A World of Our Own

by LittleGreenPuppy

Summary

Eren wasn't happy knowing his whole life that he'd have to be forced into an arranged marriage, but finding out that his fiance is one of the richest, most famous heirs of the modern age wasn't exactly helping. All about the struggles of being forced into a modern day arranged marriage.

And Eren being a little shit in the process. Cause he's a brat.

Notes

Alright, bear with me here for a moment. I just got started on AO3 after 7 1/2 years on FF.NET so if it looks like I don't know what I'm doing, it's because I don't know what I'm doing. I'll learn as I go.

Now, because I already have 7 chapters up on FF.NET for this story, I'm going to do something cool and update here once a day until I'm caught up next Monday (yes I already counted it out don't judge me). So once chapter 8 hits, it's going to normal weekly updates. :D

Furthermore, there are OCs of my own creation in this story so yeah. Have fun with those. And Levi's last name is NOT canon (I started this story back in March and I wasn't going to change it after I found out).

Aaaaaaand.... I think that's all I have to say. On with the story! >:D
See the end of the work for more notes.
This is My Future

He couldn’t do it.

There was absolutely no way he could do it.

Never in a million years and beyond would he ever be able to do it.

“I’m not kissing Jean,” Eren Jaeger, a young man with brown hair and stunning sea green eyes, stated defiantly. He and a couple of his friends were waiting in the parking lot after school, as they did every day, while waiting for the rest of their group to show up so they could leave.

“Oh, come on!” another young man, Reiner Braun, exclaimed. This one had blond hair and was fairly buff.

The young woman next to him, Ymir, was equally dismayed. “Yeah! It’ll be totally hysterical!” She had freckles and dark hair that was always tied up in a ponytail.

“I’m not kissing a horse so you guys can laugh!” At that point, two other guys from Eren’s group of friends appeared. One had two-toned tan hair and a permanently conceited or pissed off look on his face. Right now he had the latter. That was Jean Kirstein. The other one, who had been trailing behind Jean, was Marco Bodt. He had freckles, dark hair, and was much, much nicer than Jean.

“Damn it, Jaeger! I’m not a fucking horse!” Jean yelled at Eren. Everyone there rolled their eyes. Jean and Eren fought all the time. They were the best of friends, and if one of them was in trouble the other wouldn’t hesitate to help, but they also drove each other insane and showed their friendship through insults and flying fists.

“Could’ve fooled me,” Eren said with a snide grin.

“You asshole!!” Jean launched forward in an attempt to retaliate with violence, as what most of their fights usually came to, but was quickly stopped.

“Calm down, Jean!” Marco cried, pulling Jean back. He wrapped his arms around Jean and whispered soothing words coupled with little kisses. In case it wasn’t obvious, Jean and Marco were dating. It had taken a long time for them to realize it too, mostly due to Jean’s stubborn insistence that he was straight.

“Eren, why do you always have to start fights with Jean?” a girl with black hair and a bright red scarf that was always wrapped around her neck asked from beside Eren. She’d been there all along. That was Mikasa Ackerman, Eren’s adopted sister. They were practically inseparable, much to Eren’s dismay. While Mikasa had a strong sisterly love for brother that required her to take care of him, Eren saw it mostly as a nuisance and very annoying, regardless of how many times that devotion had saved him from getting the ever loving crap beaten out of him.

“Hey! It’s not my fault! They started it!” Eren griped, pointing at Ymir and Reiner.

“You guys fight all the time, you don’t need our help,” Ymir laughed in a cheeky manner. She was nudged from the side by a small blonde, Christa Lenz, also known as a goddess, the sweetest and prettiest girl in school, and, most importantly, Ymir’s girlfriend of three years.

“Well, they might not have fought if you hadn’t provoked Eren, Ymir,” she reprimanded in her sugar like voice. Ymir only laughed more, hugging her girlfriend tightly.
“Oh, those two idiots would have fought even without me and Reiner saying anything!” Ymir nuzzled the top of Christa’s head. “You’re just too sweet, Christa!”

“Ymir! Stop it!” Christa giggled, clutching her girlfriend back and clearly not truly meaning what she’d just said.

“How can you say anything about Ymir and Christa being “so lovey dovey” when you’ve still got Marco wrapped around you like a scarf.” Jean sputtered out incoherent words, and Eren smirked.

“Speaking of lovey dovey and significant others, where the hell is Berthold?” Reiner asked. Berthold Hoover was Reiner’s shy and tall boyfriend, though they kept quiet about it. Berthold, being as shy as he was, was still fairly uncomfortable with public displays of affection. Though, that didn’t stop Reiner from teasing him every now and then. Marco, still hugging a stuttering Jean, answered him.

“Armin told me that he, Annie, and Berthold would be running a bit behind. They have a test last period and I heard Mr. Zackly’s tests usually run a couple minutes over.” Most of the group groaned at that.

“Man, I hated Mr. Zackly when I had him for history!” Eren flopped back on the hood of Ymir’s truck in remembrance.

“Hah! If I remember correctly, he hated you just as much!” Reiner grinned, kicking Eren’s leg lightly.

“Jean, too!”

“Hey! It was Eren’s fault!”

“Now listen here, horseface-”

“So,” Marco cut in before things got too heated. “Is everyone excited for our trip?”

For spring break this year, the group decided to spend the week at Christa’s parent’s lake house a couple of hours away. Christa’s family was loaded. They owned a fairly successful jewelry business, made millions, and everyone knew. For a while after she came to Sina High School during freshman year, everyone talked to her and tried to be her friends for the sole purpose of either trying to get in her pants, since she was so pretty, or in hopes that they would have an expendable money source. It took months for Christa to be able to fully trust everyone that she now called her friends after they met.

“Hell yeah!” Reiner fist pumped the air in excitement. “This is gonna be sweet!”

“And better yet, no adult supervision.” Ymir winked suggestively at Christa, who then blushed a bright red.

“Oh man! If I’m gonna have to listen to you two going at it-” Jean warned.

“Like you two aren’t gonna have sex!” Ymir protested.
“Everyone who has a boyfriend or girlfriend is gonna sex there this week,” Reiner informed gleefully. “Sorry, Mikasa!”

“Don’t forget about Armin and Annie!” Marco reminded them.

“Oh yeah! Cuz poor little Armin would be far too shy!” Ymir cackled at the thought.

Armin and Annie Leonhart had only recently started dating. Annie was blonde with blue eyes, same as Armin, only she had a silent fierceness about her. Actually, within their group of friends, Eren and Mikasa were the only ones who were still single at that time. Even Connie had a girlfriend, Sasha, the last of their group of friends. She was slightly crazy and had an unnatural obsession with food of any kind.

“I really hope this place has soundproof walls,” Mikasa bemoaned, shaking her head. Eren placed a comforting hand on her shoulder.

“I feel sorry for you,” he confessed. “After hearing that, part of me is glad I’m not going.”

“Oh, that’s right,” Christa recalled sadly. “You can’t go…”

“Man that sucks!”

“Why is that again? Something about your dad?” Eren sighed.

“My dad signed me up for some business camp thing at some Ivy League school in hopes that I’ll decide to give up on my dreams of actually enjoying life.” He rolled his eyes at the thought.

Although, that wasn’t entirely true.

You see, Eren had a secret. And a very big one at that.

What his friends didn’t know, what the world didn’t know, was that Eren Jaeger was the secret heir to the largest and most successful medical business at the time, the Jaeger Medical Company. It dealt with everything from producing and shipping medical supplies to actually owning hospitals around the country. In 10 years, the company had gone from the very bottom as a new business to the very top as the best. And in 20 years, the company hadn’t waivered the slightest. What his friends also didn’t know was that he was lying about spring break. He wasn’t actually going to a business camp. No.

He was meeting his fiancé.

That’s right, Eren Jaeger was engaged. The only problem was, he didn’t know who he was engaged to.

Several years ago, before Eren was born, his dad, Grisha Jaeger, made a deal with a very large corporation that was about to buy him out. The deal was that the corporation would refrain from buying the Jaeger Medical Company, and instead, in 20 or so years, the future first born of Grisha and the then newly born first born of the son of the head of the corporation would marry when both were at least 18 years old and merge the two companies together with all of the assets to be transferred to the corporation. The corporation agreed.

The agreement would work out for everyone in the end anyway. If the agreement worked, then Grisha would not only be able to run his company for at least a good 18 years and hopefully make plenty of money out of it, but he would also be associated with one of the most prestigious, wealthiest, and oldest corporation in the country, assuring his financial security.
The corporation, in turn, would also benefit as they would not have to spend money trying to buy out the Jaeger Medical Company and wouldn’t have to worry about building it up and making it profitable; that would be Grisha’s job over the next 18 years. Plus, the corporation had an 18 year window for if the Jaeger Medical Company ended up crashing and burning. If that happened, then the corporation could simply cut off the arrangement and either buy the Jaeger Medical Company for dirt cheap or let it burn on its own.

The only problem that could occur would be if Grisha could not produce an heir. Then, if the Jaeger Medical Company was successful, the corporation would either have to spend even more money to buy the company or give up on it all together. However, there wasn’t a worry, because eight years after the agreement, Eren, the sole heir to the Jaeger Medical Company was born.

No one knew that Eren was the heir, though. Grisha had raised him away from any spotlight or excess money. Part of the reason was that Grisha didn’t want his son to be spoiled. The other was to keep Eren and his fiancé from knowing who the other was. Because of the age difference, both parties thought it would be best to separate them until Eren became of age. There were far too many things that could go wrong otherwise, especially with the media.

So Eren was kept in the dark, away from the prying eyes of the media and any knowledge of who his intended might be. The only things Eren knew was that he was in an arranged marriage and that his intended was male also. Anything more and Grisha clammed up. Though, he had no problem constantly reminding Eren of his situation, especially when Eren wanted to start dating. No dating was allowed for Eren due to his engagement, much to Eren’s displeasure.

And it wasn’t just the dating issue that Eren hated. He hated everything about his arranged marriage. The fact that he had to get married to a stranger. The fact that he had to get married to a stranger for business reasons. The fact that his fiancé was a stranger. He was going to meet his fiancé tomorrow, and then in two months when he graduated, they would be officially announced as engaged. Then he had to spend the rest of his life legally bonded to that stranger, who may or may not be a complete and total asshole, douchebag extravaganza.

But, since his 18th birthday was just a couple days ago, meaning he’d finally come of age, it was decided that he and his fiancé would spend his spring break together.

Whether he liked it or not.

Eren, now finally home, collapsed onto his bed. He wasn’t sure if he should be happy that he was out of school or wishing he could go back. Because if he wasn’t home, then his dad couldn’t drag him out to meet his fiancé.

Fiancé… God how he hated that word.

It was supposed to describe the person you loved. The one you wanted to spend the rest of eternity with. The one you chose. But to Eren, all it meant was prison. To be chained to someone for the sole purpose of business. Like a dispensable object that can be traded or sold.

There was a knock at his door. Eren lifted his head, calling out a ‘come in’. Mikasa poked her head in.

“How are you feeling?” she asked, leaning against the door frame. Eren laid his head back down.

“I’m about to be sold to the highest bidder. How do you think I feel?”

“You better not let dad hear you say that. Again.”
“Whatever!” Eren yelled, pushing himself up into a sitting position. “It’s his own fault! I mean, did he really think that when he made the deal that I would be perfectly fine with it?!” He grabbed one of the pillows on his bed and threw it at the wall. “I’m not some robot!” He threw another pillow. “I’ve got feelings and opinions!” Another pillow. “I want to live my own life!”

“Eren.”

He paused in throwing his last pillow to see his mother, Carla, walk past Mikasa and into his room. She sat down next him and gently removed the pillow from his grasp. Next, she pulled him into a hug.

“It’ll be alright. I promise,” she said soothingly. His mother was a kind person with her brown hair pulled into a loose, side ponytail and warm brown eyes. She was a stay at home mom that took care of the cooking and cleaning so that they didn’t have to hire a maid. She probably could’ve gotten a job if she wanted, but she said often enough that raising Eren was a tough enough job on its own.

“How do you know?” Eren asked, a little too harshly.

“How do you know that it won’t be?” He didn’t answer. “Eren, you’re focusing only on what could go wrong. Why not try and see what good might come of it?”

“What good could come of it?!” He pulled out of her embrace. “I’m being forced into a marriage with a stranger!” Carla only smiled.

“You’re very intent on believing that you’re going to hate whoever you’re marrying simply because you didn’t choose them. What if you end up liking them?” she asked, nudging him with her shoulder. Eren was unconvinced, and it showed on his face.

“You really think that the chances of me liking him are all that great?”

“And what if he doesn’t like Eren?” Mikasa added. “He’s not exactly the friendliest of people out there.” Eren deadpanned.

“Thanks, Mikasa. I can always count on you to cheer me up,” Eren said dryly. “But it’s a valid point. What if the guy hates my guts? Even if I’m really nice and whatever, what if he still hates me?”

Carla pursed her lips slightly in thought for a couple moments, looking away from her son’s pleading face. Finally, she sighed, looking Eren straight in the eyes.

“I’m going to give you some advice, Eren,” she began gingerly. “Don’t think about it. Go visit for the week, get to know him, and then decide if this marriage is really so bad. I don’t think you two are going to hate each other as much as you think, my son.” She smiled and pushed her son on the shoulder lightly. “You already have one thing in common,” she informed him smugly.

“Huh?” Eren furrowed his brow in confusion. “What’s that?”

“You’re both required to marry each other. This wasn’t his choice either, you know. He was only a baby when the deal was made. So please, try not to give him a hard time about it.” She gave him one last firm hug before turning to Mikasa. “Now! Mikasa, would you mind coming down to the kitchen and help me with dinner for a bit? I’m sure Eren has plenty of packing to do.”

Mikasa nodded, sent one last worried glance towards Eren, and left. Carla stood and was about to follow until she felt a tug at her shirt. Eren grasped her shirt, staring at his lap.
“Mom.”

Carla sat back down. “Hmm?”

Eren released his grip on her shirt. “In this world, everyone gets to marry who they want, whoever they love. They can choose who they want to spend the rest of their life with. You always tell Mikasa to only marry someone that she truly loves… So” Eren stared at his mother, his eyes wet with unshed tears. “Why can’t I? Why is it only me who can’t choose for himself?”

“Oh, Eren…”

Carla quickly pulled her son in for another hug, her heart breaking. She wished she could give him an answer.

After a couple of minutes of comforting hugs, Carla left for the kitchen, leaving Eren to his thoughts. Well, really, she’d left him to pack, but he wasn’t going to pack so early. He didn’t have to leave until tomorrow afternoon, so like hell if he was going to pack any time before half an hour until they had to leave.

Eren was thinking about maybe playing some video games to keep his mind off things and pass the time when his phone began to vibrate. Armin was calling.

“Hello?” he answered.

“Eren! Have you seen the news recently?!” Armin was practically yelling through the phone, obviously way too excited.

“Huh? No, I just got home.”

“Quick! Get on your computer! I need to talk to someone about this!”

Eren walked over to his computer on his desk and opened it up. After some searching, he finally found what he assumed Armin was so jittery about.

“Enlarge your penis using this one weird trick?”

“Eren, you jerk! No!” Eren chuckled, starting to feel a little better.

“Recon creators Levi Voclain and Erwin Smith rumored to be engaged?”

Levi Voclain and Erwin Smith were two names that every teenager and business person nowadays knew. They had recently created a social media website called Recon. If you want to know what Recon is, just imagine all of the best parts of Facebook, Tumblr, and any game app you can think of all rolled into one. Recon hit it off with the crowd instantly (because, let’s be honest, unless it’s Google+, any social media website will become popular). But it wasn’t just because it was a social media website, it was because of the game that came exclusively with Recon: Attack on Titan. It had something to do with a post-apocalyptic society fighting off giant, naked cannibals, and the game could be played easily via computer or phone.

There were actually more people involved in the making of Recon, but Levi and Erwin were the two faces of the website, mostly because everyone thought they were drop dead gorgeous. Plus, Levi was already well known in the business world. He was the current heir to the Voclain Corporation, a very old mega company owned by a very prestigious family that made its money off of stock and taking over other businesses, building them up, and then selling the company for even more money. Erwin became famous from association since he was Levi’s closest friend and they’d
known each other since middle school.

And apparently, now they were rumored to be engaged.

“Can you believe that?! Do you think it’s true? Has my beloved Erwin Smith found the love of his life?” Armin gushed. He was probably making a bunch of overdramatic gestures, too.

“Armin, is there something you need to tell Annie?” Eren asked playfully, looking over the article. It had a picture of the two billionaires side by side.

“Oh, ha ha. Quiet you. I just admire him, is all!”

“And obsess over him and worship him and stalk him…”

“I-I do not!” Eren could hear the blush through Armin’s voice and couldn’t help but snicker a bit.

“Admit it. You have a crush on him.”

“I do not! I do not! Besides, I’m never going to actually meet him so what’s the point in having a crush on him. Which I don’t!”

“Can you at least admit you have a celebrity crush on him?” There was no sound from the other end. “Celebrity crushes are okay you know.”

“… Maybe… But only because I admire him! I mean, he’s smart… charismatic…”

“Handsome…”

“Yeah… hand- Eren!” Eren couldn’t help it, he laughed. He loved Armin and all, but he was just too gullible sometimes.

“No, but seriously, you think he’s handsome don’t you? Come on! You can appreciate how good someone looks without having to like them.”

“We-Well… I guess. Do you think he is?”

“Yeah.” Eren responded with no hesitation. Looking over the picture the article had. Erwin Smith was tall, broad shouldered, and had an impressive jawline. His blond hair was perfectly combed into place and he had a bright smile that reached his glistening blue eyes. Very handsome. “He’s really good looking. I bet all the girls, and some guys, drool all over him.”

“What about Levi Voclain? Do you think he looks good?” Levi Voclain?

“Why? Don’t tell me you’ve got a crush on him too!”

“No, no. I’m just curious.”

Eren studied Levi. He was… significantly shorter than Erwin, by almost a full head. He was lithe, but still gave off the impression that he could easily kick your ass. And his expression only emphasized that impression. Not only was he not smiling, but his grey eyes were narrowed as if he was glaring at everyone around him. Eren decided that, yes, he was handsome, though a little too short for Eren’s personal taste. He would look even better if he did something other than frown at the world.

“He’s so grumpy… And short,” Eren said in a deep, playful voice, like he was trying to imitate how he imagined Levi would speak in a serious manner but failing miserably from trying not to
laugh. Armin was cracking up on the other end.

“If… If you ever meet him… you should tell him that… In that voice too,” Armin managed between giggles.

“What? So I can die?” Eren asked, incredulous. “Just because you guys label me as a suicidal bastard doesn’t mean I am.”

There was another good round of laughter between the two of them before Armin spoke up again.

“Hey, you know what would be cool?”

“What?”

“If your fiancé ended up being Erwin Smith.” Armin was the only person outside of Eren’s family who knew about the marriage and Eren’s secret identity. And it took a lot of crying, whining, and temper tantrums to convince Eren’s dad to let him in on the secret. “Oh! Or, even better, Levi Voclain.”

“Oh, god. Don’t tell me that!” Eren buried his face in his free hand. “It’s bad enough thinking about how I’ll have to spend the rest of my life with some rich, and most likely asshole, stranger, but having to spend my life with some famous, rich asshole who helped create the biggest social media website since Facebook? No fucking thank you. I’d prefer to stay out of the media’s attention.”

“Come to think of it… you still haven’t gotten an account on Recon yet, have you?! Oh no, Armin please don’t.”

“Ugh, no I haven’t. And I don’t plan to any time soon.”

“Why?” You know how this works Armin! No matter how much you try, Eren isn’t going to get an account on Recon.

“It’s just another social media website. It’s just like Facebook, MySpace, and Google+ only there’s like one feature that’s different or new.”

“That is so not true!” And here we go…

The rest of their conversation consisted of Armin trying to convince Eren how Recon was amazing while Eren tried to convince Armin that he wasn’t going to get an account no matter how hard he tried to convince him.

At half past five, Eren’s dad came home. In order to avoid confrontation, Eren locked himself in his room. Thankfully, his mom kept Grisha from bothering him. She told him Eren was upset about the marriage and should probably be left alone for a while. That is, unless he wanted to get into a fight right after he came home from work and right before dinner. So, for just a little while, a rare blanket of peace settled over the Jaeger household. That it, until dinner, when it was carelessly thrown off.

“So, have you finished packing yet?” Grisha asked. Eren refrained from groaning. The tension was already building.

“… No,” he answered with a slight pause.

“Have you even started packing?” Eren didn’t answer that time, opting instead for picking at his
food. “Figures. You better start soon. I don’t want to be late.”

“Yeah, I hear slave auctions are really picky about punctuality,” Eren muttered, both hoping that his dad did and did not hear it. He heard it.

“You’re meeting your fiancé,” Grisha said, pinching the bridge of his nose in annoyance. “You’re not even getting married yet.”

“Yet,” Eren mumbled under his breath.

“So you are not a slave.”

“You traded me in a business deal. I kind of feel like a slave. But, then again, who gives a fuck what I think? Dad gets a business deal!” Eren sneered.

“You will not use that kind of language in this house!” Grisha reprimanded, pointing a finger at his son.

“Or what? You’re gonna kick me out? Are you gonna disown me? Oh, wait! You can’t! Because then who are you gonna barter away to fucking strangers?!” Eren was yelling at this point. He couldn’t stop it.

“Eren, quiet. You don’t know what you’re talking about. And do not use that language in this house.”

“You know what you could do? You could cancel my spring break. I hear a lot of parents like to do that,” Eren said with fake innocence. “Only, I guess that wouldn’t work for you since I’d actually want you to do that!”

Grisha slammed his hands on the table.

“Eren, so help me God, if you do not shut up I’m going to make you spend two weeks there.” That shut Eren up good. He retreated to glaring spitefully at his dad while picking at his food. For a good couple of minutes, nothing but the sound of dinner filled the air through the thick tension. Then Grisha spoke again. “This agreement was made well before you were born. This benefits the entire family, including you.”

“Me? How the hell does this benefit me?” Grisha only glared. Eren sighed bitterly and started again, this time without the dreaded curse words. “How does this benefit me?”

