.” A volley of laughter arose at this statement as the cameras turned to Alex, who was smirking beside a chuckling Darwin, and Sean, who gave Erik a lazy salute.

“Well, they were kids,” Erik corrected himself, and Charles couldn’t help thinking of the long, sleepless nights Alex and Sean must have had to burn through for all sorts of script changes. No, Alex and Sean would always be taken seriously from now on, and Charles was glad because he felt that he owed them. It seemed Erik had the same thought, because he was conceding a quick smile of gratitude in their direction before moving on.

“I must thank my capable assistant, Remy LeBeau, who has put up with my constant tormenting from Day One with his best game face,” Erik said seriously, and when Charles turned to eye Remy in the row behind theirs, he almost burst out laughing. Remy was in complete disbelief, the astonishment on his face making it seem as though he were having a heart attack. “Homme, did your paramour just thank me?” he hissed at Charles.

“I think he did,” Emma said beside him, blinking in surprise. “If he starts thanking me, you’ll know hell has frozen over.”

“Of course, every actor is only as good as the roles his or her agent snags for them, and I would be nowhere without Emma Frost’s guidance and the many years she’s spent shielding me from people who just wanted to take advantage, especially back when I was merely a struggling, bartending
actor,” Erik said, gesturing towards Emma in the audience, and it was now her turn to look stunned. “Thank you, Emma, for being the toughest agent I have ever known.”

As more applause filled the air, Charles saw a crack in the vacant, politely bored façade that Emma usually employed at such public events. There was a glimmer of rare emotion as she smiled up at Erik while Remy rubbed her back. “I always knew Erik was a diamond in the rough,” she murmured wistfully as she plucked out a tissue and started dabbing at her eyes. “Now that idiot has ruined my eye makeup.”

Charles chuckled before turning back to face the stage, just in time to catch Erik’s countenance transform into something much gentler. “I couldn’t have done it without my parents, who signed me up for drama classes the moment they saw me running around the house in a cape as a child. I know most parents wouldn’t have been as encouraging, especially in our small town. And thank you, Mama and Papa, for scrapping together every penny you had so I could buy a plane ticket to Los Angeles as a young man with big dreams.” Erik paused, his lower lip trembling, and Charles knew Erik was on the verge of emotional tumult. Clearing his throat, Erik started speaking softly but clearly in German, most of which Charles understood. “Mama and Papa, I owe you so much for always putting my needs above your own. Thank you for teaching me strength and surrounding me with your unconditional love. I wouldn’t be here if not for you,” Erik said, the foreign words greeted by polite applause.

“Despite all the people in my life, there is one person I truly owe everything to, one person who has made all the difference,” Erik continued. His words were heartrending, his eyes glimmering under the stage lights as they locked with Charles’ gaze. “Charles, this award really belongs to you,” Erik said, raising his golden statuette as Charles blinked away his tears, overwhelmed and certain that he would never be able to stop smiling.

“Anyone who knows Charles would agree that he dreams enough for the both of us. He always sees only the best in everyone he meets, even if they themselves refuse to,” Erik continued, grinning self-deprecatingly as he shook his head. “Charles, you’ve constantly insisted that I’m capable of achieving impossible things, right from the day I met you. You’re always telling me I should push myself, and you taught me how to harness a potential I never knew existed. A year ago, I wouldn’t even have dreamed of an Oscar. Now, I hold one in my hand. And it is all because of you.”

The audience applauded, but Charles barely heard it. He was too moved by Erik’s touching speech, and although thousands of people were currently clapping for both of them, Erik was gazing at him as though Charles were the only person in the entire theatre. Charles wanted more than anything to run up onto the stage and kiss Erik silly, but proper decorum held him back. Instead, Charles blew several loving kisses in Erik’s direction, and Erik’s widening smile was at odds with the tears brimming in his eyes.

Erik opened his mouth to speak again. “Charles, you are my light, and thank you for understanding me better than I even understand myself.” There was a break in Erik’s voice here, and he squeezed the bridge of his nose, taking a short moment to collect himself, his eyes red-rimmed now. “My life is better simply because you exist.”

Charles placed a hand over his mouth, just so he could stop himself from sobbing out loud. It was also slightly unnerving to watch himself being featured on the large screens above the stage, and Charles vaguely caught sight of Shaw on the outer edge of the footage, thin-lipped and mightily displeased for being decidedly snubbed. Yet, Charles could barely bring himself to care. Erik’s words resonated with the deepest, darkest part of himself, the part that had Charles convinced that no one would ever love him for who he truly was. But Erik had proven him wrong on all counts; he had invited Charles to share his life and the parts of himself that he had locked away for so long, and if
Charles had ever been in doubt of that, here was Erik proclaiming his love for him in front of millions of people around the world.

“I’m not a complete fool; I am aware of how truly special you are,” Erik continued, his voice a little shaky and tremulous now, “and I’m thankful every single day that you choose to be--”

Erik froze when music started rising from the orchestra pit, calling for the end of his speech. The black look of thunder on Erik’s face was causing some murmuring amongst the audience. Erik calmly turned towards the conductor, leaning in towards the mic as he said with a sharp edge in his voice, “If you don’t let me finish my speech to an amazing man, I will personally stuff that tuba down your throat.”

Surprised laughter filled the auditorium, and the camera cut to the sheepish conductor giving Erik an apologetic nod. Erik only spared him an irritated glance before turning back to where Charles was, the brief anger on his face softening once again into unbridled affection.