“Well.” Grisha kept his voice stable and calm. “Not only will you not have to worry about your heart getting broken or deceived or trying to find someone worth marrying, but you will be much more financially stable than if you were to try and live off your… hobby.”

Eren’s eyes narrowed dangerously. Another very old argument started to surface.

“And what’s that supposed to mean?”

“You know very well what it means.” Grisha evaded the question.

“No, I don’t. I’m stupid, so, please, explain what you mean.”

Grisha rolled his eyes. “You are not stupid. And I am just saying that those who write for a living, don’t usually make enough to actually live comfortably. I don’t care if you write. I don’t care if you write a dozen or a hundred novels. But you need to admit that this hobby, is just that: a hobby.
You won’t get anywhere with it.”

No one at the table moved, besides Grisha. Mikasa and Carla watched Eren frantically, but he hung
his head so no one could see his expression. Neither one of them dared to interrupt, though. They
found that interrupting or trying to stop one of Eren and Grisha’s fights usually only made it worse.

Finally, Eren stood, keeping his face hidden.

“I’m done with dinner,” Eren stated emotionlessly. He picked up his half-finished plate of food,
walked into the kitchen, and dropped it in the sink carelessly. It made a loud sound but not loud
enough to indicate that anything was broken.

He came back through the dining room, as it was the quickest way back to his room. Just as Eren
was about to leave the dining room, he faced his dad, fists clenched, face red with anger, and eyes
brimming with tears about to be shed.

“Oh, and Dad? Did you ever stop and think that maybe, just maybe, I would actually want to find
someone worth marrying? On my own? Even though I’d have to deal with broken hearts and
people who want to deceive me? At least then, I’d know if chose the right person in the end.
Instead of having my dad decide what I want and hoping for the best.”

With that, Eren ran out of the room and up the stairs before slamming his door shut as hard as he
could, Mikasa not far behind. The sound of things crashing, muffled screaming, and Mikasa
banging on Eren’s door wafted down into the dining room.

Carla hid her face in her hands.

“Grisha… Why?” she moaned. He sighed in response, looking as exhausted as he felt.

“He’s going to get over eventually. Of that I’m sure,” he replied softly. “But right now he’s just too
angry about it. I just don’t want him to have any extra anger bottled up before he meets his fiancé. I
hope that if I can get him to release some of his anger before, he won’t be so bad.” Carla lifted her
head from her hands.

“It doesn’t take much to set him off, Grisha. You know that,” she countered, overcome with worry
for her son. “Even if you let him blow off steam here, he’ll still be just as angry.”

“I know, but I don’t know what else to do, Carla?” he pleaded. “I only want what’s best for him.”
Carla sighed.

“So an arranged marriage.” It wasn’t a question, but Grisha took it like one anyway.

“We’ve had this conversation, Carla.”

“I know,” she said softly, staring down at her hands on the table. “I’ve stopped judging you for it.
But the closer it gets, the more real it becomes.”

Grisha reached out and held his wife’s hands in his own. It was the only way he could comfort her
at this point. They held each other quietly and the harsh screams and crashes from upstairs slowly
faded.

Armed only with a backpack and a suitcase that he packed not thirty minutes before, Eren trudged
down the stairs and through the front door where his father waited patiently against the car. He
sighed dejectedly in defeat. He’d spent all of his life trying to fight this marriage, and nothing
worked. Now he was walking straight into what he hated the most.

“Shall we?”

Eren said nothing, but placed his stuff in the backseat anyway. He slid into the passenger’s seat just as his father started the car. As the car began its drive, Eren watched as his house faded away.

Goodbye, home. Hello, Hell.
Into The Very Fancy Lion's Den

Chapter Notes

Kiiiind of getting the hang of this? It's definitely a LOT different than FF.NET... probably for the better though. And... did I just schedule this chapter update? I can do that?! Uh... -feels power pulsing through veins-

Oh, no. Never mind... -power dies- I can just save the draft...

Anyway, here's the next chapter. Like I promised.

“Eren, stop pouting. No matter how much you mope around and sulk, the fact is you’re getting married.”

“I’m not pouting.” Oh yes he was, but hell if he was ever going admit it. “I just don’t think it’s fair. Why should I have to marry some stranger for a stupid business agreement?” Grisha kept his eyes on the road, but Eren could still feel annoyance radiating off of his father.

“That ‘stupid business agreement’ meant that I was able to keep my company so you could have a comfortable childhood. Meaning that your mother and I wouldn’t have to struggle to feed and clothe you each day.” Grisha gripped the steering wheel hard as he talked.

“18 years of comfort, some of which I don’t even remember ’cause I was too young, in exchange for 60, and possibly more, years of pain and torture at the hands of some rich stranger? I think I’ll pass.”

“Watch your mouth. This agreement was made well bef-”

“Well before I was born…” Eren waved a hand in the air in a nonchalant manner, like waving away a fly. “Yeah, you’ve reminded me of that little fact my whole life.”

“And stop being so melodramatic. I don’t know how well you two will get along, but if you actually talk to the guy, and not try to pick a fight with him like you do everyone, you may find that being married to him won’t be so bad. Just behave when we get there and maybe it will turn out okay.”

Eren didn’t respond, his dad wasn’t going to listen so there was no point in continuing the argument. He, instead, chose to stare out the window, noticing how the scenery had changed. The upper-middle class houses were gone and in their place were mini-mansions. They kept driving until the mini-mansions gave way to actual mansions, complete with overly large buildings and expensive looking yards. Even then, they kept going.

Eren was getting nervous. Just how rich were these guys? He knew the company his dad made the arrangement with was a pretty big deal, but they didn’t live in a castle, did they? He silently hoped that they actually lived in a fairly upper-middle class house and the only way to get there was through all these rich neighborhoods. Anything above a mini-mansion made him nervous. With money comes class, and with class comes the expectation of acting sophisticated, refined and elegant, none of which Eren was. Just taking a quick look at the amount of notes on his record for
“inappropriate behavior” and fighting on school grounds would prove that none of those words even came close to the definition of Eren Jaeger. He bit the knuckle of his thumb, a nervous habit he’d picked up a long time ago.

They would judge him. Heir of a large, successful company or not, they would see him only as some wild, barbaric thug. They would never take him seriously.

Finally, Eren felt the car slow down; they were turning onto a driveway with a large, automatic gate. Glancing around wildly, he took in his surroundings. The lot itself was surrounded by a tall, thick, red brick wall with the typical spikes on the top and ivy growing up the sides. It was far away from a lot of the other mansions and very, very large. The driveway was lined with beautifully placed flower fields and led up to a large plot of asphalt next to the side of the house, probably where the garage for their cars was.

Eren brought his gaze to the building in front of him.

Well, it wasn’t a castle, but it certainly wasn’t an upper-middle class house. It was made of a light grey stone with dark grey details, two stories (at least that’s what it looked like from the outside), and very big, though probably normal sized for a mansion.

Eren was suddenly very distressed, and not just because of the mansion.

Part of the driveway circled around a large pond and fountain right in front of a set of stairs that led to the fancy marble porch. And standing on that fancy marble porch was his fiancé, someone who he knew surprisingly well.

Oh, the irony.

“Dad,” Eren whispered frantically despite still sitting in the car. “Why didn’t you tell me I was getting married to him?” Grisha had a slightly smug smile on his face.

“Oh? Starting to like him already?” Eren nearly smacked his forehead out of frustration.

“Dad! You don’t understand! That’s Levi Voclain! He created the biggest multi-billion dollar social media website since fucking Facebook!” Not to mention he was well known as an emotionless bastard who only knew how to look supremely pissed off at everything. Great, he got to marry everything he didn’t want to marry: a short, antisocial, famous, bazillionaire with extra class on the side.

“And…?” Eren groaned.

“Dad, everybody knows who he is in my class. Everybody! He’s literally all over the news!” And not to mention Armin fucking called it!

“I’m failing to see the problem here,” Grisha sighed.

Eren was about to continue, but a servant, or at least he looked like a servant, opened his door for him. He muttered a thank you and stood up. His eyes wandered slowly up the porch steps until grey met green. The meeting didn’t last long though, as Eren tore his gaze away. The intensity of Levi’s harsh, scrutinizing stare made him nervous.

“Grisha! How nice to see you again!” It was then Eren realized there was a second person standing next to Levi. He was a couple inches taller than Levi, with Levi’s same dark hair color (plus a couple extra grey hairs) in a different, shorter style and thin nose but had softer, rounder eyes. Levi’s father.
“Carlton! It’s wonderful to see you again.” Great… there was that crappy business tone his father always got. “You look well, Levi. I hear you’ve made quite incredible progress in the business world already.” Levi smiled politely. Huh, looks like he can do more than frown at the world after all.

“You look well, Grisha.” Eren was sure his heart had skipped a beat. Shit. Not only was he hot as fuck, but so was his voice. “I suppose I have, haven’t I?” Wow… So modest… This guy was an asshole.

“Speaking of sons… I take it this is Eren, correct?” Carlton gestured to Eren.

“That’s correct.” Eren felt himself be pushed forward. He turned back with a pleading expression on his face, but all he got in return from his father was a cold, glare filled with promises of a missing Xbox if he didn’t cooperate. Biting the inside of his cheek to keep his anger in, Eren faced Levi again. The bastard had an amused expression on his face. Eren’s hands balled into fists.


“Yeah, because that wasn’t forced at all.” Eren glared at the sarcastic tone. Two could play at that game.

“Now what would give you the idea that any of this would be forced?” Eren asked, voice dripping with fake innocence and sarcasm. “It couldn’t have anything to do with the arranged marriage now could it?” Levi’s only response was a smirk.

Carlton clapped his hands together.

“Alright! Shall we start off with a tour of the house?”

“That sounds like a great idea.” Levi started for the house first, then Carlton.

Grisha smacked Eren’s arm when their backs were turned.

“Damn it, Eren,” he hissed. “I told you to behave.”

“He was asking for it!” Eren hissed back, rubbing his now sore arm. Grisha pushed Eren forward.

“Just follow along and don’t get lost. And I don’t want to hear any of your snarky responses.”

“Whatever, dad…”

As Eren walked through the large, double doors leading into the mansion, he found out that the inside matched the outside in levels of fanciness. The floors were polished marble with an intricate design in the center of the giant foyer. There were two sets of curves stairs on either side of the room leading up to the second floor, also marble.

“Now, as you can see here…” Eren started to tune Levi’s father out. For the most part, he could figure out on his own which room was which. “… We actually got this piece in the 1800’s from my grandparents…” Oh for the love of God. Eren was definitely tuning him out. The last thing he needed was a history lesson on a bunch of décor. He took the time to look around on his own, though remaining in the room to avoid getting lost and raising suspicion that he wasn’t actually listening.

On one side of the foyer (that’s what it was called right?) there was what looked like a living room. Complete with a very expensive looking television over a fireplace. Eren could only hope they had a good selection of movies and games here. His dad made him leave all of his back home. On the
other side was most likely the dining room, if the large table and chairs were any indication that is. An archway in between the two staircases led to a hallway. In the hallway, there was a set of open doors that led to what looked like the… family room? Eren could never tell the difference between the two. All he knew was that both rooms had fireplaces and expensive televisions. And all three rooms, including the foyer, had really fancy looking decorations.

Dressed in a t-shirt, jeans and sneakers, he felt very out of place. A strange feeling tickled the back of his mind, but it was so small that he didn’t pay attention to it.

“Oi,” Eren jumped a little, noticing Levi was now standing right in front of him and, damn, actually smelled pretty good… It smelled like he’d just gotten out of the shower but still just the tiniest bit earthy, his clothes had just been washed, and… was that… cleaning products he smelled? Weird. “You’re not even paying attention are you?” Eren spared a glance to their fathers, both of which were still wrapped up in talking to each other about the décor.

“But this history lesson is just so intriguing,” he replied with a sarcastic and snobbish tone. Levi snorted amusedly, but even that sounded classy as fuck. Damn him.

“You are a fucking brat, you know that?” Eren wasn’t really sure how to take that. Was that an insult or some kind of backwards compliment? He said it with a smile. What did that mean? He didn’t get the chance to comment. “Father!” Levi called. “Are we going to show them around or inform them of the struggles and triumphs every piece of furniture endured to make it here?” Carlton paused before laughing.

“Oh I suppose you’re right! Youngsters nowadays don’t really care much for these kinds of things, now do they? They are so fast paced these days. Too busy worrying about Twitter and Facebook and now Recon. Hah! Isn’t that right, Eren?” Carlton laughed while Eren gave an awkward half smile. It wasn’t that he was in a hurry, he just didn’t care. Plus he didn’t really use social media all that much, but he didn’t have the heart to tell the happy man that. He looked too proud at the fact that he’d even remembered the names. “Well, let’s move on then. Now if you follow me…”

Grisha smiled as Carlton and Levi continued on into the hallway in between the staircases before turning to Eren with a sharp look.

What did I tell you, Eren? He mouthed. Eren shrugged angrily.

I didn’t fucking do anything! He mouthed back. Grisha rolled his eyes before placing his happy mask back on and following the two Voclains through the house.

Eren found out that despite the large size of the mansion, there weren’t as many rooms as he thought there’d be. He thought there would be at least 30 or 35 or even 50 rooms that were all laid out in a confusing, maze like layout, but there were only 15, and the layout was really simple. After the living room, family room, and dining room on the first floor there was the music room, the party room (Eren forgot what it was actually called, but basically it was a room where they held the parties and dinners for guests and usually remained empty), the kitchen (which was unnecessarily ginormous in Eren’s opinion), and Levi’s grandparent’s room and study (Carlton firmly commanded Eren to never go in to either of those rooms without permission from his parents… but it was only a suggestion, right?).

On the second floor was where the library all the rest of the bedrooms were. All six of them. (Really? Six? Eren understood that two of those belonged to Carlton and Levi but how many bedrooms did one place need?) Unlike the first floor, which was primarily marble, the second floor was all carpet. Really soft and clean looking carpet too. It also turned out that Eren’s bedroom (which was, once again, WAY too big for Eren’s tastes. He even had his own bathroom, with a
jacuzzi bathtub too, and walk in closet! Both also way too big) was right across the hall from Levi’s. Literally. The doors lined up with each other perfectly.

But they didn’t go inside Levi’s room. Curiosity got the better of him, so Eren waited until the end of the tour to see. He watched his and Levi’s fathers walk down the stairs before reaching for the door handle. A voice stopped him.

“What do you think you’re doing?” Levi asked, his eyes narrowing dangerously. Eren started to rub the base of his neck, one of his nervous habits. He’d just been caught trying to sneak into someone’s room after all.

“I wanted to see your room.” Eren didn’t really see any point in lying. What was he going to say? ‘Oh! This is your room? I just thought the fancy double doors meant it was a closet.’ “It wasn’t really included in the Exclusive Voclain House Tour so…”

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“Why do you want to see my room?” Levi fixed a questioning gaze on Eren and folded his arms over his chest.

“Well-

“Also, if it was not included in the “Exclusive Voclain House Tour,”” –Levi mimicked Eren’s voice there in a mocking manner, obviously not exactly ecstatic about the title– “then don’t you think there would be a reason for that?” Eren frowned, his hand dropping from his neck.

“Your dad didn’t say it was off limits-“

“So what?” Levi’s voice started to rise in volume. “Does that mean if there was no sign on a cliff saying “Do Not Jump” then it would be a good idea to jump?”

“I never said it was a good idea. Just that it was never explicitly said that I couldn’t go in.” Levi took in a breath to retort, but Eren cut him off. “And besides,” he started with a slight smirk. This was a bad idea. A very bad idea. He should stop. He should stop right now. He was going to have to spend the rest of his life with this guy.

But… what if they hated each other…? They couldn’t continue with this stupid marriage if they were ready to rip each other’s throats out at any given moment, right? They’d have to stop the marriage.

“As your fiancé, shouldn’t I have a right to see what your room looks like?” Eren made to grab the door handle, but as soon as his fingers brushed against the cool metal they had been torn away. Levi was all too close and gripping Eren’s wrist at an uncomfortable angle in a painful grasp.

But that wasn’t what scared Eren.

It was Levi’s completely emotionless face and unnatural calmness.

“First of all,” Levi began, his level voice frightening Eren even more, though he refused to show it too much. “We are not officially engaged, yet. Therefore, you are not my fiancé. And, even if you were, unless you were planning on living with me in that room, meaning you’d being sleeping on my bed with me, I don’t see any reason why you should poke your bratty nose through my stuff.”

Then, emotion flooded Levi’s face, and not in a good way. He directed a glare straight into Eren’s eyes that seemed to scorch his very soul. “Know this, shitty brat. I don’t want to see your ill-bred ass anywhere near or in my room.” Levi emphasized his point by shoving Eren into the wall next to his door, then he let go of Eren and left without a single backwards glance.
Eren, for the next several moments, remained rooted in his spot against the wall, trembling. He shakily wrapped his arms around himself.

It wasn’t the strange calmness that had him so shaken. It wasn’t the threat. It wasn’t even the glare.

What was affecting him the most, kept playing over and over in his head.

*I don’t want to see your ill-bred ass…*

That strange feeling he’d ignored in the beginning of the tour, the one that had grown the tiniest bits throughout the tour, swelled. The air was getting thicker, and it was becoming hard to breathe.

“Eren!”

It was his dad…

The feeling ebbed away, back to that small tickling in the back of his mind, and the air thinned out.

That was…. weird, to say the least. He let him arms fall loose and gave a frustrated groan. Why, oh why, did he have to open his big mouth? What the hell was he thinking?! God he was such an idiot. Why would he think that his dad would drop the engagement just because they didn’t get along? His dad wouldn’t care if Eren and Levi always had hidden knives everywhere for when they fought, he’d still continue with the marriage. And now, thanks to his genius thinking, Eren had ended up on Levi’s bad side. And, from what he could tell, that was a VERY bad thing…

Although, Levi could’ve just said no. Was it really that hard? He didn’t have to go through the theatrics.

“Eren! Come down already! Carlton said that dinner will be ready soon!”

Taking a few deep, and much needed, breaths, Eren prepared himself to face Levi. He would not let Levi take control of him. He was not going to bow down and submit to him. No matter how rich, or scary, he was.

Shaky legs brought Eren down the curved staircase and next to the dining room. Grisha, Carlton, and Levi were already sitting at the table. There were eight seats in all, two at each end and three on either side. Grisha and Carlton sat next to each other on one side, while Levi, the bastard who looked like what happened up stairs hadn’t just happened, sat on the other side.

Eren made a move towards the chair next to his dad, but one look from Grisha stopped him. Grisha subtly gestured to the seat next to Levi, keeping an arm draped over the seat next to him to keep Eren from sitting there. Eren was about to protest, but Carlton chose that moment to notice his existence.

“Eren! It’s about time you joined us,” he joked. He held out a hand towards the seat next to Levi. “Come, sit.”

Eren clenched his jaw and fists, really not wanting to sit next to that asshole. But, since he didn’t want to make a scene, he reluctantly forced himself to walk over to Levi and sit next to him. He knew without even having to look at Levi that the Voclain heir was smirking, even if it was just the tiniest bit.

“So, Eren, how do you like our home?” Carlton questioned, the ever-present smile on his face.

It was too big. It was too fancy. There was too much décor. The bedrooms were unnaturally large.
There was way too much marble. One of the occupants is a complete and totally asshole-douchebag of the highest degree.

“It’s nice.”

“Wow, you’re so specific,” Levi commented sarcastically. Carlton gave him a slightly chastising glance, but otherwise did nothing to correct his behavior. Envy swelled within Eren. His dad reprimanded him for every little thing he did, always treating him like a child. Levi’s dad treated him like an adult. How Eren longed for that freedom.

“I, for one, think you have a lovely home,” Grisha complimented. Way to suck up. Eren tuned everything out after that. Everyone else began discussing the mansion, and he couldn’t really care less at that point. He rested his head on one of his hands and studied the flowery centerpiece of the table. It was really the most interesting thing in the room, mostly because it was right in front of Eren so he didn’t have to exert energy trying to focus on something else. The flowers weren’t real, and that kind of disappointed him.

The smell of dinner drifted through the air, making Eren’s mouth water. As much as he disliked the house, and certain individuals living in the house, he couldn’t deny that the food would probably be fantastic.

Eren was pulled from his thoughts by a nudge to his side, and, after taking in the expectant stares from everyone at the table, realized he’d been asked a question.

“Uh… yes.”

There were three different reactions: Carlton chuckled, Grisha might as well have been questioning God why he’d been cursed with such an idiot, and Levi rolled his eyes, probably thinking the same thing as Grisha.

“He asked what your favorite part of the place was,” Levi drawled in a patronizing manner.

Eren blushed. “Oh.”

Well this was going to be difficult. What was his favorite part of the mansion? Nothing. In fact, he kind of hated the place. Let’s see, what was the least detestable part of this horrid place?

A thought came to him, and he smirked on the inside. If Levi was going to hate him, there would be no half-assing it.

“I liked Levi’s room.”

Carlton laughed, and oh how Eren wished he could join in. But, he could feel the heat of anger emanating from Levi. He almost feared that he’d get burned for a bit.

“You didn’t even see his room,” Grisha pointed out, less than happy.

“That’s true,” Eren pouted, feigning disappointment. “I would love to see it, though.” Carlton chuckled.

“Ah, well why don’t you ask Levi?” Shit. “I’m sure he’d let you see it if you asked politely.” Eren gulped, almost too scared to turn to Levi. He did anyway. There was an evil smirk on his face. Damn, for someone who only knew how to smirk and scowl, he sure knew how to add variety.

“Yes, why don’t you ask politely?” Levi asked sweetly, putting extra emphasis on ‘politely.’ A
connotation missed by their dads.

Eren was saved by dinner coming through the door. A small buffet of food was set on the table. But, Eren could only recognize a couple of the dishes. As the others began to dig in to the food presented, he held back, still trying to decipher what the dishes he didn’t know were.

Levi, upon noticing Eren’s distress, proceeded to point out which dish was which. It left Eren confused since the gesture was almost… nice.

“Lamb, roasted garlic mashed potatoes, caramelized pears, artichoke, rolls-”

“I know what they are,” Eren snapped. He didn’t want Levi’s help, nor did he need it.

Levi raised his hands defensively, baffled. Eren glanced over towards their fathers and it appeared that neither of them had noticed the exchanged. The rest of dinner was mostly silent save for Grisha and Carlton’s comments to each other here and there. For Eren and Levi, the dinner was spent in awkward silence. Which, in all honesty, was a much better option to Eren than talking to Levi.

When desert came, a rich chocolate raspberry cheesecake that Eren only poked and nibbled at, Carlton explained the rules for the week for both Eren and Levi:

1) Lunches and dinners were to be eaten together. Attending breakfast was not necessary as everyone tended to wake up at different times.

2) They could not spend all day in their rooms.

3) No sleeping in the same bed. (That one wouldn’t be a problem. Eren was sure of that).

4) They had to at least attempt to hang out with each other.

There weren’t very many rules, and Eren was okay with that. With dessert nearly finished for everyone else at the table, Grisha spoke up.

“Eren, since you seem to be done, why don’t you go get your stuff from the car?” Eren nodded, and Grisha tossed him the keys to the car.

“I’ll help you,” Levi stated curtly. Eren was about to protest, but Levi was already out of his seat and half way to the front door. Damn that guy moved fast.

Eren quietly groaned, and followed after, only Eren took his time. By the time he got outside, Levi was already leaning against the car and looking like he wanted to do more than just help Eren. Levi scowled.

“What is your problem?” Eren faltered on his trip down the porch steps.

“Excuse me?” Levi didn’t miss a beat.

“You’re not excused. Answer the question,” he demanded.

“No.” Eren continued towards the car, defiantly. He didn’t have to answer shit. Levi narrowed his eyes.

“Do you know what you are to me?” he asked. Eren tried to ignore him and unlocked the car, grabbing his stuff from the back as Levi talked. “You are a shitty brat who’s throwing a temper tantrum. It’s obvious you don’t want to get married, let alone to someone you didn’t choose.
Here’s my advice though.” When Eren finally had all of his stuff and shut the door, Levi pulled Eren down a bit by clutching his shirt so they were face to face. “Fucking get over it. There is not a damn thing you or I can do about it. So the sooner you realize that and stop acting like a fucking dick, the sooner we can all be happy and move the fuck on with our lives.” Damn, how could such a midget be so intimidating?

Eren shook free of Levi’s grasp, glaring straight into Levi’s eyes.

“No. This week isn’t for me, it’s for you.” Of course, Eren knew that. He knew that Grisha would leave at some point. He knew that Grisha probably wouldn’t even stay the first night. But that didn’t stop Eren from wanting him to stay. He was the only familiar thing Eren had here. He didn’t want to be left alone. Grisha gave Eren a pat on the head seeing as the two hadn’t hugged since Eren was a child, since Eren found out what it really meant when Grisha talked about the arranged marriage. “I’ll see you in a week, alright? Be good.” Grisha smiled softly for his son, who was giving him the most pathetic look of abandonment he could.

It broke Grisha’s heart. But there was nothing he could do but hope that everything would work out.

And with that, Eren watched as the only connection, the only familiar thing he had, drove away, leaving him standing on a stranger’s porch with a suitcase and a backpack. He suddenly felt very alone despite the people standing around him. Gripping the handle of his suitcase harder, he refrained from giving into the urge to run after his father. He kept watching the car drive away even after the brick wall enclosing the area blocked the view of his father.

“Oi, brat. If you keep standing there any longer you’ll catch a cold, and if you do, you’re not allowed back in this house.” Eren wanted to retort, he really did, but any witty or snarky reply he could have thought of had momentarily left with his father. He sighed dejectedly, pulling his suitcase towards the door. He only caught a glimpse of Levi’s face, but, from what he saw, he could tell that his lack of response had thrown him off seeing as he wore an expression of confusion. If Eren was feeling slightly less down, he would have felt proud.

“So, I supposed you’d like to go to your room now,” Carlton started, a nervous smile on his face. “Shall we show you?” Eren headed for the stairs.

“Up the stairs, to the right, first door on my right.”

“Oh! Uh… Alright. I guess you remembered that part.” Carlton was awkward. He didn’t know how to handle Eren’s change of mood. “Good night, then!” he called as Eren reached the top of the stairs. He said nothing back.
Reaching his room, Eren placed his suitcase and backpack next to the end of the bed. Ignoring the strange feeling that was growing even more, he pulled out his pajamas: some sweats and a t-shirt. He changed quickly and grabbed his toothbrush and toothpaste. Eren paused on his journey to the bathroom, though.

That strange feeling was in the bathroom too.

He shook it off, forcing it down as he brushed his teeth. After spitting, Eren caught his reflection in the mirror. Nothing out of the ordinary there. Same messy hair, same green eyes, same half assed pajamas. The only difference was the setting.

Suddenly, that strange feeling was back, and Eren no longer wanted to be in that bathroom anymore. He left, turning off the light to both the bathroom and the bedroom, and climbed into bed. The darkness of the room only seemed to intensify the feeling Eren had.

For two hours, he tossed and turned, he couldn’t get to sleep no matter how hard he tried. That feeling wouldn’t go away. And even if the feeling was gone, the bed was surprisingly uncomfortable. He couldn’t find a position he found relaxing. The sheets were scratchy, stiff, and seemed to wrap themselves around Eren to immobilize him.

When the clock next to the bed read 1:43am, Eren finally realized what the feeling he had was.

He didn’t belong.

The room was foreign to him. This wasn’t his home. This wasn’t his bed.

Eren kicked the sheets off of him. He started to feel suffocated by them after his realization. The realization had made the feeling grow even stronger. Pulling his knees to his chest, he sat up, huddled on the bed and wanting to cry.

The room seemed to be closing in on him, like the very house knew he didn’t belong here and was trying to force him out. And, oh, did he want to leave. Who was he to these people? These people of privilege and class. He was nothing more than a business transaction. Some common article to be used. Sure he came from money. His father was certainly well off, but he had chosen to keep Eren from that world. He never went to a private school. He wasn’t raise in the spotlight. He wasn’t taught how to act civilized in the polished way everyone else here acted.

Eren ran to the light switch. The dark seemed unbearable now. The light, though blinding him for a moment, kept the closing walls at bay. His gaze drifted to the bed. Would he be able to fall asleep now? Now that he knew what that crushing feeling was?

No. He needed something to comfort him. Something familiar.

Rushing to his backpack, Eren pulled out a notebook. It wasn’t old. He’d bought it a couple weeks ago, but it was still something that wasn’t from this mansion. The familiarity provided a little more comfort. But even with the added relief, Eren knew he’d never get back to sleep. So, he did the only thing he could do.

He picked one of the pencils he brought and began to write.
So someone told me that I was making Eren brattier than he is in canon, and don't worry I promise there is a reason!!

He will not always be this bratty!!

He's just a brat right now cuz he doesn't want to get married. He's almost intentionally trying to be a pain. I could have done a better job of showing that though... I told the person who told me that this but I figured you all deserved to know too. Just in case anyone else thought the same.

Eren managed to get no sleep that night. Though, he did fill quite a number of pages in his notebook. It turns out trying to ignore the closing of the walls and suffocation was a really good motivator. He managed to tune everything else out so well that he almost didn’t hear the knocking at his door when 8:30 am came.

**Knock, knock**

“Eren?” Is that how he wants to word that sentence? That seems like a really weird way to word it. Wait, did he hear something?

**Knock, knock**

“Eren!” Oh, hey. He did.

A wave of exhaustion engulfed him now that his concentration had been broken.

“Auh…. Yeah?” he replied after a moment of yawning. At least the exhaustion made him sound like he’d just woken up.

“It’s me, Carlton. You know, your future father-in-law.” Ugh… Please, don’t remind him. Carlton laughed a bit at his own joke. “Breakfast will be ready soon. The chefs made all sorts of delicious food-”

“Wait, wait, wait. Breakfast?” Eren stood and opened the door. A casually dressed Carlton was revealed. Like, really casually dressed. Like, jeans-and-a-Green-Bay-Packers-football-jersey casual. Of all the things Eren expected to see this was not one of them. He raised his eyebrows slightly but said nothing. Shaking it off, Eren continued to the real problem at hand. “What do you mean breakfast? I thought I only had to eat lunch and dinner with you guys.”

“I know, but it’s Sunday, and I thought we could all have breakfast together. Maybe start a Sunday breakfast tradition?” his pleaded sheepishly. There was something about his smile and the way he acted that reminded Eren of one of those typical dads. He even had the bad jokes to boot.

And, it was that something that made Eren simply unable to refuse him. He sighed in defeat.

“Fine… I’ll be down shortly.” Carlton nodded happily.
“Gre-”

“Wait.” Eren held up a hand as a thought came to him. “Am I going to have to go to church, too, or something?” Carlton chuckled.

“No, no. We, as a family, like to practice our faith quietly, at home and on our own terms. Actually going to church is far too public, and I’m pretty sure Levi doesn’t care much for religion in general.” Carlton shrugged. “I’m not particularly sure. I’ve never actually asked him. But, no we won’t drag you to church.” And he was gone.

Eren breathed a sigh of relief. It’s not like he wasn’t religious, he kind of was, he just didn’t care much for going to church or actively praying with others, especially with these people. He thought just believing in God was good enough. But now he should focus his energy on getting ready.

Eren glanced out the window, noting that it was sunny today. His phone said it was going to be warm today as well. That was a plus. So, Eren changed into some jeans and a t-shirt. He mentally prepared himself to meet Levi as he headed down to the dining room. Knowing himself, and what he knew of Levi, there was bound to be friction and Eren would not lose this battle.

The smell of breakfast hit Eren upon walking into the dining room, though there was, so far, no food on the table. He also noticed that a place had been set right next to Levi, just like in last night’s arrangement. Groaning inwardly, he carefully chose the seat across from Levi instead, despite there not being a plate and silverware there. Carlton, who was sitting at the head of the table this time, noticed.

“Eren, why don’t you sit next to Levi?” he asked innocently. “He put a plate there just for you.”

Eren’s jaw dropped open. He hadn’t expected that.

“O-oh? Um…”

“Yes, Eren,” Levi spoke up. He looked hurt by Eren’s decision, but Eren could tell he was faking it. “Why don’t you sit next to me?” Leaning on one hand elegantly, Levi smirked at Eren, who was inwardly screaming. He couldn’t think of an excuse quick enough. And now, Levi, still smirking gleefully, was patting the back of the chair next to him expectantly. But Eren would not give up. He would sail through this storm!

“I… don’t like sitting next to people first thing in the morning.” Great. Way to sink your own ship there.

Both Voclains raised an eyebrow. Eren bit his lip, knowing they wanted an explanation.

“Well, you see… I haven’t brushed my teeth or… you know, taken a shower yet so I, uh, feel… gross.” Levi kept his brow raised, even more confused than before, but Carlton ah’d in understanding.

“Oh really?” Eren smirked, turning his attention to Levi now. “Is that true Levi?” Levi’s only response was a subtle, yet deadly, glare that threatened to burn all of Eren’s belongings if he even dared to use that against him. But with Eren being, well, Eren, he paid no attention, too giddy about
gaining this new information.

“I was actually surprised when Levi wanted you to sit next to him this morning. Not only does he hate all things dirty, but he’s not a people person. He’ll put on a show for company and business partners, sure, but the truth is that he’s very much a recluse.” Carlton laughed again.

“I never would have guessed,” Eren laughed along, although his was much dryer than Carlton’s.

“Father,” Levi intervened quickly, never once taking his eyes off Eren. “The chefs seem to be taking a while. Why don’t you go check and see where our food is?” Carlton smiled and winked conspicuously at Levi.

“Alright, I’ll go see what’s taking the chefs so long.”

Eren watched as he left, but when he turned around Levi’s subtle glare grew in intensity and the older man had a finger pointing towards him.

“Do not,” Levi started before Eren could react, “even think about it.” Each word was carefully enunciated. “I know exactly what you are thinking, and, I swear to God, if you try to pull any of that shit, I will have you thrown out of this house and you will have to live in the shed out back for the rest of your life.”

Eren brushed the threat off. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Besides, he just found great ammo to use against Levi! Why wouldn’t he?

“Seriously,” Levi persisted. “If you value your life, do not even try.” There was a pause as he lowered his hand and his glare disappeared. He stared down at the table. “Please… Just. Don’t.”

Eren gaped. There was a slight pleading tone in Levi’s voice at the end. Was dirt really that bad a problem for him? He didn’t have time to think about it as Carlton had come back. Levi acted like nothing happened so Eren did the same.

“What would you like to drink, Eren? We have milk, water, orange juice, tea, coffee-”

“Coffee, please!” Carlton nodded and disappeared into the kitchen for a moment before coming back with two mugs and a tea cup. Levi got the tea cup while Carlton placed a mug in front of Eren and his own plate. He held up a small sugar dish.

“Sugar or cream?” Eren shook his head, cradling the warm mug in his hands.

“No thanks.” Eren turned his attention back to the ominous looking black liquid. He really didn’t like coffee. It was too bitter for him, but he was far too tired from lack of sleep to not need some type of caffeine in him. It smelled rich and the tiniest bit appetizing. Eren hoped that maybe, in his state of drowsiness, the coffee wouldn’t taste like shit and took one big gulp.

It took everything Eren had to not spit out the vile liquid. It was disgustingly bitter. After forcefully swallowing the liquid shit, Eren started to reconsider his refusal of sugar. Carlton noticed.

“Trying to get used to drinking it black, huh?” Eren nodded eagerly, glad that he didn’t have to think of an excuse.

“Yeah, but I don’t think I’m ready for that just yet.” He reached for the sugar, and even though it didn’t help too much, it was still a better than before.

The smell of the food came before the actual food, and it smelled just as heavenly as last night. It
was as an array of biscuits, gravy, bacon, sausage, eggs, and hash browns. It looked like heaven to Eren. Being rich had its upsides…

That is… until he remembered he had no plate… and that he would have to ask Levi to hand it to him.

“Uh, Levi?” Levi paused in the middle of reaching for a biscuit, fairly annoyed.

“Can you pass me my plate?” Levi smirked.

“Can you ask nicely?” he asked in a sickeningly sweet voice. Eren glared, but bit his cheek and toughed it out. Levi’s father was here and it was apparently an unspoken rule in their war to keep their battles hidden from him if Levi’s outburst only minutes ago was anything to go by. Eren didn’t know if there was a legit reason for keeping it from Carlton or if it just made the fights more challenging and appealing to Levi. Either way, Eren didn’t really like the idea of Carlton finding out either.

“Can you pass me my plate, please?” he ground out. Levi’s smirk only became even more gleeful.

“I can.” The fucker was using grammar against him! Eren wanted to strangle him. No one besides English teachers gave a fuck if it was ‘can’ or ‘may’!

“May you please pass me my plate?” The anger was much harder to keep out this time around.

“There, now was that so hard?” If Levi showed more emotion than he let on, he’d be grinning from ear to ear. There was nothing he enjoyed more this morning than seeing Eren become flustered. He held out the plate to Eren, who hastily snatched it up.

Now that everyone had their plates, conversation died. In exchange, they filled up their plates and ate.

Eren savored every bite. Just like dinner last night, breakfast was delectable. The flavor was unbeatable save for a home cooked meal from his mother. Eren forced down the feelings of homesickness and tried to focus solely on the food.

“So, Eren,” Carlton started. Eren paused mid-bite. Oh crap. Whatever was going to come after that couldn’t be good. “How did you sleep last night?” Oh. That he could do. However, just as Eren was about to spout out a lie, a thought came to him.

What if he told them the truth?

He didn’t have to lie to them. They were going to be his future family after all. Maybe they could even help him.

Looking up, Eren’s gaze met Levi’s, and he remembered why he couldn’t.

*I don’t want to see your ill-bred ass…*

*I don’t know if this bratty act of yours is just some way to get out of the marriage…*

First of all, the feeling that kept him awake came from not fitting in. What could they do to help? Become poor?

Then there was what Levi had brought up at dinner. It was obvious to everyone involved that the last thing Eren wanted to do was take part in this whole situation. If they heard him complaining
after only the first night about how he can’t sleep in the mansion, they’d only think he was making
excuses. His dad especially would be convinced that it was all made up and probably find some
way to make him stay longer as a punishment.

And, of course, Eren couldn’t forget about the war. Telling Levi a weakness, no matter how small,
would only be giving him ammunition. That was one thing he did not want Levi to laugh at or
insult him for. His feeling was bad enough without the extra fuel for the fire.

“Fine,” he lied. “The bed was really soft.” Eren shut himself off after that so the rest of breakfast
played out in an awkward silence.

After breakfast, Eren wandered, unsure what to do.

His dad had forbidden him from bringing any movies or video games. Grisha even went so far as to
confiscate Eren’s laptop. By “no movies or video games” he also meant no Netflix or computer
games. The only entertainment device he was allowed was his phone, and even that was fought
hard over.

But the question wasn’t just about what he could do, but where he could do it. When breakfast
ended, Carlton told Eren that he couldn’t just spend all day in his room, so that was ruled out. The
kitchen was too noisy, the party room was too empty and quiet, the family and living rooms were
too public, and the music room was… well, a music room. Eren, with no considerable talent for
music, had no place in a room like that.

Just as the thought of hiding in one of the guest bedrooms crossed his mind, he remembered that he
hadn’t explored the backyard yet. So, with his only entertainment at his side, a notebook, a pencil,
and a phone, Eren stumbled his way outside. The weight of the feeling that pressed itself against
Eren’s shoulders, trying to pin him down, lifted as he left the house, the fresh, spring air making
him feel even lighter.

He might like it out here.

But while Eren was perfectly happy spending his time outdoors, Levi was another matter entirely.

Levi groaned as he lounged on his bed, his arm covered his eyes. How on Earth was he going to
spend a week with this brat? He was always shooting of insults and starting battles with Levi.
Sometimes over the littlest things. Levi wasn’t going to say that it wasn’t amusing, in some cases
fun regardless of the fact that Eren seemed to take them so seriously, and he certainly wasn’t going
to say that Eren was the only one to blame for the fights, but he honestly wondered how the boy
managed to have the energy to fight nearly every time they met.

Levi knew he wasn’t exactly the most approachable person, in fact he was an asshole to almost
everyone who wasn’t a business associate, close friend, or family member, but this boy seemed to
find something rude to say about everything he did.

He’d thought about Eren’s possible reasons a lot, and he still thought that the most likely reason
was Eren’s hatred for the arranged marriage mixed with most people’s natural reaction to seeing
who Levi really was, aside from him just being a brat. But, what if there was a logical reason as to
why Eren acted the way he did? Unlikely, but not something he could rule out.

Eren was his intended. They were going to be married, that was not going to change unless their
fathers stopped being friends or, for whatever extremely unlikely reason, an agreement could not
be made during the final stages. And Levi had come to terms with that idea a long time ago. So,
Levi needed to find at least one thing he could tolerate about Eren, if not something he actually
liked, so the next 60 years of his life wouldn’t be absolute hell.

Levi gave a hefty sigh, then there was a knock at his door.

“Come in,” he called lazily. It was his father. Carlton shuffled into his son’s room slowly.

“Levi, I told Eren he couldn’t spend the whole day in his room, and that means neither can you.” Levi resisted the urge to roll his eyes. “You two can’t get to know each other while closing yourselves off in different rooms.”

“Last I saw, Eren didn’t seem like he wanted to “get to know” anyone this morning. I’ll go find him for lunch and then we can spend time together.” Though Levi couldn’t see it, Carlton frowned at the answer.

“You two can’t avoid each other all week, you know.”

“I know.”

“At some point you two will have to interact for more than just lunch and dinner.”

“I know,” Levi stressed, removing his arm to look at his father. “I’m just asking for one morning to give him some space.” The arm was replaced. “He just got here for God’s sake. Give him some fucking room.”

“Language,” was all Carlton said before leaving. Fucking finally. Levi resumed his musings about Eren until his phone rang not five minutes later. He didn’t even bother to check the caller id before answering.

“Hello?”


“God, Erwin, you sound way too fucking happy this morning. Finally got over your constipation?” Erwin chuckled.

“No, Levi. I don’t believe I was ever constipated to begin with. I’m just excited to hear about your betrothed.”

“Fuck you.” God how Levi wanted to throw his phone at the wall. He did not need Erwin snooping through and trying to get information about Eren, or worse, trying to visit to meet him. If it was just Erwin, maybe it would be fine, but if Erwin came, then that meant Hanji would demand to come over, then before he knew it all of his coworkers and friends would be over here bombarding both Eren and Levi will questions.

“You can’t blame me-”

“Yes, yes I most certainly can.”

“You haven’t told us anything about him. Only that he was a guy.”

“Well it’s not like I fucking knew anything about him. I met him yesterday, for fuck’s sake.”

“And…?” There was a pause.

“And, what?”
“What’s he like?”

“What are we, a couple of teenage girls gushing over a new boyfriend?”

“Yes.”

“Damn it, Erwin!”

“I’m not the only one who wants to know. Hanji’s here-”

“Oh, of course she fucking is.”

“Leevii~!” Hanji’s sang.

“Go away,” was Levi’s blunt response.

“But Levi!! I want to know! What’s he like? Is he cute? Handsome? Oh! Is he taller or shorter than you? Do you know what his favorite sex position is?” Levi shot up, horrified.

“Hanji! What the fuck?! How the fuck would I know something like that?!?”

“I don’t know, maybe you two really hit it off when you met.” He could practically hear her shrugging over the phone. He sighed.

“Not really. It was pretty much the opposite, actually.” Of fuck. Levi slapped a hand over his mouth, knowing that it wouldn’t take back his words, but hoping for it nonetheless.

“What?! Really?! Details, Levi! I need details!!” Hanji screamed into the phone.

“Hah, you shouldn’t have said that Levi. Now she’ll never shut up,” Erwin laughed.

“She wasn’t going to shut up in the first place,” Levi growled.

“Oh, come on! You can’t leave me hanging after that! What happened?!” Levi gave in.

“Nothing, really. He just keeps acting like a fucking brat.”

“Oh? How so?”

“He’ll try and pick fights with me for no fucking reason and blatantly ignores everything I say just to push my buttons. It’s like he’s trying to get on my bad side and make me kill him. He’s rude, he has no manners, he eats like a fucking pig. I bet he’s messy as fuck too. My father just had to go and tell him I hate things being dirty and, fuck, his fucking face after he heard that… I just know he’s going to do something. He makes it obvious that he doesn’t want to be here and he doesn’t want to be in this arranged marriage and then turns around and has the fucking nerve to use idea that he’s my “fiancé” against me. He’s fucking-”

“Levi.”