“We’re all looking for someone and, Charles, with you, I feel like I will never, ever be alone again.” Although Erik was smiling, the tears trailing down his cheeks were unmistakable, and there was a noticeable hush in the audience. Most of them had never seen this side of Erik before. “You pulled me out of the depths and saved me from myself,” Erik paused to wipe his face, blinking rapidly before breaking down. “Thank you for making me a better man.”

By now Charles couldn’t see at all because his vision was obscured by tears, and he sniffed when he felt Raven pulling him towards her, murmuring, “Oh, Charles,” before she kissed his damp cheek and hugged him tightly. The swell of the orchestra music again must have meant that Erik was finally being led backstage, and Charles wanted nothing more than to make his way there and fling his arms around Erik until the world came to an end. He tried to get a grip on himself so he’d be presentable enough to leave his spot, but the tears just kept streaming freely down his face, and he could even see Sean wiping his eyes while Alex was nodding with a soft, wistful smile. It seemed Erik’s speech had resonated with everyone, not only Charles.

As soon as the commercial breaks were announced, Charles was out of his chair and determinedly making his way backstage. In the wings, he finally caught sight of Moira’s shimmery gown, and he headed over to where she was both congratulating and hugging Erik.

“Erik!” Charles called out, and Erik whipped around so fast that Charles was afraid that Erik would hit someone with his Oscar. There was no time to think before Erik ran over to scoop Charles into his arms with just as much fervour as the day they were reunited in Hong Kong, possibly more. Charles locked his legs around Erik’s waist, and the ensuing kiss was joyful, delirious, and celebratory.

“Charles Xavier, have you come to rescue me?” Erik’s voice was rough and hoarse, but there was no hiding the buoyant light in his eyes, despite his teasing.

“I wasn’t aware you needed rescuing, Mr. Lehnsherr,” Charles replied with a hearty grin.

Erik’s free hand was gently cupping his cheek, and he rested his forehead against Charles’. From this angle, Charles could see his lashes, wet with tears. Charles pressed a kiss to wherever he could on his face, filled with an elated sense of pride. Erik had won, and so had he. It was their night.

* * * * *

Sean was not ashamed to admit that he had been quite moved by Erik’s touching thank-you speech to Charles, and it was quite possible there may not have been a dry eye left in the entire theatre.
When Moira returned to her seat beside him after presenting the award to Erik, Sean squeezed her hand and gave her a fond kiss, which she returned with enthusiasm. It still blew his mind on a daily basis that he was getting the privilege to be with someone he had spent years and years admiring from a distance.

After Erik’s win and the ensuing commercial break, Sean applauded as a very dapper Jean Dujardin emerged to present the award for Best Actress. Sean had always thought it was sincerely a crime that Moira had never won an award of her own, although she had been nominated a few years ago for ‘Central Park’. It was hard to calculate the odds of an actor or actress catching the eye of the Academy, though. Sean privately thought it required a combination of different things: the right script, the right timing, tons of hard work and a huge stroke of luck. It would be wonderful, he wistfully thought, if he could write the perfect script for Moira one day to showcase her talents.

After the Best Actress Oscar had been awarded to a tearful Emmanuelle Riva for her performance in ‘Amour’, Sean could see the camera crews discreetly moving to the sections where some of the producers were seated. Time for the Best Picture Oscar, then. Sean felt someone nudging him, and he turned to face Alex who looked rather hopeful. “What do you think are our chances?” he asked.

Sean shrugged, glancing over at Shaw who had a rather complacent smirk on his face. “Considering that we’ve swept some of the major awards, our chances are awesome,” he replied, before lowering his voice. “Even if it means we’re forced to watch Shaw boasting and taking all the credit.”

Alex snorted in laughter. “Don’t worry, I’ve a feeling Erik is not above breaking Shaw’s legs if he tries to claim all the glory for himself.”

Chuckling, Sean relaxed in his seat, until Sir Ian McKellen took to the stage to present ‘Best Picture’, his entrance accompanied by the soundtrack from ‘The Hobbit’. Sean barely contained his squeal as the audience cheered. He had read every single volume in ‘The Lord of the Rings’ growing up, and couldn’t believe that Gandalf himself would be handing out the night’s final honour. Watching as Sir Ian went through the long list of nominees, Sean remembered the ones he had enjoyed tremendously, as well as a few that were frankly beyond his comprehension. But they were all acclaimed, so it was already an honour to be nominated. To win, of course, would be the icing on the cake.

Sir Ian’s eyes twinkled, his magnetic stage presence undeniable as he resolutely flipped open the envelope. “And the Oscar goes to...” he paused, peering at the card before turning in the general direction of Charles and Erik and looking very pleased. “‘First Class’, produced by Sebastian Shaw and Bryan Singer.”

Sean punched the air in triumph, staring at Moira in delight when she urged him to his feet, beaming as she kissed him in congratulations. “Told you that you’d win,” she said with a wink, rubbing his back.

“Dude, we won!” Alex shouted as they stumbled out into the aisle, and Sean hugged him tightly while Darwin clapped both of them on the shoulder.

“Are we supposed to go up on stage?” he asked Alex. “Or is it just Shaw and Bryan?”

“I’ll be damned if I’m letting that megalomaniac take all the credit.” Alex retorted, heading towards the stage anyway as Sean followed suit. Predictably, Shaw was smugly marching down the aisle like a victorious emperor while Bryan was more excited than anything else, identifying key people in the audience and inviting them to receive the award with him as well.