It was only after Erwin called his name that he realized what he was doing. He was fucking ranting about some brat he met yesterday. He sighed and held his face in his free hand.

“Ah, fuck.” Hanji giggled.

“Sounds like you two are a perfect match!”
“Yeah, a perfect match from hell,” Levi mumbled.

“I say give him a chance,” Erwin chimed in. “Be nice to him, give him some time, let him have his space.”

“That is a lot easier said than done. Especially when you have your father commanding you to spend every waking moment with him and you don’t even know why he’s so fucking angry.”

“Do you have any ideas?”

“I’m thinking it’s probably just the spite from the arranged marriage that he’s feeling… That along with my less than welcoming personality. But…” Levi trailed off.

“…It could be something else. Like maybe that’s just the way he usually is, or he has trust issues or something,” Erwin continued for him.

“Exactly.”

“If you want my advice,” Hanji began.

“I don’t but you’re going to give it to me anyway.”

“Then don’t do anything.”

There was a pause before both males in the conversation replied at almost the same time:

“Huh?”

“Huh?”

“Yeah!” Hanji went straight into explaining. “You’re pretty much smitten with him already!” Well that explained nothing.

“Excuse me? Did you not just hear me ranting about the brat?” Levi asked, incredulous.

“I think I see where she’s coming from…” Erwin contributed thoughtfully.

“Not you too Erwin. You’ve been spending way too much time with that escaped mental patient over there.” Erwin sighed.

“Well, think of it this way. You only met him yesterday, and yet you already have such a strong feeling about him.”

“I have a strong feeling about hating him.”

“You know what they say, Levi! There’s a thin line between hate and love!” Hanji declared.

“There’s also a thin line between genius and insanity. Unfortunately, you never had the genius side of that line,” Levi retorted.

“So when do we get to meet him? I bet he’s adorable! Is he adorable? Lev-”

Levi hung up. He had reach the maximum capacity he had to deal with Hanji at that moment. Tossing his phone on his bed, he stood up and stretched. Walking to the window, he found that Eren was in the back garden. Levi tilted his head, now standing right in front of the mirror, and contemplated Eren.
He was smiling.

That was the first thing Levi noticed. Of all the faces he'd seen Eren make up to that point, he'd never really seen him actually smile. Levi realized that Eren actually looked good when he smiled. Almost cute, even.

Eren was walking through the garden, taking in the sights of all the flowers, decorations, and trees the place had to offer. He had a notebook and pencil in hand as well. Was he a writer? Maybe he liked to doodle. Or maybe he had homework he had to work on over break.

Nah, Eren didn’t seem like the type to do his homework so early on.

Levi watched as Eren knelt down next to one of the blooming flowers. He leaned forward curiously, wondered what Eren would do next. Eren cradled the flower in one of his hands, and a butterfly popped out. Eren’s smile grew larger as he watched the butterfly flutter away, unaware that he was also being watched. Levi felt his heart flutter like the butterfly the tiniest bit.

Eren continued through the garden until reaching one of the large trees just outside of the garden. After studying the tree, Eren bit down on his notebook and pencil (Levi reminded himself to never touch that notebook or pencil) and started to climb.

Levi’s eyes widened, impressed. Since there were no low hanging branches, Eren had to rely solely on the rough bark as leverage. But, even so, Eren managed to climb the bark until he reached the first branch. He continued to climb until he reach what he deemed to be a nice, thick, sturdy branch. Then, he took his notebook and pencil out from his mouth, opened the notebook, and began to write in the notebook.

While watching all of this, Levi thought through everything he’d observed about Eren since he met him. The over-casualness of his dress and manners. His abrasive personality. His inability to back down from a fight. His need to retaliate to any insult or wrong doing against him. His determined attitude. His recklessness. This gentleness he seemed to possess. His skill in climbing. His joy of writing whatever he wrote in his notebook. His naturally, lightly tanned skin. His ocean green eyes. His soft looking, dark brown, and ruffled hair.

His smile.

Levi thought through it carefully and decided that he was not smitten. He was not in love with Eren Jaeger.

But…

Levi smiled softly as the rays of sunlight flitted through the newly grown, baby green leaves and danced across Eren, illuminating his skin, his eyes, his hair, his smile.

…Perhaps in the future, if Eren stopped acting like a brat, he might be.

Eren lounged in the tree, his tree. He claimed this tree as his own. It was Eren’s tree. And it shall be called… “Eren’s Tree.” Very creative.

His notebook lay open in his lap, and he held on to his pencil as lightly as he could without it falling from his grasp and to the ground. His head lolled to the side, one of his legs swaying lazily, as his eyes took in the sights of the garden below.

It was truly magnificent. Stone pathways wove in between patches of flowers and bushes. Small
trees were plotted here and there throughout, as were decorations like metal sculptures, vine and flower archways, and manmade ponds and fountains. Towards the back of the garden was even an enclosed glass gazebo, much like the one from The Sound of Music Eren noticed.

It had been about three hours since he came out here. He knew because he’d brought his phone with him too, and it really helped. Especially after hitting writer’s block like he so often did. He really wasn’t sure what he would do without his smart phone.

But, in those three hours, Eren had felt the most at peace since he came here. Not only was it absolutely gorgeous out, but any bad or strange feelings he had while inside the mansion had disappeared. And for those three hours, he remained blissfully unbothered sitting in his tree, sitting in Eren’s Tree.

Then came 12:30… or 1… It was somewhere around there. But that time brought with it someone Eren believed to be very unwelcome.

“Oi.” Eren purposefully avoided looking at Levi, and refused to respond to him. “Oi, brat.” Still no response. “Fucking hell, brat! Wake up, I’m talking to you!”

Finally, with a heavy sigh, Eren dropped his gaze to Levi.

“What do you want?” Levi glared.

“Fucking finally,” he breathed, probably not necessarily intending for Eren to hear. “Lunch is ready, get your ass down here.” Eren contemplated Levi’s words for a moment.

“No,” he said, shaking his head. Levi’s brow rose in disbelief.

“What do you mean?”

“You’re excused,” Eren snickered, facing away from Levi and closing his eyes.

“You aren’t not going to go to lunch.”

“I think I am.”

“That’s not your decision.” Eren opened his eyes briefly so that he could roll them. “I’m serious, brat.”

“But it’s your decision?” He asked.

“No, it’s not.” Levi clarified. “Us having lunch and dinner together is not our fucking choice. That was the only thing our fathers insisted upon when it was decided you’d stay here, and, guess what, they’re going to be pretty fucking pissed when they learn you’re refusing to go.” He tried to keep his cool, but Eren proved that to be more of a challenge than he thought.

“You know, I’m finding that I really don’t care.”

“Seriously, what the fuck is wrong with you?” Levi cracked a bit. Eren shifted his attention back to Levi, curious.

“What do you mean?” he asked.

“What do I mean?” Levi gestured to Eren. “This whole I-fucking-hate-everything-in-the-world attitude you’ve had going on since you first fucking showed up!” Levi took a deep breath. Yelling at him won’t help.
“And why should I tell you?” Eren questioned tauntingly, though traces of actual curiosity peeked through.

“Well, to take a page from your poorly written book, as your fiancé, shouldn’t I have the right to know why the fuck you’re such a goddamn brat?” Eren snorted.

“Yeah, and, to take a page from your stupid book, we’re technically not engaged yet, and so, therefore, you are not my fiancé.” He pointed an accusing finger at Levi. “So you can’t use that card against me.”

“Didn’t stop your ass from trying, and it sure as hell is not going to stop me,” Levi scoffed. There was a moment of silence between the two as Eren decided what to say next.

“You know, Levi, if you really want to know anything about me, maybe you should get rid of your piss poor personality first.” Levi feigned a look of hurt.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” he drawled in a fake remorseful tone. “I didn’t realize yours was any better.” He changed back to his annoyed look. “Just get your shitty ass down here before my father decides to get involved. We’ve spent too much time arguing already.”

“No.”

“Brat.”

“No.”

“I’m not fucking kidding.”

“Neither am I. No. I’m not going to come down no matter what you say.”

“Fucking brat, if you don’t get your fucking ass down here I swear to fucking god…”

“What? What are you going to do? Climb up here and drag me down?” Eren’s hand flew to cover his mouth in mock shock and his smirk. “Oh, wait, can you not climb up here? Is it that you can’t or that you just don’t want to get dirty?” Eren’s smirk only grew. “Or maybe it’s because you’re just too short.”

He really shouldn’t have said that, but the idea that Levi couldn’t get him at the moment gave him courage… and stupidity. Levi would get him back for that comment, because that comment had pissed. him. off. So much so that if Eren looked closely, he could almost see the waves of anger emanating off of Levi.

“Fuck you,” Levi ground out after a moment. “You can stay up there for the rest of your pathetic life for all I care. Just don’t blame me when everything goes to shit. And don’t expect me to cover for you. You’re on your own, brat.”

“Good, I don’t want your help!”

“Good!”

“Fucking leave already!”

“I am!”

“Good!”
Levi stormed back inside, sufficiently pissed off. He slumped into his seat in the dining room, and his father gave an inquisitive look. Levi sent back a harsh glare.

“If you want that brat to join us, then you’re going to have to pluck him from the tree yourself,” he explained before Carlton could ask.

Carlton let out an irritated sigh, clearly displeased with Eren’s actions. He pushed himself up and away from the table and set his course for the tree that Eren was currently residing in.

After their argument, Eren had decided to climb even higher. He didn’t like the branch he was currently resting on, as it was thinner and less sturdy, but he no longer felt comfortable sitting so low in his tree. The lower he was, the easier it was for others to reach him. He had brought his legs up to his chest and wrapped his arms around his legs, staring at nothing in particular.

“Eren,” a calming, yet firm, voice called. Eren knew it was Carlton, and faced towards him, much more emotionless than before. “Please, come down and join us for lunch. We would greatly appreciate it.”

See? Now that was how you asked someone to lunch. Take notes, Levi. Still, it was not enough.

“No, thank you.”

“Eren, when you came here, it was agreed that you would have lunch and dinner with us every day. Other than that you are completely free to do what you want on your own time. When you think about it, we’re really not asking for much.” Carlton tried to say this as nicely as he could, hoping kindness would coax Eren out of the tree.

“I know. But… I just… I really just want to be left alone for right now.” Eren rubbed his arms and looked away. Carlton spent a few moments to consider his options.

“I’m going to let you off this hook this time only because you had breakfast with us, but you will have dinner with us tonight, no exceptions. That goes for the rest of the week as well, understood?” His tone left no room for debate.

Eren nodded, letting out a quiet affirmative reply, and Carlton left, leaving Eren to curl in on himself even more.

The garden didn’t seem quite as inviting as it had before.
Visitors in Prison? Yes Please!

Chapter Notes

I......... don't think I have anything to say today... Um... I'm tired... I got 5 hours of sleep last night... Oh, 4 1/2 really... I have to take two finals today and then work right after... I need coffee...

Oh and hey look there's that new chapter.

Hours passed, and soon, the sun began to disappear behind the taller trees in the distance. Hues of red swam through the sky and clouds. Shadows stretched, and wind blew, bringing along the cold with them. Eren shivered involuntarily.

He never left the safety of his tree, spending most of his time writing and playing games on his phone. It would be a lie to say he never moved, because he eventually dropped back down to his original branch. After Carlton left, no one else had bothered Eren, so his feelings from inside the mansion returned to the mansion, and the garden became a safe haven once more. There was no more reason for him to be so far up. Plus the original branch was more appealing than the one further up.

Eren pulled out his phone, noting that it was now 7:26pm. Someone would be out soon to take him to dinner, and he could only hope that this time it wouldn’t be Levi. He didn’t want to go to lunch earlier to begin with, but after Levi’s attitude, he definitely didn’t want to go. And that got him in trouble. Sure there were no real consequences from it, but if he acted like that again, he was positive that Carlton wouldn’t be so light with him.

The sound of footsteps alerted Eren to the newcomer’s presence. Without looking he closed his eyes. Eren prayed as hard as he could that whoever had come to get him wouldn’t be Levi.

“Oi.” Fuck. Eren opened his eyes and turned towards Levi, expecting one of his glares. He was shocked to find that Levi wasn’t wearing a glare. In fact, he looked rather drained. “We would be very grateful if you could join us for dinner.”

Dear God… That was… civil. Since when was Levi ever civil with Eren?

It was only when Levi gave him a questioning look that Eren realized he’d had his mouth hanging open.

“Oh… Yeah, sure…” Eren probably would have talked back, but the politeness Levi showed him threw him off. He grabbed his notebook and pencil and proceeded to slide down from branch to branch until he reached the lowest branch. From there he decided jumping would be the easiest way down. It wasn’t too far.

Bracing himself for impact, Eren threw himself from the branch, keeping his knees bent. His feet hit the ground, and he rolled forward from the momentum but caught himself with his hands. Pushing up from the ground, Eren brushed himself off and noticed how a flash of alarm had cut across his usual mask for a moment.
“What?” he asked. Levi shook his head.

“You’re just a reckless brat, is all,” he responded, and with that, he headed for the back door to the mansion. Eren jogged after him.

“Hey! I resent that!” he called out.


“And what’s that supposed to mean?” he questioned, having finally caught up with him.

“If you don’t get it then I’m not explaining.”

“No, really, what do you mean?”

“No, really, I’m not explaining.”

“Why the hell not?!” Eren yelled. What was this guy’s problem? Levi stopped dead in his tracks, and twisted around.

“Jesus Christ, calm down!” he shouted, though it lacked any real venom. “I said it because you resent everything! Okay?”


“Let me guess, you resent that?” He resumed his walk back to the mansion, leaving a sputtering Eren to catch up.

“Wha- I… Huh…? Was… was that a joke?” he asked in suspicious shock.

“Yes, in fact, it was.”

Eren still hadn’t moved. Levi made a joke. It was like seeing a lion turn down a steak. Levi doesn’t make jokes. Then again, how would Eren know? He’d known him for 24 hours. Really, he didn’t know anything about Levi.

After a moment, Eren finally said, “I don’t get you.” Levi stopped, yet again, and slowly faced Eren.

“And I don’t get you.” There was nothing insulting about how Levi replied. Only curiosity. “You seem to think that everyone here is going to attack you. You get pissed off at the tiniest provocation. Why is that?” Levi crossed his arms, awaiting an answer.

Eren blushed, upset that Levi was delving into something personal and furious at himself that he didn’t have an answer.

“I… That’s none of your business…” he stammered. Eren pushed past Levi, who had been blocking the path, and didn’t look back. The conversation was officially over.

Levi could have pushed more, questioned Eren further, but that would only result in yet another fight. And, with an hour of being forced to sit together in the same room, a fight sounded like a very bad idea.

Dinner ended without any real problems. The silence was so obviously awkward, though, that it made the silence even more awkward. Still, there was no fighting between Eren and Levi. Eren
was too busy trying to avoid answering Levi’s question, while Levi was busy trying not to start a fight for the sake of dinner and figuring out how to get an answer out of Eren.

After dinner, Eren retreated back to his room. His thoughts were plagued by what Levi had said.

Eren would have liked to say that he knew exactly what the answer was, but to be honest, he really didn’t understand the question. Was that really the impression everyone here had of him? It made sense. He wasn’t exactly friendly towards anyone around here.

*Why is that?*

Eren shook his head free of those thoughts. He didn’t want to think about that anymore, and he wouldn’t admit that it was because he was scared of what the answer might be.

But whatever the answer was, it wasn’t his fault. It wasn’t because of him. Of that he was sure.

His phone buzzed, completely dragging him away from his thoughts. It was a call from Armin. He answered it quickly.

“Armin?”

“Yup! It’s me buddy!” Eren nearly fainted with relief. It was so nice to hear from someone who wasn’t his dad or a Voclain.

“Oh fuck, thank God…”

Armin laughed. “What’s with that? Were you expecting Satan to call?”

“More like expecting him to barge in through the door…” Eren moaned.

“That bad?” Armin said sympathetically.

“You have no idea… So what’s up?”

“Well,” Armin drawled dramatically. “I was wondering if you were allowed visitors in jail.” Eren froze.

“What? Really? Wait, when would you…”

“Tomorrow, right before we leave.” Eren didn’t know what to say. Thankfully, Armin didn’t waste time in waiting for him to find his voice. “We thought it would be a good idea to visit.”

“Wait… We? As in, everyone would visit?”

“Yeah. I know the information isn’t public yet, but now that you know, then you can let your friends know right?”

“Hold on, I’m going to call you back.”

With that Eren quickly hung up the phone and practically sprinted out of his room and down the stairs. Determination flared throughout his body.

He might be able to have friends over.

He might be able to have all his friends over.
He might be able to finally tell his friends what he’d kept secret from them his whole life!

Carlton was in the family room watching reruns of old football games (apparently, he liked watching football on Sundays regardless of whether it was football season or not). Upon seeing him, Eren quickly slowed to a stop, all of his nerves were racing.

What would he say? Would he outright say no? Would he tell him to ask his dad? God, he couldn’t ask his dad. That would give him a definite no. Just to be sure he wouldn’t catch Carlton at a bad time, Eren waited until there was a commercial.

“Um… Carlton?” It still felt really weird to refer to him by his first name. Carlton quickly turned in his seat. He was shocked at first but then joyful.

“Eren! How nice to see you. Have you come to watch the game with me? Or, no, you look like you just threw a baseball into one of the windows.” Carlton’s tone was supposed to be humorous, but it didn’t make Eren feel any less nervous. “So what is it?”

“Uh… I have a question…. To ask…”

Carlton chuckled. “Well, then ask.”

“Is it alright if I… Is it possible… Could I maybe… invite some friends over?” The smile fell from Carlton’s lips as he stared thoughtfully at Eren.

“Friends, huh? You remember that this week is for you and Levi to get to know each other right?” Oh man, he had one of those parent tones. The one where you knew they were just leading up to saying ‘no’.

“Yes.”

“And you know that having friends over would mean you wouldn’t be spending as much time with Levi?” What was bad about that again?

“Yes.”

“And you remember that you already spent most of this day avoiding everyone in this house?”

“… Yes.”

“Do your friends know about this arrangement?”

“… No. Well, two know.”

“And how many friends would be over?” Eren actually had to count how many friends he had. He’d never counted before, so when he realized how many he had, it made him not want to answer the question even more.

“…… Eleven…” Carlton raised his eyebrows in surprise.

“And when would this be?”

“Tomorrow.”

“I see… And, has your father agreed to this?” That was the one question he really didn’t want to answer. Should he lie? If he lied, he was probably more likely to have his friends over. But, then if Carlton called to confirm… Eren shuddered at the thought. But if he told the truth, he was
probably never going to get to see his friends.

It took everything he had to say, “…… No.”

Carlton sighed, and it looked like he was about to make a decision. Panicking, Eren quickly tried to defend his case.

“It would only be for a little while,” he rushed. “They’re leaving for a lake house tomorrow for spring break. They’ll be there all week. I… actually would have gone too, but… I had to be here. And I promise they won’t tell anyone! They’re not the kind of people to do that. Especially if it’s about one of their friends. And-” Eren cut himself off, realizing he was about to start rambling about things that wouldn’t matter to Carlton. He sighed. “I just want to see my friends sometime this week.”

“That would only be for a little while,” Carlton chuckled when Eren bit his lip and looked away. “I’m guessing that’s a no.” Carlton crossed his arms over his chest with a hefty sigh. “Well, I’m going to be at work tomorrow, so it’s not going to matter to me if you have friends over…” Carlton gave Eren a sly smile. That smile grew as he watched Eren’s green eyes light up with the joy and excitement of a small child on Christmas. “But,” Carlton interrupted, holding a finger up. “Levi will be here. So you need to ask him if it’s alright.”

That little piece of information did little to dampen the light in Eren’s eyes. He only nodded vigorously.

“Yes! Alright! Thank you!” Eren ran over to Carlton and gave him a quick hug from behind the couch, grinning from ear to ear. With no time to lose, Eren dashed back up the stairs, feeling lighter than ever.

Carlton, on the other hand, stared at the spot where Eren had been standing only moments ago in stunned silence. Then, he let a small smile grace his face. That was the first time he’d seen Eren actually smile.

Eren raced up the stairs. It wasn’t until he was just about to knock on Levi’s door that he truly understood what it was he had to do.

Eren’s raised hand faltered as questions from before bombarded him. What would he say? Would he say no? He shook his head, his body filling once more with determination. He was so close to being able to see his friends, to tell his friends what was going on. He would not stumble here. So, he gathered his courage and knocked on the door.

Not ten seconds later, Levi answered, aloof as usual.

“Can I help you?” Don’t say anything that will ruin your chances. Don’t say anything that will ruin your chances. Just keep it short and to the point.

“Is it alright if I have friends over tomorrow?” Levi’s face flinched with confusion.

“Friends?” Don’t say anything. “Our fathers are allowing you to have friends over?” he asked, incredulous. Eren shrugged, but refused to look away. No matter how piercing Levi’s stare was.

“I asked your dad, and he told me to ask you.” Levi exhaled sharply, pinching the bridge of his nose.
“They can come over tomorrow after lunch.” Eren tensed up with excitement. “But don’t bother me while they’re here. Understood?” He nodded furiously.

“Understood. Thanks.” And with that Eren retreated back into his room excitedly. Frantically calling Armin back to tell him the good news.

Levi scrutinized the door across the hall with narrowed and confused eyes.

“I really don’t get you, Eren Jaeger.”

Once again, Eren couldn’t sleep that night. He could feel certain effects start to take a hold of his body when morning finally came. Grogginess, the ability to focus, and even worse decision making skills were a few. They only showed up in small amounts though. Eren had spent too many nights pulling all-nighters on both last minute school projects and video games alike so he’d built up more of an immunity to the effects of sleep deprivation. Plus coffee and the constant feeling he had kept him awake and alert. Well… mostly alert.

It worried him, though. He needed to find a solution quickly, because he was positive he wouldn’t be able to spend the whole week sleep deprived. Couldn’t sleep deprivation kill someone? Eren pushed that thought into the same corner where all the other thoughts he had about the mansion went.

There was no use in worrying about it now. At least that’s what he told himself. He had guests coming over after all. And he was so excited that for a moment he didn’t even care that he was marrying the world record for most amount of shit and sarcasm in a small object.

Finally, he could tell his friends everything. He wouldn’t have to keep it hidden anymore. He was sure his dad was going to be pissed, but that was a problem he could deal with later. What was more important right now was that his friends were coming over! There would be no more secrets!

Anxiety gripped Eren.

How would he tell them? How would they take it? He’d kept this secret for so long… They were his friends. They had stood behind him no matter what. So they wouldn’t hate him or abandon him because of this… right?

These were the thoughts that plagued him throughout the night and morning. Eren was left alone and bored with those thoughts too. Carlton had left early in the morning without so much as a goodbye, though it was probably because he thought Eren would still be asleep, and Levi hadn’t even left his room. That left Eren to wander the house with his troublesome questions. He was almost glad for lunch when it finally came.

“Brat! It’s fucking time for lunch! Get your ass down here!”

Well, he said almost didn’t he?

Levi came stomping down the stairs as he yelled, looking sour indeed. Apparently, Mondays were still Mondays for the rich and famous.

Eren, who’d been lounging on one of the couches in the living room, rubbed his ears from Levi’s shouting. “There’s really no reason to yell, you know.” Levi stopped.

“You left your room,” he pointed out in surprised.
“Really? I thought this was my room.” Eren rolled his eyes, sarcastically. Levi didn’t comment, and continued to the dining room, sitting down in his usual seat. Eren did the same. “No, but seriously,” Eren grumbled as he sat down. “Was it really necessary to be so fucking loud? My room isn’t that far from the staircase.” This time Levi rolled his eyes.

“The walls of this house are practically soundproof. I thought you were still in your room, therefore, I thought I needed to yell,” Levi explained, curtly. Looks like his fuse was a tad short today.

“Well I wasn’t,” Eren replied, just as curt.

“Obviously.”

They glared at each other in tense silence. Eren broke the silence as he felt his stomach constricting from lack of hunger.

“So… are we gonna tell the cooks or-”

“They know,” Levi cut off. He pulled out his phone to show Eren the time. It was 11:55. “Lunch is at noon. It’s not noon. Calm down.”

“Well, excuse me for wondering,” Eren said defensively.

“Oh, how I wish I could.” Levi said it more to himself than to Eren, but Eren heard it anyway.

“Well, if you don’t want to be around me so badly, why don’t you just leave? Not allowed to eat in your room?”

A servant came out then, holding a tray of tea. She set the tray in front of Levi.

“ Fucking finally,” he muttered bitterly. Eren glared at him. How could he treat her so badly? But the servant looked unfazed. She turned to Eren.

“What would you like to drink?” she asked professionally.

“Coffee, please. With sugar,” he replied, letting go of his harsh appearance so she didn’t think he would treat her like Levi treated her. But even so, she remained unfazed. She left back to the kitchen, to get Eren’s drink.

“Trust me,” Levi started as soon as she was gone, taking a sip from his tea. “I would love to eat in my room and away from you, especially today, but, if we don’t follow the “rules” then the servants are going to tell my father and we’ll be in trouble. And I would rather not have to waste my time listening to that lecture.”

“Gee, it’s nice to know you like me so much.”

“Guess whose fault that is.”

The servant came back before Eren could comment, this time with his coffee and an array of sandwiches, fruit, and what looked like homemade potato chips. They were still warm.

The rest of lunch was silent. Eren found that silence while eating was one thing he and Levi could actually agree on. There were probably more things that they could agree on, but Eren sure as hell wasn’t going to find out. He wanted as much distance from Levi as possible.

As Eren wiped his mouth with a napkin, one of the sandwiches had been fairly messy, he noticed
Levi grimacing from across the table, but he chose not to comment. It was probably just because he was in a bad mood.

Levi finished off the last of his tea and stood.

“Your friends are coming over right?” Eren nodded.

“Yeah, they should be here soon.”

“Good. You can do whatever you want, just don’t disturb me, got it? I have a shit ton of work to get done for this week no thanks to you.” Levi began to head for the stairs before Eren cut him off.

“Hey! You having work isn’t my fucking fault!” he yelled.

“No, but the fact that you’re here means that I won’t be able to do any work for the next fucking week. And that’s a pain in the ass.” Levi tried to push past Eren, but Eren stood firm.

“Once again, that’s not my fucking fault! What are you gonna do? Blame me because I was fucking born?” Levi stared with affronted astonishment.

“I’m not fucking- Fuck it!” He threw his hands in the air, forcibly shoving Eren out of the way. “Just have fun with your friends, and don’t let me see you until dinner!” Levi hurried up the stairs, he’d had enough of Eren.

“I plan on it!” Eren shouted after him. “Fucking asshole…”

“I heard that!”

“Good!”

Eren fell back into his seat and let his head slam against the table.

Fuck Levi. Just fuck him. Eren was sure he was far worse than an asshole now. It’s not his fault that he couldn’t do his precious work so there was no need to blame him like that!

He felt his phone vibrate in his pocket, and any negative feelings subsided for the moment. Hurrying, Eren pulled out his phone to see he had a message from Armin.

Armin: Heyy, were just about to leave. Whats the address?

Eren couldn’t help the excitement building up inside him. It took him three tries to write down the address because he was so excited. He even almost let out what would have been a VERY manly squeal at the thought. He didn’t care if Levi thought Eren was to blame for this whole week and was now throwing a tantrum up in his room about it. His friends were coming over and that’s all that mattered at this point.

It would take about 15 or 20 minutes for them to get here, possibly longer if they all decided to leave separately. But that probably wasn’t going to happen. Of the three people who had cars in their group, Reiner, Ymir, and Marco, only Marco had a usable GPS and while Armin, Mikasa, Berthold, Christa, and Annie were all fairly adept at giving directions, no one else was really all that adept at following directions. So, assuming that they would all leave at the same time after picking up Mikasa and just follow Marco that meant Eren had about 15 to 20 minutes left of lonely hell.

What would Eren do…?
Could he slide across the floor of the party room in his socks?

Over the next 20 minutes, Eren found out that yes, he could slide around the party room in his socks. He also found out that it was very easy to fall while sliding.

And it was extremely entertaining, thank you very much.

Eren’s phone vibrated after 20 minutes, and he slide over, still in just his socks, to wear it laid on the floor of the otherwise empty room.

**Armin:** *Here! At least I think so… :P*

Eren tried to get to the door so fast, he forgot his shoes. He didn’t get very far without them. The slippery marble led him straight into a wall. So he dashed back to his shoes and threw them on. As much as he wanted to see his friends, he really didn’t care for walking out in only his socks. After finally getting shoes on his feet, Eren made once again for the door. The sight that greeted him did not disappoint him.

There was Reiner’s black SUV, Ymir’s bright red truck, Marco’s powder blue Prius, and all of his friends with different expressions of shock and awe.

Eren fought back tears.

“Oh, thank GOD!!” he cried, throwing himself at Armin and Mikasa. He pulled them into a tight hug. “You guys have NO idea how fucking happy I am to see you all! And yes, I’m even happy to see horseface over there!”

“Yeah!” Connie exclaimed. “Group hug!”

Sasha jumped up in joy and both made a leap for Eren, but both were held back by Reiner.

“Hold on, now,” he said skeptically. “I think we all deserve an explanation.”

“Yeah! What the hell’s going on here?” Ymir nodded in agreement.

“And why the fuck are you in some fancy ass mansion instead of at some college camp crap?” Jean joined in, crossing his arms over his chest. Eren pushed Armin and Mikasa away and held them at arm’s length, taking turns staring them in the eyes.

“You didn’t tell them?” To be honest, Eren thought that Armin and Mikasa would tell everyone before coming here. The two wouldn’t meet his gaze.

“W-Well,” Armin offered. “We thought it was your secret to tell.”

“Did you tell them anything?”

“We told them you weren’t at college camp,” said Mikasa. Eren’s shoulders dropped.

“Thanks. I can always rely on you guys,” he muttered sarcastically.

“If you wanted us to tell them then you should’ve told us!” Armin laughed nervously.

“So what’s going on?” Berthold spoke up. Everyone nodded, just as curious.
Eren sighed. Now that the time was here to tell everyone, he was really nervous. It was probably best to keep this as short, sweet, and to-the-point as possible.

“Well, long story short, I’m the well-guarded secret heir to a multimillion dollar corporation and part of an even more well-guarded secret engagement to an asshole.”

There was a long period of silence before they all yelled at the same time:

“What?!”

And then the questions came.

“You mean to tell us, that all this time you were super fucking rich?!”

“Yes.”

“What the hell are you the heir of?”

“Jaeger Medical Corporation.”

“You mean all those hospitals?”

“Yup.”

“So when teacher’s asked you-”

“Yeah, I lied.”

“Do you have a bunch of lake houses and beach houses and mansions? Like Christa?”

“No.”

“Wait, so you’re the heir to a multimillion dollar corporation and you still didn’t know who Christa was when you first met?”

“…Yes?” Eren wasn’t entirely sure how to answer that one. Was it “yes he didn’t know” or “no, he didn’t know”? Eh, whatever.

“Does that mean you’re going to take over the company after college?”

“Thank God, no.”

“This explains why you always got really cool presents for Christmas and your birthday!”

“I guess?”

“So why was it secret?”

“To keep me out of the spotlight.”

“Are you be able to access your dad’s money in case you need to dispose of a body?”

“What?” What the fuck, Connie? Really?

“Hold on! Just, everybody hold the fuck up!” Jean screamed, and everyone stopped to look at him curiously. “Are we not going to discuss the fact that Eren just said he was fucking engaged?”
“There was yet another long period of silence before…

“WHAT?!”

Apparently they hadn’t heard that part.

“Yup. And the guy’s a dick,” Eren complained.

“It’s a guy,” Marco commented thoughtfully.

“So he’s forced to swing that way, huh?” Connie stroked his imaginary beard.

“That means Connie and Armin are the only two straight dudes left in our circle of friends,” Ymir pointed out. “You’re outnumbered! Ahaha!”

“Who wants to bet that Armin turns gay next?” Reiner grinned.

“Well, it’s gotta be Armin. I’m far too deep to pull out now.” That earned Connie a hard smack from severely blushing girlfriend.

“Guys!” Armin held up his hands, silencing his friends’ conversation about his possible future sexuality and Connie’s terrible innuendoes. “Can we not? So who is it Eren?”

All emotion fell from Eren’s face. The irony of the situation coming back full force now that Armin was here.

“Do you remember that conversation we had Friday?” he questioned in a monotone. Armin let out a dramatic gasp.

“No! You mean-”

“Yup,” Eren nodded, cutting off his friend. “Only it was the smaller of the two evils.” He held up his thumb and index finger and held them close together for emphasis. Armin covered his mouth with his hand. It was obvious that while he felt really bad for his friend, he found the irony absolutely hysterical at the same time. And now he was trying not to laugh and make his friend feel even worse.

“So you’re marrying… that guy?” Christa spoke up in her soft voice. The group stared at her.

“You know who we’re talking about?” Eren asked in disbelief.

“I’ve been here before for a business party and I met him once.” She shrugged. “He seemed okay.” Eren shook his head.

“He’s not. Trust me, he’s not.”

“Who the hell is ‘he’?”

Eren took in a deep breath and braced himself for the reaction. This was probably going to be worse than telling them he was secretly rich.

“Levi Voclain.”

“ARE YOU FUCKING SHITTING ME?!!?!!?!?” was Jean’s immediate response. “Why is it that JAEGGER of all people had to hit the jackpot for life?!” Marco raised an eyebrow and stared coldly at his boyfriend. Jean was quick to apologize. “It’s not like I’m not happy I have you, but… It’s
Levi Voclain! He’s rich as fuck!”

“Heir to a multimillion dollar company and fiancé to the heir of a multibillion dollar company and cofounder of another multibillion dollar company.” Ymir nodded her head slowly and grinned. “Nice.”

“Dude, that’s awesome!” Connie congratulated.

“The fuck it is!” Eren countered.

“How is that bad?”

“Well, for starters, he’s an asshole,” Eren listed, counting on his fingers for every point he made. “I’m going to have to live the rest of my life with him, he’s an asshole, he’s fucking famous meaning I’ll have to deal with the media and shit, and did I mention that he’s a fucking asshole of the highest fucking degree? This sucks! I hate him!”

“You’re going to be a mega multibillionaire! So what if your significant other sucks?”

“Because I’m going to have to spend the rest of my fucking life with him!”

“Why are you marrying him if you don’t like him?” Sasha tilted her head to the side in confusion as she asked.

“It wasn’t my choice! It’s an arranged marriage. My dad made a deal with his family before I was born, so it’s not like I had a say in who I got to be tied to for life.”

“I wouldn’t mind if I got a bunch of money out of it.”

“You would if your intended was Levi Voclain.”

“Damn…” Berthold sighed, leaning back against the SUV. “This is a lot to take in.”

“You’re telling me. I didn’t even know until Saturday!”

“So where is he now? Can we meet him?”

“Busy. He holed himself up in his room and told me not to let him see my face until dinner. So, no, you can’t. Now can we do something that isn’t talk about the bane of my existence? I have all week with him and only a couple hours with you.”

They all agreed, and Eren led them to the backyard. It was a beautiful day out, so why waste it indoors?
Your Friends Will Want To Pester You

Chapter Notes

I almost didn't post this today because I'm hittin' da road for a super long road trip... all by myself... But then I realized, if I didn't do it early in the morning, it was going to be done late a night.

So here you go! :D

Levi growled as he went through his emails in his room. Eren wasn’t the only one unhappy about the week. With Eren here as a “test run,” that meant they had to spend as much time as possible together. Which meant for the entire week, Levi had to stay home. Over the weekend was fine. Levi didn’t like working over the weekends anyway so having Eren over was perfectly fine, that is, if he didn’t act like such a brat.

This bugged him to no end. He didn’t like working from home for even one day, but for a week? If anyone wanted to know why Levi was in such a bad mood today that was why.

Levi forced his way through another email. He hated the fact that he wasn’t able to actually see what Erwin was talking about. How was he supposed to know what was actually happening? It wasn’t that he didn’t trust his co-workers to do things right while he was gone. Hell, they were all his closest friends, and he would trust them with his life. Well, except for Hanji. To be honest, Hanji would probably kill him faster by accident. It was just that he needed to feel like he was being useful, and sitting at his desk in his room so he could entertain a shitty brat was not being useful.

At least the brat had friends over today so Levi could work in peace. They had even chosen to stay outside, which meant that the noise level wouldn’t be as bothersome.

Now the only problem was that Levi had a perfect view of them from his room. And it was becoming increasingly difficult to keep his attention on his computer. They were far too distracting.

For one, Eren had a large group of friends. When he’d asked Levi if it was alright for friends to come over, Levi had expected two, maybe three, people to come over. Not an army. Not to mention that they kept moving. Every time Levi thought his eyes had adjusted to having the group of brats in his peripheral vision, one of them would do something, and his gaze would be drawn back to the pack of teenagers.

What surprised Levi the most, though, upon first inspection of the group was that he actually recognized one of them. A small blonde by the name of Christa Lenz. Her father was a close business partner to his family and was fairly selective on who he and his family was acquainted with. Levi specifically remembered how Mr. Lenz had not so subtly tried to push a relationship out of Levi and Christa during one party, too. It didn’t work out, needless to say. So now, Levi was wondering how Eren had managed to become friends with her.

Actually, if he was being honest with himself, he was wondering how Eren had managed to have so many friends in general. It didn’t seem possible for such a perpetually angry boy.
Realizing he was once again wasting time watching Eren and his friends, Levi shook himself out of it and returned to his work.

There was a new email from Erwin. Apparently, the test run for the new level of Attack on Titan failed horribly. The characters weren’t moving properly, the special features didn’t work, and the mobile version only crashed every time it was opened.

Levi could feel a major headache coming on. How the hell was he supposed to fix this? All of the programming files and information were at the office and it would be impossible to send the files via email. The files were just too large. And if he didn’t have the files, how was he supposed to try and find the source of the problem and help offer solutions? Plus, it was just so much easier to talk to his coworkers verbally and in person than through email.

Without his permission, Levi’s eyes wandered back over to Eren and his friends.

They were sitting under the godforsaken tree that Eren had climbed up yesterday. He noticed one girl in particular this time. She had black hair and a red scarf despite the warm weather, and she hadn’t left Eren’s side this whole time. Who was she? Was she someone that Eren had wanted to date but couldn’t due to the engagement? If that was the case, he could understand how Eren would be so upset. She was very pretty, and it was obvious that they were very close with each other.

Levi had to stifle a short twang of jealousy. After all, there was no reason to feel jealous of someone when the person they were clinging to wouldn’t give you the time of day to do anything other than argue. Besides, he couldn’t be jealous yet. To be jealous you need to actually like someone. And he couldn’t be falling for the brat so soon could he? Or perhaps he was simply jealous of the fact that he laughed and smiled with them. He wanted Eren to have fun with him too. He didn’t want to fight forever with the brat.

When Levi finally stopped his musings, he noticed he’d received another email.

From: Hanji

So how are things going with your boy toy?

Fuck Hanji… Could’t she realize that the work email was for fucking work? Not thirty seconds later, there was another email from her.

From: Hanji

Oh, come on! Don’t delete my email like I know you probably just did!

She was fucking psychic.

To: Hanji

You do realize that this email is specifically for WORK and not your pathetic attempts at trying to gain more information on my brat of a fiancé.

From Hanji:

But you won’t answer if I call you or text you! And you never answer your non work email! And you’ve threatened to destroy all of my toilets if I come over and visit! What else am I supposed to do? You’ve left me no choice so this is your fault really.
To Hanji:

Have you perhaps considered not asking me about it?

From Hanji:

I’m not going to get any information out of you if I don’t ask! Duh.

To Hanji:

You’re not going to get any information anyway. Just drop it.

From Hanji:

Oh! How about if I video chat?

Of fuck no. There was no way in hell Levi was going to answer any video chat calls from Hanji. Especially when he had such a hard time focusing on anything inside his room already. Really, he should just close the blinds. But then he would miss out on all the sunlight. If he had to spend this beautiful day inside then he was going to keep the blinds open. Even if it meant he’d have to deal with the brat and his friends constantly being in the corner of his eye. They couldn’t stay there all day after all… Right?

Incoming Call from Hanji…

Nope. Levi declined, knowing that Hanji would either only call back again or spam his inbox. At least he wouldn’t have her voice making his headache any worse.

Incoming Call from Erwin…

… Shit. Either this was Hanji hijacking Erwin’s computer for the sake of finding out about Eren or it was actually Erwin wanting to talk about something relevant and important. So, with a heavy sigh, he clicked accept.

The first thing he saw was glasses and always messy brown hair tied up in a ponytail.

“LEVI!!!!!”

“Hanji, I am going to hang up right now, march over to your fucking house, and-”

“Levi, Levi, wait!” came Erwin’s voice. “I actually do have to talk to you about something important. So please, don’t hang up.” Levi’s lips formed a thin line, but he slowly and grudgingly removed the mouse from the end call button. Then he sat back in his chair.

“I’m listening. But you need to get her-” Levi pointed a finger at Hanji “-out of here.”

“No! Levi! Please! I need to know! How’s everything with your boy toy?!”

“First of all, don’t ever call him my ‘boy toy’ ever again. Second, I am not telling you anything about him. And third, get out of my face before I risk angering my father in ways I don’t want to anger him so that I can strangle you.” Hanji stuck her tongue out childishly.

“Boo. You’re no fun Levi! But don’t worry! I’ll get it out of you eventually!” And then she was gone.

“Sorry about that,” Erwin laughed, rolled into the camera shot. “She originally hijacked my
computer to call you, but then I realized I actually needed to talk to you and video chat would be a lot easier.”

Levi relaxed back in his chair, the danger finally gone. “Just so long as she doesn’t barge back in and demand to know more about that brat.”

“I have to admit, though, I am curious about him too.” Erwin leaned forward, resting his head on his hands elegantly.

“Oh, God, not you too.”

“You can’t blame me. You got all riled up about him and then refused to give us any more details.”

“You’ll find out about him soon enough, just fucking calm down will you? He’s my fucking fiancé. He’s not going to drop off the face of the Earth for fucks sake. In fact, if you don’t see him by the end of summer, you’re fucking blind.”

“The end of summer?” Erwin repeated, incredulous. “That’s a long time from now Levi.”

“I said by the end of summer, not after or at the end of summer,” Levi sighed, leaning back. “Meaning you’ll see him before then. The engagement is supposed to go public after he graduates so really if you don’t see him in the beginning of summer then you’re fucking blind.”

“That’s still pretty far…”

“It’s two months. You’ll fucking live. Now can we stop talking about this? I only have so much time to work before I had to spend every waking moment of this week with that brat.”

“Alright, alright. Now I’ve left the programming of the next level to Gunter and Erd, but I was talking to Petra and it seems that one problem might stem from the layout of the map—”

Erwin continued on discussing the problems of the new level and possible solutions. He held up pictures that helped demonstrate his point better than simply describing it in an email. Levi paid close attention and offered his limited help, but after a half hour Levi’s attention began to drift.

“Levi.”

“Hmm?”

“Levi!”

“What?” Erwin shook his head.

“That’s the third time you’ve stared off to the side like that in the last 15 minutes. What’s going on?” Now it was Levi’s turn to shake his head.

“Nothing, I’m just a bit… distracted.” He gave one last glance outside. Eren and his friends hadn’t moved from the tree, and now they were playing cards. He couldn’t tell what game from so far away though. Although, from what it looked like, Eren wasn’t doing too bad judging from his smug face. Levi watched, though, as the next turn came and Eren’s smug face dropped. Eren fell back in an overdramatic fashion and everyone laughed. Even Levi found himself letting out a small chuckle.

“Levi!”

Levi jumped as Erwin called his name, and he hid his face in one hand.
“Fuck, sorry Erwin.”

“Seriously, Levi?” Erwin smirked playfully. “Now you can’t avoid talking about it… It’s him isn’t it? Your fiancé?”

“Drop it, Erwin. You know if you talk about him a certain someone is going to-”

“Fiancé?!” Not five seconds later, Hanji’s face filled up the screen next to Erwin. “What’s this I hear about a fiancé?”

“It’s nothing. Leave us alone.”