As a result, there were quite a number of people on stage, and Shaw proudly accepted the award from Sir Ian, looking a lot like Gollum as he cradled it to himself. Sir Ian levelled him an unamused
look, and it took a while before it occurred to a now seemingly chastised Shaw to shake Sir Ian’s hand in return. Sean was admittedly disappointed when Sir Ian didn’t wipe his sullied palm off on his tuxedo jacket. Unlike Shaw, Bryan was hugging everyone, particularly Charles whose eyes were still reddened from Erik’s touching speech earlier. And then it was Sean’s turn to be hugged by the exuberant Bryan, who was far more concerned about sharing his joy instead of making a grand speech like Shaw was about to do.

“From the moment the script for ‘First Class’ landed on my desk, I knew it was a winner,” Shaw declared, holding the award high in the air. “I’ve always had a knack for picking out a surefire win, and selecting the right people to bring that vision to life. Thank you to my team for making this happen, and for showing the world what a dedicated team of professionals we are, and what we can do.”

Sean fought not to roll his eyes at Shaw’s pompous speech. Of course it would be all about him. He tried to stifle a laugh when he spotted Moira’s disgusted expression in the audience, and Darwin had an eyebrow raised, equally unimpressed at Shaw’s bragging. But to Sean’s surprise, Emma’s lips were pursed in an amused twist, her head tilted fondly to one side as she gazed rather admiringly at Shaw. Sean blinked, then blinked again. Of all the people to take Shaw’s side, Sean would have placed Emma last, right behind Erik and Michael Bay (whom Shaw had once had a heated argument with in the Paramount lot a few years ago, if the rumours through the grapevine were to be trusted). Maybe Shaw was starting to wear down Emma’s diamond-hard resistance to him after all.

Charles was coming over with Erik, laughing as he hugged Alex and slid an arm across his shoulders. Erik was headed over in Sean’s direction, and there was an instant flashback to when Erik had shoved him down the aisle earlier. “Whoa, you back right off!” he laughingly warned Erik, who held his hands up in surrender as he took a step back. In the meantime, Shaw had finally finished hogging the mic and was passing it to a grateful Bryan, who was gushing out a stream of names that he wanted to thank.

Charles, who had released Alex, was of course back in Erik’s arms, the two of them in a world of their own while the rest of the cast and crew surrounded them. Erik kept tipping his head down to press little pecks against Charles’ mouth, and Charles was staring at Erik as though Erik were the saviour of all mankind. There was a loud cheer when Bryan thanked the both of them, and Charles managed to tear his gaze away from Erik’s long enough to raise an appreciative hand to the audience. Erik was smiling from ear to ear, nodding to his peers as he surveyed the theatre. His smile only broadened when Sir Ian came over and enveloped Erik in a hug, eliciting cheers and whistles from the entire theatre.

“Oh, my word,” Charles murmured from where he was standing beside Sean, his eyes flitting back and forth between Erik and Sir Ian. “They do look remarkably alike, don’t they?”

Sean squinted a little, comparing both their faces before his eyebrows jumped. “You know, you’re actually right. If Erik looks like that when he gets to Sir Ian’s age, you’re a lucky man.”

Charles’ mouth curved up in a brilliant smile. “I’m already very lucky,” he said softly.

“That’s nice,” Sean deadpanned. “By the way, have you seen my insulin?”

Charles’ smack on the shoulder was quickly followed by a one-armed hug, and Sean rubbed Charles’ back, genuinely glad for him. Now Erik was stepping forward and tugging Charles over for his turn to hug Sir Ian, and it was genuinely bewildering for Sean to observe Erik’s besotted grin as he stared at Charles. Sean couldn’t help but be awed at the complete turnaround he’d witness Erik going through during the past year. Love truly changed people.
As Sean caught Moira’s eye, he broke into a soft grin when he realised she was giving all of them a standing ovation. She blew him a kiss, and something inside Sean’s chest glowed bright and warm and he vowed to write her a role so good that she would one day receive the recognition long owed to her.

* * * * *

After the Oscars, celebrities and their entourages were always spoilt for choice when it came to the after-parties. People usually flocked to the Vanity Fair Oscar party, and the list of those in attendance was a veritable who’s who of Hollywood’s glitterati. Raven had once told Charles that every year, over 400 bottles of champagne would be popped at the party to celebrate everyone’s big wins, and Charles was quite sure that this year, he and Erik would be responsible for at least half of those bottles should they choose to attend. Charles couldn’t hold back his ear-to-ear grin at the reminder that both he and Erik had been awarded some powerful recognition for their efforts.

After a round of interviews in the post-Oscar press room, they were finally free to leave and celebrate their triumph. People left and right were congratulating both of them on their wins the entire way out of the Dolby Theatre, even though Erik didn’t seem to know who half of them were. Charles remembered most of them, freely doling out hugs and gamely posing for pictures. Erik was in a splendid mood, judging from how willing he was to jump into pictures with Charles, an arm perpetually hooked around Charles’ waist as they posed with strangers. Charles was drunk on the giddy high of victory, as well as Erik’s nearness and the random, unexpectedly soft kisses on the neck that he’d plant on Charles, making him all hot and bothered in public.

“Are we going to swing by the Governors Ball or the party thrown by Fox? Or the ones by Vanity Fair or Elton John?” Charles asked as he tucked an arm around Erik, the other holding his Oscar firmly. “So many parties, so little time!”

“I’m only ever interested in one party,” Erik drawled, before leaning in and kissing the shell of Charles’ ear, making him shiver. “The private one we’re going to have tonight, when I get to take that gorgeous tuxedo off you.”

Charles laughed, even as his skin tingled at the thought of Erik undressing him slowly once they were alone. He patted Erik’s thigh, standing on his tiptoes to kiss Erik thoroughly. “I absolutely can’t wait, darling.”

In the end, they decided on the Vanity Fair party on Sunset Strip, since it was the one most of their friends were headed to. Outside the Sunset Tower Hotel were swarms of paparazzi, held back only by a chain of bulky, irate bodyguards. Many stars were making their way down the entrance to the hotel, pausing to be photographed and occasionally interviewed. Inside the venue, there was a long line for the security clearance, but since both Charles and Erik were the men of the hour, they were quickly led to the front and escorted in with barely a security check. There was welcoming, congratulatory applause as they stepped into the ballroom, and Charles felt his face heat up in a blush, overly conscious of the heavy gold statuette in his hand.

This of course meant the start of an endless stream of people congratulating him, including a very gracious Robert De Niro who pretended to try and steal Charles’ Oscar, as well as Chris Martin from Coldplay who kept shaking Charles’ hand enthusiastically like a water pump as Gwyneth Paltrow watched with amusement. Erik was surrounded by an admiring mob as well, and for the first time Charles could see Erik relaxed and loose, accepting the praise and compliments thrown his way with grace and aplomb. Finally, Erik was starting to realise what Charles - and so many of their peers - had seen in him all along.

When they had a rare moment alone at last, Charles gulped down a flute of champagne before setting
the glass aside and plastering his entire body against Erik’s, arms circling around Erik’s neck. “Academy Award winner, Erik Lehnsherr. Have I told you how proud I am of you yet?” he murmured against Erik’s lips, chuckling when Erik stole a kiss.

“Not as proud as I am of you,” Erik said softly, his fingers raking through Charles’ hair with complete disregard for Angel’s earlier threats. “My win is meaningful simply because you won, too.”

“You’re hopeless, darling,” Charles teased him quietly, even though it felt like his heart was overflowing with warmth, and he kissed Erik even harder, their awards knocking together with a ‘clink’.

“Told you that they were already getting it on,” he heard Raven’s voice behind them, and he reluctantly released a dazed Erik to find Raven, Hank, Moira, and Sean surrounding them, armed with wide grins and full glasses.

“Raven!” Charles was far too happy to admonish her for her ragging, flinging his arms around her tightly (although he was careful not to dislodge her French twist).

Raven wrapped her arms around his neck and hugged him fiercely. “I’m so proud of you,” she said as she held him.

Charles smiled fondly into her hair and kissed her cheek. “Thank you, my dear,” Charles murmured in her ear. He truly owed her everything. They pulled apart then, Charles beaming brightly as he released her.

Moira quirked an eyebrow as she approached, a wry smile spreading across her face. “I can’t believe you picked up one of these before me,” she joked, stepping forward to embrace Charles as Raven made her way over to congratulate Erik.

"Moira, love," Charles greeted just before he kissed her cheek and hugged her. "That makes the two of us, but thank you. And thank you for saying such brilliant things about Erik."

"Yes, you made Charles cry like a little girl," Raven quipped, laughing when Charles balked.

“Oh, don’t say that! Do say let’s go have a drink first,” Charles begged, feeling himself blushing.

Raven smiled obligingly. "Fine, let’s drink ourselves stupid tonight."

"Wonderful," Charles sighed, nodding his thanks when Raven grabbed two champagne flutes from a passing waiter and handed them to him and a thoroughly amused Erik.

“Okay everyone, a toast!” Raven lifted her glass, and everyone else followed suit. “To Charles and Erik, for all their hard work!”

“Especially for making the most realistic sex scene in the history of cinema,” Sean chimed in.

"Oh, my stars and garters," Hank exclaimed, red-faced as he adjusted his spectacles, causing an eruption of laughter from the rest of the group.

Everyone clinked glasses and downed their champagne. The first of many rounds, Charles hoped. Just as he was about to suggest a refill, he felt his phone buzzing in his pocket. “Do excuse me for just a moment,” he said politely, his ingrained Brit manners kicking in as he stepped aside, fishing out his phone and wondering who it could be.

His jaw dropped open when he saw the name and picture on his caller-ID. His mother, calling at this
hour? It was the wee hours of the morning over in the UK. With a shaky thumb, he swiped the green ‘Answer’ button. “Hello?”

“Hello, Charles.” His mother usually sounded stiff and formal on the phone, but now she just sounded tired and a little worn. “I wanted to call and congratulate you on your win.”

Charles could sense Erik’s ever watchful gaze burning into his profile, as if to ascertain that everything was all right and that Charles wasn’t in distress. Charles remembered to close his mouth, blinking rapidly. “Thank you, Mother. That is very kind of you.”

Erik’s eyebrows shot up at that. There was an awkward little pause as his mother remained silent on her end, and Charles strained to listen over the background noise of the chatter and clinking of glasses from the party carrying on around him. Just as Charles was wondering if the connection had been cut off, his mother said, “You looked absolutely wonderful in your tuxedo. Armani?”

Charles’ shoulders sagged in relief. This was familiar territory for his mother. “Yes, Giorgio tailored tuxes just for me and Erik.”

“He looked splendid, too.” Another long pause, and then Mother’s voice sounded softer, warmer. “I’m glad he won. I’m glad both of you won.”

Charles fought hard to swallow the lump in his throat. It meant a lot in itself that Mother was proud of his win, but this was as good as her implicit acceptance of Erik as an important part of Charles’ life. “Thank you.” He didn’t trust himself to say anything else without getting over-emotional, so he chewed his lip, fighting to keep a rein on the odd mix of feelings swelling within him.

He heard a soft yawn on Mother’s end of the line. “Do excuse me, Charles dear. It’s late and I should get to bed,” she said apologetically. “Maybe when you’re here in London, we could catch up over afternoon tea at the Athenaeum Hotel? I tried it recently and must say it’s not bad.”