“Levi has been zoning out and looking out the window for the past 15 minutes.” Erwin you dirty traitor.

“You’re joking! Really?!”

“Fuck you, Erwin.” Erwin only laughed.

“This is what happens when you don’t tell me right away.”

“Alright, fine! Yes, I was looking out the window. But it’s a fucking gorgeous day out and I’m stuck inside working.” That’s a good excuse right? They won’t pry any further right? Wrong.

“And why is that?”

“Because there’s a ton of shit to get done and the only time I have to do it is while E-there’s people over entertaining that brat so I don’t have to.” Hanji and Erwin shared a glance, both having heard the slight slip up, but chose to say nothing.

“And where are they?”

“In the back-ballroom. Ballroom. They’re in the ballroom.” Levi swore. Even he couldn’t come back from slipping up that badly. At least he managed to catch himself with Eren’s name.

“Oh really? The back ballroom?”

“I didn’t know he had a back ballroom. Did you?”

“No, I most certainly did not.”

“They’re in the backyard.” Levi stressed, giving up his façade.

“Really? You know, I do believe you have a great view of the backyard from your room.”

“Yes, it’s the window that you just so happen to be have been looking out of while we were talking.”

“I. Hate. Both of you. So fucking much. Yes!” Levi finally cried. “Alright?! He and his friends are in the back-fucking-yard and I keep getting distracted by them. Are you fucking happy?!”

Hanji jumped up and down squealing, “I knew it! I knew it! I knew it!”

“That wasn’t so hard now was it?” Erwin teased.

“Don’t talk to me.”
“Oh! I fucking knew it! You are completely smitten by him!” Hanji pointed a finger at Levi after she stopped hopping around like a retarded bunny.

“I am not.” And it’s true, he wasn’t.

“I don’t know Levi…” Erwin spoke contemplatively. “You don’t zone out very easily.”

“I can’t be smitten with him.”

“Can’t or won’t?”

“Can’t! He’s a fucking brat! The fucker is constantly being a total dick to just about everyone here! I want to throttle the shitty brat! He pisses me off!” Levi yelled. Why couldn’t they see that he was not smitten with that brat?

“There’s a fine line between love and hate~!” Hanji sang. Oh how Levi wanted to rip out her vocal cords right now.

“I don’t give a fuck!”

“Well, I certainly don’t think you love him,” Erwin offered helpfully. “But you can’t deny that there’s something captivating about him to you. Otherwise you wouldn’t act like this.”

Fuck. He had a point. While there was no way in Heaven, Hell, or even fucking space that he could be in love or smitten with Eren, there was no denying that the brat intrigued him. There was something about him that pulled Levi towards him, and Levi couldn’t for the life of him figure it out.

Levi sighed, glanced once more out the window, and froze.

Eren and one of his friends were fighting. He was taller than Eren with kind of weird two-toned hair. It looked like a pretty heated argument.

“Levi?”

“Shut up.”

Levi leaned forward in his chair towards the window. He couldn’t hear anything and he couldn’t read lips, but he was pretty sure it had something to do with the game they’d been playing. Levi quickly surveyed the rest of the group. Each person was making one of two faces: either they were cheering them on or they looked bored.

Did those two fight a lot?

Did Eren fight a lot?

Could it be that Eren really was just an aggressive person and the marriage wasn’t as important as he thought?

Hope swelled up in Levi for a moment that perhaps the fights weren’t anything personal. Then, it shriveled up. If this was normal behavior for Eren, then there wasn’t much hope in getting him to change so they weren’t fighting all the time. Levi sighed and his shoulders drooped at the thought. Was he really going to spend his life with a guy who couldn’t hold a conversation without fighting?

“Levi! What’s going on?!” Levi sighed and leaned back in his chair.
“Nothing.”

“Aww, come on!” Hanji whined pitifully. “Don’t skimp out on us! What’s your boy toy doing?!?”

“I told you to stop calling him that. Now I’m definitely not telling you.”

“No- wait. You mean there was a chance you’d tell us?!?”

“No.”

“Levi…”

Levi chuckled at her form, finding pleasure from watching her suffer like that. Serves her right for being so fucking nosey. He decided to check up on how Eren was doing with his fight, if it was even still going on. So, he peeked out the window once more…

… Just in time to watch Eren punch the other guy in the face.

“What the fuck?!” Levi cried before he could catch himself, bolting upright in his chair. Both Hanji and Erwin stood at attention at the computer, watching Levi closely.

“What’s going on?!”

“No, hold on, shut the fuck up.”

Levi crossed over to the window, his face a flurry of confusion. What the hell was going on down there?

Both boys were going at it with each other. Or at least trying to. A black haired boy was holding the two toned guy back by hooking his arms under the guy’s shoulders, but the guy was still struggling, managing to kick Eren back in the shin. Eren had been, at least before the kick, somewhat calmed down by the scarf girl simply by having her pull him back by the shoulder one-handed. After the kick she had to hold him back with more force and a small blond haired… boy (?) had to help. Eren was angry in a way Levi had never seen before.

And in what seemed like an instant, he was back to normal. He was kind of frustrated, but that was basically the same thing with Eren. He’d brushed off the scarf girl and he-she off of him and two-toned did the same thing with black hair. Then they returned to their game. They each gave each other a small shove and that was it. Their fight was over.

Levi honestly couldn’t comprehend what he’d just seen. Eren had gone from laughing with his friends to arguing with one of them to punching them in the face and then back to laughing with his friends within a matter of minutes.

He honestly did not get Eren. Even after witnessing Eren reacting to people that weren’t Levi and his father, he was still no closer to figuring out the puzzle that Eren now was. In fact, he was probably even further from solving it than he was before.

“Leeeeeviiiiiii~~!!!!!”

Oh, fuck…

“Leeeeeeeveeiiiiiiiiiiiiiii~~!!!!! Tell me what’s happening~~~!!!!!”
Levi groaned as Hanji’s nasally voice came from the computer. He reluctantly returned to his desk, the oh-so-curious faces of his two supposedly “best” friends taking up his screen.

“I’m not telling you. You can bitch and scream and moan all you want but I’m not going to tell you.”

“I am not going to leave this computer until you tell me what’s happening!”

“Alright.”

And with that, Levi ended the call.

And turned off the computer.

And turned off his phone.

He’d turn them back on in a bit, but right now he needed to think, and he wouldn’t be able to do that with Hanji, and Erwin too, screaming at him about what had happened.

Back under Eren’s Tree (if you thought Eren wasn’t going to keep calling it Eren’s Tree then you were horribly mistaken), Eren and his friends sat in a circle. After some card games, a race up Eren’s Tree between Eren and Jean (which Eren won by the way), and a rousing and slightly painful game of hide and tackle (it was like hide and seek only Reiner always played too rough, which meant so did everyone else), they were back to playing card games under the protective shade of the tree. Everything was going smoothly until Reiner tried to ease in a suggestion to Eren.

“So, I know you don’t want to talk about him-”

“Great, thanks for acknowledging that. Now, who wants to play another round of Cards Against Humanity?” Eren cut off quickly, reaching for the cards. He knew exactly where this was going and he did not want to participate.

“Oh, come on, Eren. Please?” Sasha begged, her hands clasped together as she leaned forward towards him.

“No.”

“But we’re dying to know!” Connie, who was sitting right next to Sasha, mimicked his girlfriend. “Please?”

“I’ve already told you too much as it is! Really, no one outside of our two families are supposed to know,” Eren grumbled, shuffling the cards in his hands.

“Oh!” Connie gasped. “So that’s why Armin and Mikasa were all like “Don’t tell anyone about Eren when you find out” and “Like seriously, you can’t tell anyone. This is a big secret.””

“Yeah. And seriously, if any one of you tells a single soul outside of this group I will personally see to it that you suffer ten times worse than I will have to if this gets out.” Eren jabbed a threatening finger at them and backed it up with a glare. He knew that they never really listened to his threats, mostly because Mikasa and Armin never let him follow through with them. Though there were a couple times where he had them, Jean and Reiner specifically, eat their words. Those were proud moments for Eren.
“Oh shit! Guys! He’s actually going to have the power and money necessary to back that threat up!”

“He’s not a puppy we can kick around anymore.”

“The horror!”

“Oh fuck you guys.” Sometimes Eren didn’t really understand why he was friends with these people.

“So why did you tell us? Aren’t you going to get in trouble for it?” Christa asked worriedly.

“Because Levi’s dad is a really nice guy and more understanding than my dad. And I’ll probably get my ass chewed out by my dad when he finds out. It’s weird though,” Eren pondered. “Levi’s dad treats me with so much respect and doesn’t treat me like a child. It’s weird… It feels like there’s some sort of catch. Well, besides having to marry the world’s largest asshole, douchebag extraordinaire.” He started passing out cards to everyone, hoping that the conversation was now over.

“And speaking of…” Oh for the love of… Reiner…

“Oh god, can you not?” And there was where they’d come full circle. Actually they’d had this conversation at least five different times and it was really starting to get old. He even ended up punching Jean in the face because of it. Who then kicked him in the shin, which still hurt a bit. The bastard.

“But it’s Levi Voclain! How many other chances are we gonna have to hear about him from a first-hand experience, or even possibly meet him.” The very conspicuous suggestion was not lost on Eren.

“You do realize that I’m marrying the jerk, right?” Eren pointed out with a raised eyebrow. “You are gonna have infinite opportunities to hear me complain about him and see him be a jerk.”

“Well, when could we meet him? Like, without needing to keep it a secret and stuff?” Marco wondered. Eren’s friends leaned in closer to Eren out of curiosity. The cards were forgotten. Eren ran his fingers through his hair as he thought about it. When was it again?

“Oh… The… official announcement of the engagement is supposed to be… sometime after I graduate. I don’t remember the exact date. Or if there even is an exact date.”

“Summer?!” Ymir shouted in shock. “We’re gonna have to wait until summer?”

“That’s so far away though! It’s only spring break!”

“You’re getting the opportunity to meet Levi Voclain in a casual setting several times in the future, an opportunity I remind you that very few people get to have, and you’re going to complain that it isn’t right now?” Eren couldn’t believe this. Were his friends really that starstruck?

“Yes.”

Apparently so…

“Fuck you guys.”

Everyone laughed.
“Aww! We love you, too, Eren!”

“I don’t.”

“He can have my platonic love, but my real love is for Christa.”

“I don’t care how you love me or not, I still hate you all.” Eren made to get up and leave. Where he was going to go, he didn’t know, but he didn’t have to think about it for too long as Armin pulled him back down.

“You know you love us. What would you do without us?” he asked, holding Eren in place.

“Be happy,” Eren grumbled, but complied and stayed seated.

“Even without Armin? Or Mikasa?”

“I’m fine with Armin and Mikasa, it’s the rest of you bastards that I hate.”


“… Fine, I hate most of you bastards. Especially horseface over there.”

“Go to hell, Jaeger!” Eren gestured and fixed Jean with a pointed stare.

“Already there,” he smiled ruefully.

“Wait,” Berthold spoke up, holding his hands up in a silencing motion. “Is your last name gonna change to Voclain when you get married?”

A hush befell the group as they contemplated it.

“Huh, I never thought about that…” Eren said absentmindedly, before groaning. “Ugh, and it probably will too. Just my luck…”

“Oh no! It’s going to be so weird not to refer to you as Eren Jaeger…” Marco commented softly.

“You mean our Jaegerbomb isn’t going to be a Jaegerbomb anymore?” Ymir gasped, melodramatically.

“No more Jaegermeister for you,” Connie chortled.

“Oh, haha,” Eren deadpanned.

Mikasa harrumphed, crossing her arms. “There was no Jaegermeister to begin with. And none until you turn 21,” Mikasa added as a side thought.

“Mikasa!” Eren blushed lightly. She was always babying him!

“Yeah, I don’t think we’ll want to see Eren drunk,” Berthold laughed nervously.

“I wanna see Eren drunk!” Jean proclaimed, laughing as well. “He’s probably an idiot when he’s drunk. More so than usual at least.”

“That’s gonna be weird, though. Eren Voclain…” Armin sighed. It was going to be especially weird for him since he had known Eren the longest. To think that he’d have to refer to Eren as anything other than Eren Jaeger was going to take some getting used to.
“It’s got kind of a nice ring to it, though, doesn’t it?” Christa murmured, sweetly albeit quietly for fear of upsetting Eren. She was sure he wouldn’t take too kindly to having someone saying his name sounded good with the last name of the guy he hated. It would be like telling him Eren Kirstein sounded good.

“Yeah, it does doesn’t it? Eren Voclain,” Sasha tested, also liking the way it sounded.

“No, it doesn’t!” Eren stared slack-jawed at his friends disbelievingly. How could they be so cruel to him? Saying that Levi’s last name sounded good attached to his first… it was beyond mad! Mixing their names together at all was beyond mad!

“What if Levi’s last name changed?”

“Levi Jaeger!”

“Eh… not so much… Eren Voclain sounds a lot better.” The rest of the group agreed.

“Can you guys stop mixing our names together? I don’t have to think about that yet so I’d rather not,” Eren groaned. He had a good long while before that would become an issue and he wanted to keep it that way.

“So when is the actual marriage?” Damn it Jean! Just when Eren thought the conversation would finally end, Jean just had to go and ask another question.

“I don’t know. We haven’t even gotten past the engagement.”

“Is there a specific time you’re hoping it will be in? Like, summer? Or winter?”

“How about never?”

“Is there any way you can get out of it?”

“I can think of several good ways but they all involve me dying, and really, I don’t exactly like the idea of dying.”

“What about divorce?” Divorce, huh?

“Ugh, sounds great but it probably won’t be an option until after Levi becomes head of the Voclain group, and who know when that will be. Then there’s the whole general mess that divorce makes. If you don’t agree on something then you have to go to court and split all your shit up, blah, blah, blah…” Yeah, divorce sounded great at first, but the more he thought about it the less appealing it became. Especially considering that the topic of the companies would come into play too, and Grisha would probably wring Eren’s neck for trying to fuck up his precious life plan for Eren.

“Still, at least it wouldn’t be for all of your life. Just some.”

“Why do you have to marry him?” Annie asked suddenly.

“It’s a marriage that our families arranged! How many times do I have to say that? It’s a fucking arranged marriage!” Eren yelled, exasperated. Connie, Sasha, and Jean he could understand needing a repeat but everyone kept asking him that!

“We get that part,” Annie waved off. “The question is, why are you actually following it? You’re a legal adult now, you have a say in who or what you marry.” It was a valid point. Eren could very well tell his father and Levi to suck it and leave while flipping them off with both hands. The only
problem was…

“His father has threatened him with disowning him,” Mikasa answered for Eren.

“Exactly,” Eren confirmed, sighing. “Then I’d be completely on my own, no money for anything, and I’d never get to see my family again cuz my dad would hate me that much.”

“And what about Levi? He’s 26. He’s even more of an adult than Eren.”

“Plus he actually has the money and power to live on his own comfortably even if he was cut off from his family.”

“But that’s probably it. Maybe he’s just really big on family too,” Eren shrugged.

“But really, the biggest question on everyone’s mind is are we gonna meet Levi or not?” Fucking hell Reiner… Just as Eren was about to refuse, a sudden thought came to him. He was almost surprised it hadn’t come to him earlier. He had to suppress a smirk.

“How about a house tour instead?”
But They Will Also Want To Help You

Chapter Notes

Hey! So this ended up being a little late today. I swear this is the like... second time I've been able to get on my computer. Too much stuff to do... BUT I GOT LUSCIOUS STUFF!!! :D

So yeah here you go.

It only took half an hour before Levi realized that he was only wasting what little time he had to work. After all, he had to make sure everything would be okay for the next week without him. Of course, he did that on Friday as well, but it couldn’t hurt to make sure while he had the time. He was through with video chat, though. At least with emails, he could just delete them as they came.

The next two hours were spent deleting Hanji’s emails, reading Erwin’s emails, responding to them, and watching Eren while he waited for Erwin to respond. During that time he’d seen them play two card games using playing cards, another card game involving black and white cards, Eren and two tone race up the tree (a race that Eren won), and some really weird mix of hide and seek and tag that seemed way too unnecessarily violent.

Levi had just finished a response to Erwin’s last email when he glanced outside, only to see the group of friends heading inside. A twinge of apprehension sparked inside Levi.

No. There was nothing to worry about.

The brat wasn’t going to do something stupid was he? Like, oh, maybe try to bother Levi?

The ever increasing sound of other people, loud other people, proved Levi wrong.

They had stayed downstairs for a bit, seeing as Levi couldn’t hear them for a good long while, but he could hear them coming up the stairs and talking, even through the thick walls of the house. How loud they must be... If this was how they actually talked then Levi honestly wondered how Eren- scratch that, how none of them were deaf yet.

“This is the second floor. It’s mostly just bedrooms, but there’s a library down the hall over there,” came Eren’s voice.

“Eh?! A library? No way! Can we go see it?” Levi didn’t know whose voice that was. But apparently they liked books.

“No, I brought you on a house tour just to tell you the rooms that were here. Of course we can go see it!” Eren laughed. Weird. Levi hadn’t heard Eren laugh yet. It sounded nice, and left Levi with this yearning to hear more.

So he was giving them a tour of the house, huh? Levi let his shoulders drop in relief, but despite how innocent it seemed, he still couldn’t shake the idea that Eren probably had something planned. It wouldn’t be like him to pass up such an opportunity as this.

Levi blinked in stunned realization at what he’d just been thinking before sighing, crestfallen.
Great, he was already assuming that Eren would do anything to make Levi’s life hell. It was becoming instinct to prepare himself for a fight every time he encountered Eren. Levi didn’t want to fight with Eren. In fact, all of this fighting was starting to get old. But Eren wouldn’t let Levi close enough for him to figure out how to stop it.

“This is my room,” he could hear Eren say. Looks like they were done with the library.

“Dude! It’s huge!”

“That’s so cool!”

“Is that your closet? Is it a walk-in?”

“No, that’s the bathroom. The walk-in is in the bathroom.” You know, for someone who seemingly hated being here so much he sure sounded pretty damn smug.

“What?! The bathroom?! You get your own fucking bathroom? And a fucking walk-in?! Fuck you, Jaeger.”

“You wish, horseface.”

“Which one is Levi’s?” Oh no… Oh please don’t…

“That one there.” For the love of God don’t even try.

“Can we meet him?” Just go about your silly little tour and leave Levi alone.

“I’ve told you a thousand times that he was fucking busy!” … Huh… Was he actually being considerate of Levi? That was a first. “I’m not going to drag him out here to meet you ungrateful lot only to be killed later on. I don’t have a death wish.” Well, even if it was only out of self-preservation, it was still a first.

“Maybe we should knock?”

“Don’t you do it, Connie!”

“Do it, Connie!”

“You’re going to get me killed if you knock!”

“I’m gonna do it~….”

Jesus fucking… Levi stood up and strode towards the door. Like hell if he was going to listen to Eren’s uncouth friends bang down his door for the rest of the day. Better just get this over with…

Levi flung the door open, startling everyone in the hallway. The boy who was about to knock, a little baldy (and Levi took great satisfaction in the fact that baldy was shorter than him though he would never admit to anyone), literally jumped back in fear. He glanced over everyone else until his eyes met Eren’s startled but defiant ones.

“I thought,” he drawled. “That I specifically said that you could whatever you want with the only catch being that you would not disturb me.” He narrowed his eyes threateningly. “Was there some part of this that you simply didn’t understand, or do I need to stamp it on your forehead for your incompetent mind to comprehend?”

Eren snapped out of his startled state, only for a glare to take its place along with traces of slyness.
The bastard had planned this, just like Levi’s originally gut feeling had told him. Maybe his plan didn’t include directly disturbing Levi, but Eren had wanted to disturb him nonetheless.

“How are we disturbing you? I was just taking them on a tour.”

“Yeah, well it’s a loud as fuck tour. Did you ever think about toning your voices down a notch or several?”

“I thought you said these walls were soundproof.”

“Practically. They’re practically soundproof. Surprisingly enough, soundproof and practically soundproof are not the same thing. The latter meaning that I can still hear your annoying ass voice while I’m trying to work.” Never mind the fact that Levi had only been half focusing on his work in favor of watching Eren. “Now, leave me alone. Unlike you, I actually have work to do.” Eren glowered for a moment then turned to his friends.

“There, are you guys happy now? You got to see Levi. Now can we go do something else?” Eren hissed quietly, probably hoping Levi couldn’t hear. That’s why he bothered Levi? So his friends could meet Levi? Was there no intention of bothering Levi to begin with? No, Levi was sure that Eren did want to bother Levi, but used it as an excuse for his friends to meet him.

“But, Eren~” A glare from both Eren and Levi shut the tall, well-built blond guy who had spoken, and the group started heading back downstairs with Eren leading the way.

Just as the group was about to walk out of sight, Levi caught sight of two toned and made a split second decision.

“Oi, two tone!” The guy looked back, questioningly and slightly offended. The boy next to him, the one that had held him back during his fight with Eren, and Christa stopped as well. Thankfully, they were in the back of the group so no one else really noticed. “Come here for a second.”

“My name is Jean,” he informed, walking back over. The black haired boy, who Levi now noticed had a plethora of freckles adorning his face, and Christa, after saying something to someone out of view, both followed.

“Yeah, well I didn’t know that before.”

“So what did you want?”

“What’s your relationship with Eren?”

“My relationship? Why do you ask?”


“Uh… well, he’s a jerk and an asshole and an idiot and we hate each other’s guts.”

“Don’t listen to him,” Marco chuckled lightly, waving Jean off with a smile.

“Marco!” Marco only laughed more.

“I’m Marco, by the way.” He held out his hand. Levi contemplated it for a moment before grasping it firmly with his own in a friendly shake.

“Levi. It’s nice to meet you, Marco.” Levi held out his hand to Jean as well, who took it nervously. “And you as well, Jean.”
“Yeah…”

“They’ll never admit it under normal circumstances,” Marco continued. “But they’re really the best
of friends. They’ll yell and fight with each other to no end, but if either was in trouble the other
wouldn’t hesitate to help. Not to mention that they’ve teamed up on a number of occasions to prank
others.” Marco gave Jean a pointed stare. “Even if not all of them are necessarily legal.”