“Of course, Mother.” Charles was already thrilled that she had taken the time to call, hoping that her use of ‘we’ meant the inclusion of Erik. As if on cue, he felt an arm sliding around his waist, and he looked up at a concerned Erik with a shaky, reassuring smile. “Thank you very much for calling. I love you.”

An awkward pause, before Mother murmured, “I love you, too. Good night, dear.”

A dazed Charles barely registered hanging up before burying his face in the broad, safe expanse of Erik’s chest. He could feel Erik caressing his back, whispering soothing things into his hair. Charles just held onto him tighter, torn between wanting to smile and cry. He had sought his mother’s approval for so long, and finally she was bestowing it not only upon him, but also on the most important person in his life. The night had shaped out to be truly beyond his wildest expectations.

* * * * *

After excusing himself and heading to the VIP washroom, Charles felt in much better control of his emotional faculties now that he had splashed his face and examined his appearance in the mirror. He had every reason to be happy, after all. Outside, the man of his dreams was waiting for him and holding an award that so many of his peers coveted. Mother had also somewhat given him her blessing after years and years of expressing her disapproval in his occupation of choice, and admittedly he was still a little in shock over that.

Mopping at his face with a silk handkerchief, he took a deep breath, squaring his shoulders and smiling at himself in the mirror before marching out of the men’s room. Erik was lingering outside,
leaning against the wall with an Oscar in each hand. He brightened up the moment he spotted Charles, pushing himself off the wall and striding over to where Charles stood. “Feel better?” he asked, tipping his head down to give Charles a brief, sweet kiss.

“When am I ever not feeling wonderful with you around?” Charles said truthfully, which earned him a dazzling, ear-to-ear grin from Erik. Another kiss, slow and tender, before Erik returned Charles’ Oscar to him, and Charles couldn’t stop marvelling at its hefty weight, at his name engraved at the bottom. It still felt so surreal.

There were quickened footsteps rounding the corner, and then Sean’s flushed, excited face was peeking out at both of them. “Did you guys disappear for a quickie or something? Come on, everyone’s asking for you,” he said, gesturing in the direction of the main ballroom with his thumb.

“Don’t be silly, Sean. We’ll be right out,” Charles assured him, and they followed him back out to the teeming masses in the ballroom, a mix of journalists and photographers, other actors and their agents. Charles kept the smile firmly plastered on his face and an arm securely looped around Erik’s waist, keeping him anchored to Erik. After posing with his award for what felt like the hundredth time, Charles perked up when he spotted Jean Grey, completely resplendent in an emerald and gold gown.

“Jean!” Charles leapt forward and hugged her with a laugh. He would always be eternally grateful to her for casting him and Erik together for ‘First Class’. “It’s been a long time, my dear.”

She was beaming as Erik hugged her as well, holding onto him a little longer since they had known each other for so many years. Charles knew Erik felt like he owed her for his big break in his very first movie with Ben Affleck, which was why Charles wished he could repay her somehow. “You two definitely did well,” she remarked as she examined both their awards.

“We have you to thank for bringing us together, Jean,” Erik said, flashing her a winsome grin that made something in Charles’ chest flutter. It didn’t help that Erik’s arm was now sliding proprietarily around his shoulders. “If it weren’t for you, I wouldn’t have met Charles.”

“Ah, so am I the one responsible for breaking the hearts of millions of single women - and men - all over the world?” she said teasingly, making Charles burst into laughter while Erik chuckled against his temple.

“I wouldn’t say ‘millions’,” Charles managed to protest, batting at her arm. “Anyway, I think we need to celebrate our big wins in style. Anyone for vintage champagne?”

Erik’s mouth quirked up in amusement. “I suppose that means I’ll have to go hunt for some.”

“Only if you want to,” Charles said with a sly grin, looking up at Erik with wide, pensive eyes. Erik’s sigh of defeat was quickly followed by a short peck on the lips, which Charles prolonged into a longer, open-mouthed kiss while he grabbed onto the lapels of Erik’s tuxedo.

“Oh God, you guys really are as bad as the rest said you were,” Jean muttered, raising her fingers to her temples and closing her eyes in mock mortification. “I created a monster. Or monsters, to be precise.”

Erik chuckled as he planted one last kiss on Charles’ mouth before dragging himself away. “Don’t be jealous, Jean,” he said dryly before heading off in search of the champagne, and Charles was not at all shy about ogling that muscular arse as Erik walked away. He gave Jean a sheepish grin when she caught him leering, shaking her head as she did so.
“This reminds me all over again of the screen test where you two acted together for the first time,” she said, tapping her chin nostalgically. “Even then, we could all sense the chemistry sizzling between you and Erik.”

“Really?” Charles was pleased. He had been so caught up in that scene that he had been barely aware of anything except Erik’s gaze burning into his own, the heat radiating off Erik’s body. “I didn’t think we were *that* obvious then.”

Jean shot him a flat-eyed ‘puh-leaze’ look. “For what it’s worth, you two are still at it. In fact, you’re even worse now.”

“Ain’t that the truth?” a familiar voice said behind him, and Charles turned to find a smirking Darwin nursing a bottle of beer.

“Too bad we weren’t there for their impromptu first kiss.” Darwin continued, voice dripping with sarcasm, and held out a friendly hand to Jean. “I’m Armando, by the way. Charles’ PA.”

Jean smiled as she shook Darwin’s hand. “Nice to meet you, Armando.”

“I still maintain that the script called for the kiss,” Charles said obstinately, stopping a passing waiter who was carrying a tray of glasses filled with chardonnay. “Do excuse me, my good chap,” he said with a grin as he helped himself, passing the wine to Jean and Darwin. It would be sufficient to tide them over until Erik came back with the vintage champagne.

“Hey, save us some,” Charles heard a familiar voice call out from behind Darwin, and he turned to see a rather tipsy, happy Alex, supported by Scott Summers. Scott now had much shorter hair than he did during the promotional tour for ‘From The Ashes’, and as always, he was wearing sunglasses indoors.

“Alex, maybe you should ease up on the booze for a while, huh?” Darwin said in concern, taking over Scott’s role as a support post. “Geez Scott, how much did you let him drink?”

Scott’s eyebrows jumped in surprise. “Don’t look at me, it’s not my fault that your boyfriend is a lightweight. He’s only had two beers, and a rum and coke.”

Charles couldn’t help chuckling as he passed the chardonnay to Scott as well, careful to circumvent Alex who was already listing dangerously towards Darwin. “Alex, I expect more from you,” Charles said mock sternly.

“Yeah, how come Charles can drink like a fish and you’re wasted after just two beers?” Darwin pretended to complain, but his hand was tender as he rubbed the back of Alex’s neck soothingly. Jean was just watching everything with amusement, her eyes flitting back and forth between Darwin and the brothers before settling meaningfully on Scott, taking small sips of her chardonnay.

“Well, perhaps he could repay Jean after all. “Oh, where are my manners? Jean, this is Scott Summers, he was my producer when I was shooting ‘From the Ashes’. He’s a force to be reckoned with on the field and I had such a wonderful time working with him in Japan. And he’s Alex’s older brother, of course,” Charles said, gesturing towards Scott with his wine glass. “And Scott, this is the very lovely and brilliant Jean Grey, our casting director for ‘First Class’.”

Scott tilted his head in interest as he stepped forward, shaking Jean’s outstretched hand. “So you’re the reason I had to constantly battle Yuriko over her vendetta against Erik. She was determined to have him banned from the set.”

Jean’s laugh was loud and surprised. “I suppose someone has to take the blame for that,” she said
with a mock rueful sigh, before smiling at him. “By the way, I really loved ‘From the Ashes’. I have a weakness for movies set in Japan. I watched it with some industry people and we all agreed that Charles was luminous in it. My favourite scene was the one in the ramen shop after he visited Phoenix Hall.”

“It was such a pleasure to shoot at Byodo-in Temple,” Charles recalled fondly. Even Yuriko had been in a good mood that day, having yelled at him only twice. “Well, if we leave out the part where I had to consume the ramen. I remember my face turned red because the soup was so hot.”

“We had to pause filming a few times while we waited for Charles’ face to return to its usual pallor,” Scott said wryly, while Jean chuckled. “No amount of makeup could conceal the fact that he looked like a tomato.”

“It was worth your suffering then, because that scene was really funny,” Jean said, before squinting curiously at Scott. “Don’t mind my asking, but why are you wearing shades indoors? Is it a style thing?”

“Oh, sorry.” Scott adjusted his sunglasses a little sheepishly before taking them off and revealing his eyes. “It’s just that I suffer from a mild case of photophobia, so my eyes are quite sensitive to light.”

Jean nodded sympathetically. “That’s a shame, you have such striking eyes.”

Jean was right, Scott did have a marvellous pair of blue eyes. Charles chuckled, inclining his head to take a closer look. “I agree. And I do believe this is the first time I’ve actually seen them.”

“Oh, hell no,” Alex all but shouted. “I’m not putting myself through Charles and Erik 2.0. Dar, let’s go get a drink. Jean, my big brother is a blind moron if he doesn’t ask you out.”

“And by ‘drink’, you mean ‘water’,” Darwin said as he dragged a rather sloshed Alex off with an apologetic wave while Charles and Jean tried their best not to laugh. Scott, on the other hand, was smiling at Jean sheepishly, and Charles couldn’t help wondering if he had been this obvious when he had been flirting with Erik before they got together.

The thought of Erik, never too far below the surface of his mind, made him turn and crane his neck, wondering how Erik’s search for the champagne was going. At the other end of the room, he could make out Erik’s and Emma’s heads bowed in discussion, Emma smiling as Erik showed her something on his phone. Charles briefly wondered what they were talking about, but it was hard not to get distracted by Erik’s soft, gentle smile. He put the thought aside for later, meaning to tease the truth out of Erik when he got back with the champagne.

* * * * *

Erik’s search for the vintage Dom Pérignon was continually hampered by people wanting to congratulate or interview him, and he remained as patient as he could, shaking hands and being introduced to people whose names he’d shove aside the instant he walked away. But it was really nice to bump into one of his old co-stars from ‘Cyborg Cop’, and he left with promises to catch up over lunch soon.

He finally found the bar and was looking for the sommelier when he spotted Emma sidling up to him with a smirk, Remy tottering right behind and hanging onto her arm. “Charles isn’t with you?” Emma asked smugly. “I’m sure if I go and look out the window now, I’d see pigs flying.”

“Very funny,” Erik retorted, lifting an eyebrow at Remy, whose eyes were bleary and bloodshot. “What on earth happened to Loverboy?”
Emma simply threw him a dismissive glance. “Let’s just say he got a little too handsy with some poor girl and she happened to be carrying pepper spray.”

Erik was unable to suppress a bark of gleeful laughter. “I’m surprised you haven’t gone blind,” he told the sulky Remy.

“Oui, me too,” Remy complained, lifting a hand to rub at his eyes but wincing when Emma deftly smacked it away. “Maybe it was a very mild version.”

“That will teach you to place your unwanted paws on a lady’s bottom,” Emma scolded him, and Erik couldn’t stop chuckling at how contrite and sheepish Remy looked.