“Okay, first of all,” Jean began indignantly. “There is no reason for you to be bringing that up! It’s
long in the past! And secondly, it was all Eren’s fault! So don’t you point fingers at me.”

Marco laughed at Levi’s confused face. “If you’re ever on better terms with Eren, just ask him
about the fire truck incident. It’s a great story. If not very illegal. They almost spent a night in jail
because of it.”

“It’s true, though,” Christa spoke up. “About Eren and Jean helping each other, I mean. Remember
when those guys from Trost were ganging up on Jean? And Eren immediately ran over to help?
And with his help you sent those guys packing?”

“Oh please,” Jean scoffed. “He probably just wanted the glory of beating those guys.” His tone
might have suggested indifference, but he couldn’t stop the flush of embarrassment from rising to
his cheeks. He was apparently one of those tough guys who tried not to show his feelings.

“It was five against two, Jean. And both of you got the crap beaten out of you in the process. Eren
had a sprained wrist, fractured ribs, and both of his eyes were blackened. It was obvious that all of
the odds were stacked against you two from the get go, and you want to say he only did it for the
glory?” Levi had a sudden possessive need to go find whoever they were talking about and
personally kick the living shit out of them (after all, it was much easier to like Eren when he wasn’t
fighting with Levi at the moment), but shoved it down. It was in the past so there was no point in
worrying about it.

“And don’t forget those times when you talked Eren out of several of his episodes even though you
knew that you’d get hurt every time.” Levi didn’t like the sound of that. Could he ask? Or would
that be delving too deep into something he shouldn’t know yet? Would they even tell him?

“Yeah, and it wasn’t fun taking care of all those injuries, you know,” Marco joked.

“W-Whatever…” Jean blushed even harder and stared at the wall.

“Episodes?” Levi asked, almost scared to hear the answer. The three of them exchanged glances.
They were such deep and meaningful glances that Levi was almost positive that they’d just had an
entire conversation simply by looking at each other.

“First,” Jean started. “We want to know what your intentions are towards Eren.”

“We’re not going to give out information about our friend to anyone, especially if we think they’re
going to hurt him.” Christa nodded in agreement, but said nothing. Levi sighed. Great. He was
being interrogated by a couple of teenagers. Although, he did ask a personal question.

“I don’t want to hurt him. If anything, I actually want to like him. I have to spend my life with him,
as you have probably already heard a dozen times.” Levi leaned against the door frame. “I just
want to understand him.”

They shared another glance, and Marco scratched temple lightly. “Well… and don’t tell him we
told you about this cuz he would probably freak out if he found out that we told you, he’s not
exactly fond of you, you know.” Levi nodded in understanding. Oh yeah, he knew what Eren’s
feelings were towards him. “And we’re not going to tell you a bunch of specifics about it. If you want to know more then you’ll have to ask him yourself.” Levi nodded once again. “…But, he wasn’t exactly a happy child at the beginning of high school.”

“He would have these psychotic episodes every now and then where he was completely blinded by rage. Most of the time he didn’t even realize he was doing it. One time he tried to kick in an entire row of lockers, they were metal though so he only dented them, but they were pretty deep dents. By the time he’d snapped out of it, he was handcuffed to a chair in the principal’s office with four policemen holding him down and he couldn’t remember a thing.” Christa nodded at Jean’s words.

“Thankfully it was after school and the principal didn’t let it get out that Eren had done those things. But it always seemed like something was constantly bothering him and he just sort of took it out on everyone.”

“Yeah, then you mix in raging hormones and obligatory teenage angst and bam! Psychotic episode.”

“Oh, but don’t worry! He got help for it. With it, he got over it during sophomore year and he hasn’t had one since. And recently he’s been a lot happier,” Christa reassured Levi. Apparently he must’ve look pretty worried. Who wouldn’t be, though, after learning that their fiancé had been detained for nearly destroying an entire row of lockers in a fit of uncontrollable rage and that those fits of rage were normal for a while?

“So it probably was just the weird hormones and teenage angst,” Jean added.

Silence fell over them as Levi contemplated this.

“… Could it have had something to do with the arranged marriage?” he asked thoughtfully after a moment. Levi actually hadn’t intended to say that out loud, and only realized that he had when someone responded, but nothing could be done about it now.

“Now that I think about it…” Marco thought out loud. “It’s possible.”

“Yeah, it would make a lot of sense. He never told us though. So we wouldn’t know. You’d have to ask him that yourself.”

“If he ever starts to like you that is,” Jean joked weakly.

“Well,” Levi sighed. “I’ve kept you here long enough. Thank you for answering my questions, and enjoy your time with Eren.” Jean and Marco gave him shy goodbye smiles and left, but Christa lingered behind.

“Hi,” she said, smiling.

“Hello, how have you been? I hear your father’s been doing pretty well,” Levi remarked, polite yet friendly.

“Very well, thanks! And yes, he’s found a new business partner and is excited for it.”

“That’s good. So, was there something you wanted?” he inquired curiously.

“Oh, yes! I know you’re busy, but I just wanted to say… Please don’t hate Eren,” Christa pleaded. Levi was speechless. What?
“I know you two aren’t exactly on the best terms… and you probably don’t have a very good image of him… especially after what we just told you… but he’s really not a bad guy! He’s actually really nice and genuinely kindhearted, if not the tiniest thickheaded and really stubborn. In fact, his nickname at school is “suicidal bastard” cuz he just never gives up.” She laughed at the name, obviously remembering some story related to it.

Suicidal bastard, huh? Interesting name. Levi could bet that the original story behind it was probably a good one.

“And even though people at school think he’s a bit of a doofus,” Christa continued. “He’s still really popular. He never dated anyone because he always said he couldn’t, and now I know why, but he always felt bad so when he turned them down he’d offer to take them out for ice cream. And then…” she smiled fondly. “He was one of the few people who liked me for who I was and not what I had. He made friends with me even though he didn’t know who I was. He said that I looked far too sad for someone who refused to be friends with anyone.” And I can’t thank him and Connie enough for that day, because if they hadn’t talked to me then I wouldn’t have as many friends as I do now.”

“You better not be falling for him,” Levi teased gently. “He’s a taken man, you know.”

“I know,” she laughed lightly. “Besides, I’m a taken woman and very happy about it.”

“And I don’t hate him,” Levi said firmly, shaking his head somberly. “I just don’t get him, is all. And he refuses to let me in close enough for me to ask. Both physically and emotionally. I don’t suppose you’d have any advice for me?”

“Appeal to his interests.”

“And those would be…”

“Well, he’s not too much of a reader but he loves to write. And he’s big on video games, computer games, handheld game, games in general and movies. He’s basically a child on the inside.” So it looked like Levi was right, Eren was a brat, though not necessarily in a bad way. “Oh! And he loves being outside!”

“Thanks,” Levi said, thankful that he actually had something to work with now. Christa placed a cautious hand on his shoulder.

“Good luck.”

She waved happily, and then she was gone, leaving Levi with his thoughts and the beginnings of his plan to get Eren to break out of his angry shell. He had more pieces to the puzzle named Eren, but there was still so many more he needed before he could piece them together.

Eren’s friends were supposed to leave at 5 that day. Carlton would be back at 5:30 and then dinner would be at 6. Plus it took about three hours to get to the lake house so leaving at 5 would be best all around. But four hours were honestly not enough in Eren’s opinion. So he tried to drag it out for as long as possible.

By any means necessary.

“Eren, please let go of my leg,” Armin begged at his pitiful friend. Eren had wrapped both his arms
and his legs around one of Armin’s legs. He didn’t care if he looked stupid, just so long as his friends wouldn’t leave him here all alone.

“No.”


“Actually, I’d say he looks more like a dog whose masters are about to leave,” Jean taunted. He walked over to Eren and kneeled down beside him, ruffling Eren’s hair. “Aww,” he mocked. “Don’t worry, little puppy. Your masters will be back soon to pick you up.”

Eren growled (in a completely un-dog like manner mind you) and snapped his jaws at Jean’s hand. Jean stumbled back, startled, and fell on his ass.

“What the hell, Jaeger?!” he yelled.

“Horses don’t have pet dogs,” Eren stated simply. Jean glared.

“You wanna say that again, bastard?!”

“And here I thought horses had great hearing.”

“Fuck you! But the joke’s on you!” Jean laughed, pointing a finger at Eren.

“What?”

“You admitted to being a dog.” Eren gawked at Jean, blushing.

“Go suck a dick!”

“Already have,” Jean responded smugly, to which Marco blushed a deep red.

“Jean!”

“Dude… TMI…” Connie muttered, put out.

“Don’t think you have room to talk, Connie.” Sasha hit the top of her boyfriend’s head with her elbow, not letting his previous comment from earlier go.

While everyone laughed at Connie, Armin managed to pull his leg out from Eren’s iron grasp. Eren whined and put forth his most pitiful looking face, whimpering the tiniest bit.

“Holy crap! He looks like a kicked puppy! Jean, for once you were right!” Reiner gasped.

“I don’t care!” Eren cried, still sitting on the ground. “I’ll act like a fucking monkey if I need to! Don’t leave! Or leave and take me with you! Just stuff me in the trunk and kidnap me!”

“Eren.” Eren stopped bout of self-pity and pathetic pleading and stared at Jean, who was oddly serious. “You should give him a chance.”

“Huh?” Now Eren was really confused. Give who a chance? He wasn’t talking about Levi was he?

“How about you actually try to get to know him. If you do, maybe you’ll find that he isn’t as bad of a guy as you’re making him out to be.” Eren could only stare, open-mouthed and dumbfounded, as Jean talked. Looking around, Eren found that everyone else was just as shocked at Jean’s strange burst of wisdom.
But, regardless of that, it was already past 5, and they had to leave. Eren stood and his friends all said their goodbyes and climbed into the three cars. Mikasa gave Eren a firm hug.

“If that shorty hurts you in any way, you just let me know and I’ll kick his ass,” she assured. Eren hugged her back wholeheartedly. For once, Mikasa’s constant babying of him was much appreciated. She gave him one last comforting smile before heading off to the little blue Prius that was her ride to the lake house.

After her, Christa, all alone since Ymir was waiting by her truck, placed a gentle and comforting hand on Eren’s shoulder.

“Good luck.”

And off she went, climbing into the passenger’s seat of the truck.

They all shouted their goodbyes once more from their cars as they drove away, those who had the hands to, waved. Even Jean.

Eren didn’t know how long he stood there, staring off where he’d last seen his friends with a confused expression.

Why would Jean of all people say something like that? Didn’t he see how terrible Levi actually was? Besides, he would have expected Armin or Mikasa to say something like that. Hell he thought Connie would be more likely to say that then Jean! … Okay, maybe that was pushing it, but it was still surprising. Jean didn’t often spout serious words of wisdom all that often. The only times he did were when…

_Beep, beep._

“Eren!” Eren jumped at the sound of the car horn. Carlton had come back. His head was hanging out of the window and his car was idling in the driveway, a nice Mercedes Benz. “What are you doing staring off into space on the porch?” It took few seconds for Eren to realize that Carlton had actually asked a question and was actually waiting for a response.

“O-Oh, well… uh,” he stumbled. What was he supposed to say? How long had he even been standing there?

“Ah, no matter,” Carlton brushed off good-naturedly with a smile. “Why don’t you head on inside and get Levi for dinner? I’m a little late so it should be ready soon.”

Eren nodded vacantly and walked through the front doors and up the stairs. His movements felt robotic and precise. He didn’t even flinch when he had to knock on Levi’s door. Levi opened the door for the second time that day for Eren, looking less than pleased but not necessarily mad or upset.

“Haven’t you bothered me enough today?” Eren heard Levi ask. Eren stared off to the side. How about you actually try to get to know him…

“Your dad is home,” Eren started, indifferent. Hey, it was better than hostile. “He told me that dinner would probably be ready soon and that I should go and get you.”

Maybe you’ll find that he isn’t as bad of a guy as you’re making him out to be…

“Whoopdi-fucking-doo,” Levi whooped sarcastically. “I had no idea that dinner would probably be
ready by 6 like it is every night. Thank you so much for telling me!”

Eren clenched his fists, but said nothing. After all, he was trying to make this work. Right? Wasn’t he?

Levi studied Eren between narrowed eyes.

“I’ll be down in a minute,” he informed, this time with much less sarcasm. Maybe… it could work? Maybe Levi wasn’t going to be such a jerk? “You better hurry, you might miss dinner.” Levi gasped in fake horror before shutting the door in Eren’s face. Eren felt anger simmer inside him.

There was no getting along with Levi.

No matter how hard he tried, every time he tried to be semi-agreeable, Levi would always be a complete jackass! This marriage would never work!

But… Even so… Eren couldn’t find himself feeling too angry about it. He didn’t have the energy right now to even think about fighting back. He felt rather defeated overall and tired- no, exhausted. Like all he wanted to do was lie down on the ground and sleep.

He felt the same way he’d felt after Grisha left him on the porch, just like his friends had done. Plus he was physically tired now from the lack of sleep. So, Eren dragged his feet down to the dining room in hopes that dinner would be short tonight.

“So how was your day, Eren?”

“Fine.”

“Your friends came over today, right?”

“Yes.”

“Did you have fun?”

“Yes.”

“What kind of things did you do?”

You know how when you’re really upset and don’t want to talk to anyone, but everyone seems to want to talk to you and just won’t take the hint? Yeah, that was Eren and Carlton during dinner. No matter how many hints Eren dropped and how many short answers he gave, Carlton just kept asking questions.

Eren sighed.

“We hung out it the back yard.” Levi rolled his eyes.

“That’s specific.” Great, even he wanted to talk to Eren. This was just not his night, was it? “You know, usually when someone asks what you did, they want to know more than “we hung out”.” Eren only had the energy to give a weak glare, and boy was it weak. He was pretty sure he could see Levi laughing at it on the inside.

“Hey now Levi,” Carlton reprimanded, though not very sternly. “If Eren doesn’t want to share then
he doesn’t have to. He’s probably tired from his friends coming over today and therefore doesn’t want to talk as much.”

“Y-Yeah. I’m just tired.” Hey, if Carlton was going to say it then Eren was going to roll with it.

Levi rolled his eyes once again, this time with a barely audible “bullshit” to go along with it, but Carlton didn’t hear it. That sort of frightened Eren.

Did he know? Was he able to read Eren so well? How was he able to read Eren, especially so soon? He was able to fool Carlton, but not Levi? Great… Fucking perfect…

“Oh!” Eren flinched.


“Pay attention will you? I asked if you were alright. You’ve hardly touched your food.” Eren’s brow scrunched in confusion. Why was Levi asking him that? He didn’t care about Eren’s wellbeing.

“What? Yeah… I’m fine. Just tired, like M-Carlton… said.” Eren would probably never get used to calling him Carlton rather than something like Mr. Voclain. It felt too informal for him.

Levi didn’t say anything but sent him a look that clearly said “don’t feed me the same bullshit that you’re feeding my dad.” The look made Eren feel weird. How could Levi know if Eren was lying or not? Why was it that Levi could read him so easily? Sure saying he was just tired was old and cliché, but it’s not like it wasn’t a plausible excuse…

Man, why was everyone acting so weird today?

“I think I’m going to go to bed,” Eren stated, setting his fork down and getting up from the table. He’d only eaten about half of his food, but he couldn’t find it in him to eat anymore right now. If he got hungry, maybe he could just nibble on some midnight snacks later.

“Oh… alright.”

Eren jogged up the stairs and into his room. His too big for him room. He sat down on the floor by the foot of his bed, his usual spot, and let his head fall back against the frame of the bed.

Why was everything so weird and complicated right now?

Why was everyone so strange today? Jean spouts off some unlikely wise bullshit, Christa offering him a “good luck” that seemed to be weighed down with this overwhelming sense that she knew more than she let on, and Levi has apparently completely figured Eren out to the point that he knew when Eren was lying.

And none of it made sense.

Knocking at the door and a surprisingly sincere voice pulled Eren from his thoughts.

“Oi, Eren. Open up.” Oh god no… Eren shut his eyes tightly in the hopes that closing his eyes tight enough would just make Levi go away. He so did not want to talk to Levi right now. “Eren.” It was a command.

Against Eren’s better judgment, he called out, “It’s open, you can come in!”

And open it did, revealing Levi in all of his short assholyness if that was even a word. Eren didn’t
think it was.

“What’s going on?”

“What?”

“You heard me.”

“No, I know I heard you. I meant what are you talking about?” Well, really he meant how are you able to tell there’s something wrong when your dad couldn’t notice anything worth shit? But yeah, he wasn’t going to ask that.

“‘I’m tired’ my ass. You think I’d believe that for a second?” Levi scoffed as if that excuse was the most offensive thing Eren had ever done to him. And, considering that they hadn’t really interacted all that much, it probably was.

“Why wouldn’t you believe it?” Come on, just believe it will you? Eren didn’t want to deal with this right now.

“Because from what I know about you, you’re not the type to be tuckered out from a simple play date. Plus you’re not that good of a liar.” That ruffled Eren’s feathers. That arrogant asshole.

“You don’t know anything about me!” Eren yelled forcefully.

“You’re right, I don’t!” Levi yelled back just as intensely. It looked like Levi was about to say more, but Eren wouldn’t let him.

“Well then don’t make fucking assumptions about me like that! You don’t know who I am! You don’t know how I work!” Eren clenched his fists and felt the anger inside him begin to boil. This guy managed to push all of his buttons, and that was bad news. Familiar feelings from years ago began to resurface, coming back quicker than he imagined due to his lack of sleep.

“Then tell me!” Levi emphasized. “For fucks sake, how the hell am I supposed to know anything about you when all you do is avoid the fuck out of everyone here and fight with me whenever we happen to interact?! And for the love of fuck don’t you ever say something like that again. You sound like an angsty middle schooler who just discovered Fall Out Boy. And really, if you haven’t grown out of that stage yet then you really need to rethink your life.”

“Maybe I don’t want you to know anything! And fuck you! I’m not a middle schooler!” Breath. Deep breaths. Damn it, this was not what he needed right now. This fight was quickly getting much more heated than any of their other fights, which was probably why these feelings were showing up again.

“That’s irresponsible. What? Do you plan on spending the next 60 fucking years with me as complete strangers? Did you really think that would work? And from your temper tantrums, I would have believed it if someone told me you were a middle schooler.”

There was a short period of time where neither said anything. Levi watched Eren closely while Eren diverted his gaze to the floor in front of him.

“Go away…” Eren mumbled quietly, breaking the silence. Levi needed to leave before Eren’s anger got the best of him.

“What? Can’t think of anything to say because you know I’m right?” Levi taunted, unaware of Eren’s struggles.
“Leave me alone…”

“And speaking of which,” Levi pressed onwards, he was not going to let it go this time. “Why don’t you talk to me, hmm? Why is it that you avoid everyone here? Why is it that you’re always fighting?”

“I said leave me alone!” Levi jumped back from the retaliation, clearly not expecting such ferocity. But Eren had had enough. He was getting too close to the extreme feelings of anger he’d had long ago, and that scared him. Levi needed to leave and now. “I don’t want to talk to you! Especially not right now! You’re not getting anything from this pointless arguing so just fucking leave will you?!?”

There was another several moments of silence as Eren panted, trying to regain his breath from his outburst. He couldn’t read Levi’s expression as the elder’s hair covered and shadowed his eyes.

“You’re right,” Levi said finally, his tone dead. “This is just a waste of time. And I refuse to waste my time on some worthless shit like you.” The door slammed on Levi’s way out.

Eren resisted the urge to scream.

Give him a chance they said. Maybe you’ll like him they said!

Fuck that. Levi was a terrible person and there was no way that he would ever be able to get alone, let alone like, that bastard.

Eren felt tears of anger and fear well up in his eyes. They spilled over without his permission and ran down his cheeks. Eren sobbed quietly.

He was so angry. Levi had been nothing but a complete dick the entire time he’d been here. He was constantly insulting him and yelling at him. The entire world may love Levi, but none of them knew what he was really like. He wouldn’t be able to do this if it was going to stay this way, which it probably was.

But he was scared too. Scared because suddenly, feelings he’d managed to control and suppress back in his early high school years were showing their ugly heads again. Why were they showing up now? He thought he’d locked that anger deep inside with a cage strong enough to contain King Kong or the Hulk. This wasn’t good. As much as he hated Levi and this stupidly large mansion, he didn’t want them to have to deal with one of his rampages. Hell, Eren didn’t want to deal with one of his rampages. Especially not with his friends so far away and unable to help.

And finally, he wanted to sleep. He really did. Sleep sounded like the best thing in the world right now, but that ever present feeling of his kept him alert and the walls that like to close in while Eren wasn’t looking kept him from closing his eyes.

So Eren cried instead.

On the other side of the hall, Levi braced himself against his door, trying to comprehend what he’d just seen.

It wasn’t what he was used to. Eren’s voice at the end wasn’t the same kind of anger he’d seen from the boy before. This one seemed stronger and was mixed with something else…

What was Eren scared of? Why was he so angry? He’d never gotten that angry with Levi before, even when Levi was pressing him on his behavior. Hell, the last time Levi brought up Eren’s behavior, the boy didn’t even get angry. Not even a hint of anger. What was going on?
He would have these psychotic episodes every now and then where he was completely blinded by rage...

Do you think it might have had something to do with the arranged marriage?

It’s possible…

Levi shook the thoughts from his head.

They said he got help for it, right? And lately he’d been happier, right? But, then again… If it had anything to do with the marriage, it’s highly possible that Eren could relapse since the marriage was so much more real now. It was just an idea before, but now he’s actually met his fiancé and is currently living in his house…

Levi sighed. There was no reason for him to jump to conclusions like that. It was an extreme that was unlikely to happen again.

But… Levi kept it in mind, just in case.
There was a thunderstorm that night. Sometime around three, but Eren didn’t actually check. He just knew it was some time in the early morning hours. Besides, thunderstorms always happened around 3 and 5 in both the morning and afternoon. Rarely at any other time of the day or night, and never when you need it to symbolize anything that’s happening in your life. Especially when you need it to symbolize anything that’s happening in your life.

Movies and books always use thunderstorms as these symbolic tools to make their stories more intense. In fantasy, the thunderstorm always show up right at the start of the fight, the thunder and lightning accentuating the intensity of the battle. Or it would be pouring rain as the main couple kisses romantically under the cascade of symbolic water. But in reality, they always managed to just miss whatever event would have been perfect for it.