“Pardon, mademoiselle,” Remy muttered. “Anyway, I’m going to go wash my eyes again.”

“Try not to accidentally gouge them out. I need you once filming starts and you’re useless to me blind!” Erik called after him with a snicker as Remy slunk away to the bathroom, almost knocking over Al Pacino and Adam Sandler along the way.

Emma shook her head as she watched him tottering away, before turning back to Erik. “Look at all the bad habits he’s picked up from you. Good thing Charles doesn’t mind having your hands on his ass.”

“Indeed he doesn’t,” Erik said, smiling a little when he spotted Charles across the ballroom, in the middle of an animated conversation with Jean and - yuck - Scott Summers.


Rolling his eyes at her, Erik started rummaging through the available bottles at the bar, his attention immediately drawn to the sleek 1995 vintage Jeroboam, the white gold plating of the rare three-litre bottle catching the light beautifully. Well, this was certainly the night to pull all the stops. Erik gestured to the sommelier for it before turning back to Emma. “Why do I get the feeling you’re up to something?”

Emma tossed her hair back. “I’m not up to anything particularly evil,” she purred. “I just thought I’d mention a certain astronomical bill you received from Neil Lane.”

Erik remained very, very still, before casting a quick eye around to make sure that none of Charles’ friends were nearby. “You didn’t tell Charles, right?” he asked quietly.

Emma let out a scoff. “What? And ruin the chance to blackmail you? I’m not stupid.” She rested an elegant hand on his wrist with a knowing smile. “I just want a sneak peek at the reason why my bonus will be miniscule this year.”

Erik kept a straight face. “What makes you think you’re getting a bonus?”

Emma gave him a good whack on the arm. “After netting you an Oscar and the great love of your life, you’re lucky I’m not demanding my own private island.”

Erik considered this for a moment. Verdammt, she did have a point. After making sure the coast was clear, Erik grudgingly fished out his phone and opened the photo of the men’s diamond engagement ring that Neil Lane had finally finished crafting last week according to Erik’s very detailed designs, showing it to Emma.

She whistled, visibly impressed. “That is a beauty.”
Erik immediately relaxed. Emma was a self-proclaimed diamond expert, and if the ring passed her stringent criteria, it meant that he had most likely made a good choice. “Do you think Charles will like it?” he asked, a little anxious.

Emma snorted, before peering closer at the bright phone screen. “Sugar, I would marry you if you gave me that ring.”

Erik couldn’t stop the broad smile stretching out across his face. Now he simply couldn’t wait to give it to the intended recipient. “Good thing it’s not meant for you, then,” he quipped, letting out a loud ‘ow!’ when she gave him a resounding slap on his bicep.

* * * * *

Charles pulled back the duvet and crawled in, and had just settled his head onto the pillow when Erik returned from their en suite bathroom with a wet washcloth, his gait unsteady as he all but collapsed into bed. Charles laughed, reaching out to help Erik wriggle his way up the sheets and into his waiting arms. “I don’t think it’ll be wise of you to get out of bed tomorrow, darling.”

Erik chuckled, smoothing back Charles’ tousled hair. “The thought never even crossed my mind.”

Erik reached down and began gently cleaning Charles up with the washcloth, and Charles sighed as the warm fabric brushed against his sensitive skin. They had gone home and Charles had kissed Erik’s trophy proudly before placing both their Oscars side by side on the mantle over the fireplace, to which Erik had laughed and responded by coming over to kiss Charles’ Oscar followed immediately by Charles himself. They had then celebrated with an excellent bottle of Cuvée Dom Pérignon from the outstanding 1962 vintage, followed by three rounds of very boisterous sex that Charles was quite embarrassed to admit their very famous neighbours down the street must have overheard, particularly when Erik had thrown him up against the wall and fucked him into next week.

Charles took the towel from Erik when he was done, softly wiping Erik clean before tossing the washcloth to some corner of the bedroom. Erik placed his full weight comfortably on Charles, tucking his face into the curve where Charles’ neck met his shoulder. He stroked Erik’s hair, massaging his scalp as he listened to Erik’s breathing even out, the rise and fall of Erik’s back beneath Charles’ arm levelling slowly, until each exhale was just a gentle puff of warm air ghosting against his skin. As much as Charles enjoyed indulging in carnal desires, clinging and moulding to each other so that, for a few brief moments, Erik was a part of himself and he a part of Erik, the two of them inseparable, he craved what came after most of all. Because when Erik finally surrendered himself to peace, all the doubts and fears written in the fine wrinkles upon his face smoothed over, like lines drawn in the sand by ocean waves, that was when Erik was completely and utterly his.

“Erik?” Charles whispered tentatively, smiling when he received a muffled grunt in reply. “I’ve been thinking about this a lot lately.” Charles paused, kissing the back of Erik’s shoulder. “Actually, I have for quite some time now.”

Erik stirred, quickly propping himself up on his elbows with what for a quick second looked like a startled expression on his face. “What is it, Liebling?”

“I just think we’re in the right place for this now, but if you feel we’re not ready it’s completely all right as well. I love you, and the last thing I want to do is to force you into anything you’re not comfortable doing.” Charles said, eyes searching Erik’s face nervously.

Erik went worryingly still. “I love you, too. Just say it, Charles.”
Charles took a deep, fortifying breath. “Well, I feel we should utilise our celebrity status by teaming up with the Human Rights Campaign,” Charles said, running a hand along the curves of Erik’s bicep. “It’s a worthy cause, and I’ve been considering it since our press tour for ‘First Class’, actually. We’re public figures, and now that we have these accolades, people will listen and take us seriously.”

It was then that Erik burst out laughing.

Charles pouted as he lifted his eyebrows. “Perhaps you had too much champagne.”

Erik shook his head immediately, still grinning when he bent down to kiss Charles’ cheek. “I’m sorry for laughing, Charles. It’s just that I was expecting you to say something very different for a moment.” Erik settled down and gazed at him adoringly, a soft smile on his face as he cupped Charles’ neck with one hand. His thumb slid slowly from the back of Charles’ ear down his jawline as Charles’ lips parted like second nature, a quiet sigh escaping his throat. “I think this is a magnificent idea,” Erik said, just before he closed the distance between their lips with a tender kiss, a fleeting touch of tongues like a lovers’ pact, signed and sealed.

Charles smiled delightedly when they parted. “Good. Because I can’t do this without you.”

Erik slipped his arms under Charles, rolling them over so that it was his turn to be on his back, cradled by the pillows. Charles accommodated when Erik arched his spine, lifting himself as Erik shimmied his hips a little to adjust to the mattress before lying back down on Erik’s warm torso. Erik combed his fingers affectionately through Charles’ hair, ruffling it up then petting it down again. “And how do you propose we make use of our newfound power?” Erik asked through a yawn.

Charles lifted his head, smiling when he noticed Erik’s drooping eyelids. He leaned down and placed a kiss on Erik’s forehead. “You’re tired.”

Erik smirked, closing his eyes. “Someone wore me out.”

Charles laughed and reached for the covers, tucking them both in. He spread himself over Erik, stretching out to take Erik’s hand in his and threading their fingers together. It never ceased to amaze him that Erik, who hardly ever let anyone in, never minded when he wrapped himself around him this completely, that Erik actually loved being this intimately connected as much as Charles did.

“Go to sleep,” Charles whispered against Erik’s temple, pressing the suggestion into his skin with a kiss. “I’ll tell you in the morning.”

* * * * *
‘First Class’ Sweeps ‘Best Picture’, Major Acting Awards at Oscars

Erik Lohnsherr and Charles Xavier are still reeling from their mega sweep on Sunday’s Oscars, where they walked away with ‘Best Actor’ and ‘Best Supporting Actor’ wins respectively, while ‘First Class’ picked up ‘Best Picture’ and ‘Best Original Screenplay’ to boot.

“It still hasn’t sunk in for me yet,” an ecstatic Xavier said at the press room after the awards. “I’m even happier for Erik being bestowed with such an honour.”
Notes:
1. The ‘rambling speech’ that Erik was rolling his eyes over in the article refers to Clint Eastwood’s speech at a Republican convention earlier this year.
2. Some nice pictures of La Petite France in Strasbourg, Alsace, France.
3. *Château de L’Ile* is a beautiful hotel near Strasbourg where our gruesome twosome stayed for their anniversary.
4. The stork is the emblem of Alsace.
5. Emma’s comparison of Charles and Erik to Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton is a reference to them falling in love on the set of ‘Cleopatra’ before going on to make a total of 11 movies together. Richard Burton’s diaries were published recently and here’s an interview Elizabeth and Richard did with 60 Minutes where they behave a lot like Charles and Erik at times.
6. James McAvoy infamously joking that he’s had sex with Michael Fassbender four times and, on a separate occasion, that they had sex every morning.
7. The Alsatian vineyards along the Route du Vin (Alsatian wine route) are famous for their wines.
8. *L’Auberge de L’Ill* is a famous three-starred restaurant in the charming village of Illhaeusern.
9. The scene where Erik and Charles read the scripts offered to them is an homage to various completed popular fics in the fandom. In order of appearance: Limited Release by rageprufrock, Not So Much the Teacup by thehoyden, A Curious Carriage of Crystal and Cold by Etharei, and Come As You Are by scarletblush.
11. The gazebo was chosen due to its resemblance to Cerebro, which Charles says Erik helped him build in ‘X-Men’.
12. The quote from ‘The Once and Future King’ is about Lancelot and Guinevere.
13. The kiss routine that Charles and Erik came up with is based on the infamous victory kiss by Ryan Gosling and Rachel McAdams when they won for Best Kiss at the MTV Movie Awards in 2005.
14. The Oscar nominations are announced at the ungodly hour of 5:30 A.M. for people on the West Coast.
15. Moira’s gown that she wore to the Oscars is based on an actual dress that Rose Byrne wore on the Emmys red carpet.
16. Michael Fassbender played David 8 in Prometheus, alongside Charlize Theron.
17. Since this chapter was written at a time when the Oscar hosts and nominees have not been confirmed yet, we went purely with speculation, based mostly on this list of buzzworthy contenders.
18. Deleted scene where Erik is asked if he’s looking for someone at the train station.
19. “Oh, my stars and garters,” is a quote by Hank from ‘X-Men: The Last Stand’.
20. Phoenix Hall, where they filmed one of the scenes of Charles’ Japanese indie movie,
is a reference to Jean Grey, as well as the title ‘From The Ashes’.

23. Neil Lane is the go-to celebrity jeweller and has designed many celebrity engagement rings.

24. The vintage champagne that Erik bought at the party is the limited edition Dom Pérignon 1995 Vintage White Gold Jeroboam, and they drank the Cuvée Dom Pérignon Brut, from when else but 1962, for their ‘private party’ afterwards.

25. The Human Rights Campaign is the largest LGBT equality-rights advocacy group and political lobbying organization in the United States.

Works inspired by this one: **Art inspired by The proper care of actors** by Mikanskey, **In Another Life (To How We Were And Will Be)** by orphan_account

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