But when the thunderstorm gave way a constant pitter pattering of soft rain, that’s when Eren realized that today was going to suck.

If it was going to rain all day, then that meant Eren would be stuck in this stupid mansion for the rest of the day. Meaning he had very few places to hide from Levi. And with no friends to keep him busy, he’d have even less of a reason to avoid Levi.

At least the thunderstorm had inspired him to write some more. While he still didn’t have an actually story to write, he had plenty of scenes that could probably be used once he actually had a plot. And so, he wrote, his new notebook slowly filling up page by page. The pages were crinkled, stiff, and were indented from not only the words written on the page, but from the words written on the page before it as well. The signs of a well-used notebook. And the writing made the time fly by much faster.

Without a computer or a television to use (sure he could use one of the two flat screens downstairs, but he didn’t want to have to explain himself if someone came down for a midnight snack) the idea of not sleeping was suddenly very unappealing. Simply because it was far too boring.

But with his inspiration, Eren wrote into the later hours of the morning. He wrote until he had squeezed out every last drop of inspiration he had. He wrote until his legs had fallen asleep at least three different times from sitting on the floor, unmoving. And he wrote until the sun started its journey across the sky and he could see Carlton’s fancy Mercedes Benz drive off into the sunrise.

And Eren could no longer write.
Holy shit did his hand hurt. Hours of holding a pencil and writing with it hurt. Eren was sure his hand would be cramping for the rest of the day. And his head… Oh, man he had a terrible headache now.

Note to self: don’t write for hours and hours on end on one inspiration.

Eren groaned, stretching his stiff muscles and made to get up. Every part of his body hurt from sitting like that for so long. Especially his ass. Shower… A shower sounded wonderful at this point in time. He stumbled over to the bathroom. If he remembered correctly, there was not only a bathtub, but a shower as well. Why they couldn’t just combine the two like normal households, Eren didn’t know.

Stupid rich bastards.

He turned on the hot water and started to undress. It was only after he’d shed the last of his clothing that Eren realized that he had turned on the sink instead of the shower. And even so, it took him a full minute to properly understand what he’d just done.

“Shit…” he swore, turning off the sink and then finally turning on the shower. He double checked this time.

The bigger problem, though, was that the sleep deprivation was becoming worse. Eren had never stayed up this long before. He couldn’t even remember the last time he’d slept. Looks like he’d need extra coffee today if he had to appear like he was actually getting sleep. The extra-long shower helped though. Eren switched back and forth throughout the shower between hot and cold. The hot water relaxed his aching muscles, and the cold water shocked him awake so he wasn’t as disoriented. He’d still need buckets of coffee though.

But regardless of how great the shower had helped, he couldn’t continue to sit on the floor like that.

He’d need a pillow pile or something.

Eren dried himself off (with the surprisingly soft towels, like really soft towels) and pulled on some clothes from his suitcase as he thought about it.

There were certainly enough pillows on his bed. Couple that with the pillows from the chair and couch (which for some reason his room needed) and he’d have plenty. So that’s what he did. He grabbed all of the pillows in the room and made a pillow throne on the floor at the foot of the bed that he hadn’t rested on since his first night here. The pillows were strategically placed so that there were armrests and the best pillows were part of the seat and back for optimal comfort. He had to start over a couple of times. The fluffy comforter on the bed was thrown over the pillows as a sort of glue to keep them all together, and so he wouldn’t have to tear it apart because a pencil might have slipped between two pillows.

But, when Eren flopped down on to the throne, he realized there was something missing. Sure the pillows were squishy and comfortable, but it still wasn’t as comfortable as it could be.

Oh he was going to look like an idiot. But he didn’t care.

Eren dashed into the bathroom and grabbed as many towels as were there, laying them over the pillows and comforter. He sat down again, this time sighing in bliss. Perfect. Those towels had done the trick. But…

Now he was bored again. Eren checked the time on his phone.
Well, at least the pillow throne and extra-long shower had killed plenty of time. But now what? Well, he supposed now would be a good time to probably get some coffee. Figuring out how to make it would take at least half an hour, if not more.

So off he went, in search of a coffee machine!

Eren actually hadn’t really been in the kitchen yet, since he wasn’t really paying attention during the tour, and it was a shock when he went in.

Just like the rest of the house, the kitchen was far too big with an island in the middle. He didn’t even know what half of the equipment in there was called, let alone where a coffee machine was. He knew the oven and stove, though it looked like no oven or stove he’d ever seen. There was also a big flat… thing… It was like one of those things you’d find at a Japanese restaurant where they cooked in front of you. There was also a deep fryer and another oven (?) thing and… another oven? Okay, was it just Eren or was almost every piece of equipment in this damn kitchen a fucking oven?

“Can’a help you?”

Eren jumped, startled by one of the two cooks who were in the kitchen. He was tall with blond hair and a bit of scruff on his chin and he was holding a very large knife. And he had a very tall hat. Eren may not know much about cooking or… well… anything about cooking, but he did know that the tall hat meant he was in charge.

“U-um… I was just looking for… uh… coffee?” The man just stared at Eren for a moment before throwing his head back in laughter. Eren didn’t know what was so funny, but the good aura that the man gave off kind of made him want to join in. As weird as he seemed, Eren liked this man. He guessed part of it had something to do with his slight accent, whatever it was.

“Ah, oh, I’m sorry, kid,” the man sputtered out after he’d calmed down. “You just looked like you were gonna piss yourself out of fear. I know’a have a knife, but I’m not too keen on killin’ people.” Eren blushed bright red. He didn’t even realized he’d looked like that. “So you said you wanted coffee right? I gotta fresh batch right here if you like. There’s even a clean mug right next to it!” The man gestured to what was a very obvious, bright red coffee machine on the island. How’d he managed to miss that among all the grey, stainless steel?

“Thanks,” Eren said, pouring himself a cup in the clean mug and adding as much sugar as the liquid could hold. “What are you guys doing?” He couldn’t help but ask.

“We’re in the process of making lunch right now. Paninis.” The man smiled brightly. Paninis?

“Paninis?”

“You know, grilled sandwiches.” Eren still wasn’t following.

“… Like grilled cheese?” If it was just grilled cheeses then why call it a panini? The man threw his head back again and laughed.

“Hahah, a couple more ingredients then that. I’m Hannes, by the way,” Hannes introduced. “Chef Hannes if you will. I didn’t earn my culinary degree only for people to refer to me as Cook. And that fat ass over there is Hugo. Chef Hugo.” Chef Hugo waved a hand, but didn’t turn around from his work. “You’re Levi’s fiancé, right? Eren?” Chef Hannes asked, as he returned to his work of cutting stuff, probably stuff for lunch.
Eren nodded, shocked. “You know me?”

“Well’a don’t know you, per say, but me and some of the other workers here have seen you, and let me tell you, your fights are the highlight of our days!” Chef Hannes laughed his head back again.

“Wait, wait. You know about our fights?”

“Everyone knows about your fights, boy,” Chef Hugo chimed in, laughing alongside Chef Hannes, though not as enthusiastic as his co-worker. “The servants and maids know everything that goes in this place. That’s cuz no one ever pays enough attention to them to realize that they’re there. That first fight you two hand? About Levi’s room? Yeah, there was a maid at the other end of the hall who’d just finished cleaning the study.”

“Oh! And then there was a gardener who overheard your fight while you were in the tree.”

“And just yesterday, Rico got to hear you two fight it out at lunch. I could only hear bits and pieces though, cuz the fan was so loud and these walls are thick as fuck.”

Eren only blushed harder and hid it behind his cup of coffee. Were they really that obvious? But Carlton hadn’t noticed yet, and he was actually paying attention to them. Did the servants just not tell him about these things?

“You guys are great, man, but’a wouldn’t advise keeping it up though,” Chef Hannes cautioned. “That boy can get quite the temper when properly pissed off. So whatever beef you may have with him, you’d better resolve it soon.”

“I don’t have a beef with him,” Eren grumbled into his coffee. “He’s just an asshole.”

“You aren’t a peachy tree to him, either, you know,” Chef Hannes said pointedly. “But yeah, he is an asshole. That’s just part of his personality.”

“His piss poor personality,” Chef Hugo joked quietly. Eren recognized it as one of the things he’d said to Levi at some point and his face turned red again. So they really did know about all his fights with Levi. And apparently they made jokes about it. Great.

“Levi does not come off as the nicest person around, but that’s only because he’s frank about everything.” Chef Hannes explained. “He doesn’t like to sugar coat anything. Mix that with his love of swearing and other family inappropriate words and that’s Levi for you. So it basically goes without saying that often times people’s first impression of him is that he’s rude and just wants to put everyone down, but really, he’s a pretty okay guy.” This conversation was going where Eren didn’t want it to go. It was time to get out of the kitchen now.

“Okay, well, thanks for the coffee. And it was nice meeting you.” Eren’s tone probably gave away the fact that he didn’t truly believe Hannes, but he didn’t care right now. He just wanted out of this conversation. So he refilled his mug and left the kitchen as quickly as he could. He liked talking to the chefs, he really did. He just didn’t want to talk about Levi like that.

The only problem now was that Eren didn’t have anything to do again. Looking through the nearest window, he could see that the rain was still falling so outside was still out of the question. Maybe TV? Or…

Eren walked into the party room then, and memories of sliding on the floor in his socks came back. That was something to do. Biting his lip, he looked around for any servants, remembering what Hugo had said. When he found no one, Eren set his mug on the ground near the wall so no one would knock into it and took his shoes off.
Taking a few tentative steps, Eren remembered just how slippery the floor was in only socks. It was like ice skating for the first time, only there was a bit more friction with marble than ice. Images of a guy in a loose button down shirt, boxers, and socks came to mind as Eren slid and twirled across the party room, coming close to falling more than a couple times. It was from some movie, he knew that, but which movie was the real question. Eren couldn’t remember.

While he was sliding, Eren thought about what Hannes had said. In all honesty, it made sense. It was probably very true that Levi wasn’t actually insulting him 24/7, but there was an exception to every rule. The larger part of his mind, the one filled with delusions from sleep deprivation and anger which only grew the less he slept that Eren wasn’t all that aware of, was certain that at least most of Levi’s comments were meant as insults. Because, really, they were always fighting. Levi probably had a terrible opinion of him and wanted to insult him all the time.

After one fairly impressive slide, Eren turned around to go again only to meet the eyes of the very man he’d been thinking about. Startled, Eren lost his footing and slipped comically with his feet over his head to fall on his ass. He laid down from the pain. Man, he’d just gotten feeling back there too.

“An incredibly hysterical fall for an incredibly impressive slide. Fitting.” The bastard was laughing at him. Sure he wasn’t outright laughing but Eren was sure that Levi was cracking up on the inside.

“Shut up.” Eren glared at the ceiling until an outstretched hand came into view. Then he glared at that.

“Here, let me help you up.” He ignored Levi and turned away from the hand, getting up on his own and walking towards his shoes and coffee as quickly as he could just to get away from Levi. “Or not,” Levi sighed dejectedly. “It’s time for lunch.” And he left. He’d probably given up on Eren at that point, which was fine with Eren.

Wait, lunch?

Eren check his phone, and sure enough it was noon. It was actually five minutes past noon which was weird. Levi usually like to be on time or five minutes early for lunch. Just how long had Levi been there watching him?

Levi and lunch were already at the table when Eren got there. The paninis and all. When he sat down, he caught sight of Hannes, Hugo, and what he guessed was probably Rico, the girl who’d served them yesterday, peeking out from behind the door to the kitchen behind Levi. Dear God, they were so obvious! How’d he not see them before?! Or maybe they were just paying extra close attention today. They caught his gaze and Hannes and Hugo started to silently gesture to Levi, telling him to start talking to Levi. He felt like he was in some comedy TV show.

“Just ignore them. They’ll get bored and go away soon enough,” Levi informed emotionlessly. Hannes and Hugo smiled sheepishly while Rico sigh and face palmed at her two idiot companions. Looks like Levi was either more aware of the servant then most, or Hannes, Hugo, and Rico were just too obvious this time.

Just like Levi had said, soon enough the three of them left the doorway. They still had jobs to do after all. But, despite all of their efforts, lunch had been fairly quiet. Eren didn’t want to talk to Levi, he never wanted to talk to Levi actually, and Levi apparently had given up enough on Eren at that point that he didn’t seem to find a purpose in trying to get Eren to talk.

That is until the end of lunch, where Eren noticed Levi grimacing at him just like he had yesterday. Only today, Eren wasn’t going to let it go.
“What?” he questioned, demandingly.

“You eat like a fucking pig. It’s fucking gross.” Eren sent a glare at Levi.

“Oh, I’m so sorry, Princess. It was a messy sandwich, alright?” Levi shook his head.

“You eat like a fucking pig all the time. Don’t blame the sandwich for your terrible table manners.”

“And you’re only just now commenting on it?”

“Well I was trying to be polite by not bringing it up. You were the one who asked. I was only answering your question.”

“Did you think I wasn’t going to ask when you kept making those faces at me?”

“I wasn’t trying to coerce you into asking, that was just my natural reaction to seeing what a slob you are.”

Eren continued to glare at Levi, but said nothing. He had nothing to say back to that, and it looked like Levi was done with the conversation as well. Eren promised himself that he’d get Levi back the next time they fought. He stored his anger inside for later.

After lunch, Eren tried desperately to avoid Levi as much as possible, and in the beginning, it worked. But after the sourness of their last fight had worn off, Levi tried persistently to try and spend some time with Eren. Where ever Eren went, eventually Levi would show up with some kind of comment and Eren would leave right after, holding in any anger or comeback.

In the library: “I didn’t know you could read, let alone that you liked it.”

In the party room: “Back to falling on your ass?”

In the music room: “I didn’t think brats enjoyed classical music. Or did you just get lost?”

In the dining room: “Lunch is over you know.”

Considering hanging out in the kitchen: “Is this why you were hanging out in the dining room? Because you’re still hungry? You eat like a pig and now you’re acting like one.”

Damn it! Didn’t Levi know that Eren was avoiding him for his own good? Hannes had told him to stop fighting with Levi and the only way Eren knew how that was going to happen was if they just avoided each other like the plague. But, no. Levi wanted to destroy that plan by trying to talk to Eren and spend time together! Prick.

Now Eren was in the family room, watching something on TV. He didn’t know what, as he wasn’t really paying attention to it, but so far he’d watched one episode of whatever it was and Levi still hadn’t come to bother him. Did he give up?

The answer to that question was a no, but this time when Levi showed up, he didn’t say anything. Instead, he sat down in the seat farthest from Eren and started watching TV.

This…

This might actually be okay.

Sure it was awkward and uncomfortable, but at least they weren’t talking.
“Hey!”

Eren was startled once again that day as Levi yelled at him.

“What?!” he yelled back.

“About time, damn it,” Levi huffed. “You were zoned out big time. I was calling you for fucking 5 minutes.”

“Well, what do you want?” Eren questioned, annoyed.

“Pass me the remote. I fucking hate this show and you’re not even watching it.”

Oh how Eren wanted to retort, but he wouldn’t let himself start a fight. He’d been doing so well today. So Eren threw the remote at Levi a little too harshly instead. He kind of hoped that Levi would yell at him for it so he’d have an excuse to lash out at Levi, but he didn’t. Eren, mildly disappointed, went back to staring blankly at the screen.

Dinner wasn’t much better. Only this time Carlton kept asking questions. Levi had taken the hint, after a really long time, of course, but he’d gotten it nonetheless, and kept his mouth shut. Eren had to hold back immensely with Carlton, answering with short, one worded answers, because Carlton didn’t deserve his anger. Carlton had done nothing wrong. He was just a bystander in this shoot off between Eren and Levi.

“It’s finally stopped raining, you know,” Carlton talked, still oblivious to the tension in the air. “It’s been raining all day so it’s nice to give the ground a break, no?” He laughed, and Eren perked up a bit.

It wasn’t raining anymore? He could go outside! Sure it was going to be wet and cold and dark, but anything was better than being stuck watching mindless TV with Levi and having Carlton bombard him with questions while feeling like he was going to explode any second. Hell, maybe he’d even be able to take a nap outside in the gazebo. He didn’t get the feeling of suffocation and closing walls while he was outside so he might be able to sleep. He could sleep! Why didn’t he think of this before?!

Wasting no time after dinner, Eren raced outside as soon as he could.

The ground was soft and squishy with the overabundance of water, and Eren lost himself in the feeling. He wasn’t sure why, it was just interesting. The farther he walked, the less of his surroundings he noticed. He barely even noticed when he ran into his tree. The ground surrounding the base of the tree, despite having plenty of grass, was unbelievably thick and liquid like with mud.

This wasn’t the gazebo…

Eren couldn’t find it in him to care anymore, so he climbed the tree without a second thought. The bark was wet and slippery, making it a lot harder to climb up. So were the branches. If Eren had known he’d be sitting in his tree rather than the gazebo, he would’ve brought a towel. But that wasn’t the only flaw in his disoriented plan. The danger of falling kept Eren from fully falling asleep. It was like constantly being splashed with water just as soon as the lulls of sleep have you in their grasp. But Eren was far too out of it to consider another option.

Eren didn’t come back inside for hours. Four hours actually. It was cold, wet, and very, very dark outside. But still, Eren refused to come back inside until the clock neared 11, and it was only because it had become too cold to sit outside comfortably in only a jacket. As short as it felt, the
trip outside was much needed despite not being able to sleep like he’d hoped.

Eren often thought that he wouldn’t be able to last much longer here, but this time when he thought it, he had more reason to back it up. Much scarier reasons than before. The strangled feelings he got from the house, the feelings of anger reminiscent of his feelings from early high school mixed with the anger from Levi’s snide comments from today, and his overwhelming exhaustion were building up and fast. As much as he tried to bottle them, they kept fighting back, cracking the glass confines they resided in.

He was going to break soon.

When Eren leapt down from his branch the mud at the bottom sloshed against his feet. The force of the jump landed him a good two inches in, the mud sucking him into the ground. It took effort to pull his feet out of the mud, and when he finally managed it, he shoes were practically dripping with mud.

He grimaced at the mess and headed back to the mansion. He tried wiping his shoes off on the grass on the way back, but it did little. It actually sort of made it worse. Now, instead of just mud, there was mud and grass pieces. God this sucked. Oh well, he’d just clean them when he got back inside.

Eren became distracted, though, as he walked. Just like he had when he was walking out to the tree. He could barely remember the walk there. He couldn’t even remember walking into the house. What he did remember, though, was what he heard when he walked inside.

“What the hell are you doing?” Oh, great… Levi.

Levi? Was he inside already?

Looking around he found that he was standing in the middle of the party room, a very pissed off Levi glaring at him like he was some kind of scum from the lowest shit hole you could find. Now the question was… What was he doing? Okay, time to retrace his steps. He was walking outside… in the mud… and grass… and he was going to take his shoes off…

Eren paled and was almost too scared to turn around. But he did anyway. Forcing his body to turn around, he found the source of all the anger now showing on Levi right now.

Right behind him was a long, ugly trail of mud and grass leading from him all the way to the door… And considering just how big the party room was and the fact the Eren had made it to the center of the room that was a long line…

“Uh…” Eren couldn’t say anything else. What was he supposed to say?

“‘Uh’? Really? You’re so fucking articulate.” Levi’s voice was so cold, if Eren looked hard enough he’d probably be able to see Levi’s breath. “You cannot seriously be shitting me right now! Did it ever cross your puny, incompetent brain to maybe, oh, I don’t know, take off your fucking shoes?! Are you fucking kidding me?! There’s mud fucking everywhere!”

‘I’ll smear it on your face if you don’t’- NO! Don’t think that! Don’t even think anything like that! No matter how exhausted he was, Eren couldn’t let himself be taken over by the anger and exhaustion. He could not fight with Levi. He couldn’t!

Eren tried tuned out Levi but it didn’t work. He was coming dangerously close to snapping. That glass bottle couldn’t hold forever, and now just might be its last night.
“Are you trying to fucking piss me off?! Cuz guess what! It’s fucking working! But you wanna know what, shitty fucking brat? Nothing’s changed! You’re still stuck in the house for the week, you’re still fucking getting married to me, and no matter how big of a temper tantrum you throw, you’re still not getting out of it!”

He needed Levi to stop talking. He needed Levi to let it go and leave him alone now or else the shards of glass would fly everywhere.

Eren covered his face with his hands. “Go away… Please…” he whimpered. “Leave me alone…”

His plea fell on deaf ears.

“Go away? What, is that a sore topic for you? No. No, you can’t whine you’re way out of this one! You don’t get to play that card two times in a row just because you don’t like what I’m saying! You need to fucking suck it up and get over it!”

The bottle broke.

“SHUT UP!!!” Eren tore his hands away from his face, glaring ferociously at Levi. His voice scratched at his throat from the raw emotion. “JUST SHUT THE FUCK UP!!! You have absolutely NO idea what you’re talking about! You don’t understand anything! You have no right to talk about things you don’t understand!”

“Well, it’s not my fucking fault! You get mad because I don’t understand but then you refuse to tell me anything!”

“I don’t want to tell you anything! I don’t want you to know anything about me! I fucking hate you!”

“You are such a goddamn idiot! No, you’re worse than an idiot! You must be full blown retarded!”

“And you… You have been nothing short of a complete and total shitwad of a person! You have been nothing but rude and insulting and a fucking asshole to me since I came here!”

“Oh. Oh, I’VE been rude and insulting and an asshole! You’re full of shit, you know that?! You wanna see a true shitwad? Go look in the fucking mirror! I have tried to fucking make this work! I’ve fucking tried to talk to you to make this fucking work cuz we don’t get out of this shitty situation! You’re the one who’s started every fucking fight we’ve had! You’re the one who’s shut everyone off here! And you wanna know what? I think the only reason is because you have to get married! It doesn’t have anything to do with me or with my dad or with anything! You’re just so fucking pissed that you have to follow orders so you think taking it out on everyone around you will somehow make it better!”

“You don’t fucking know anything! Stop acting like you do! You have no idea what you’re talking about! You keep using this fucking marriage as some fucking excuse to label my anger but you know nothing about me! You’re horrible! You’re terrible! I hate being around you! I can’t see how anyone would like some fucked up shit like you! So, you know what? You can shove that marriage agreement right up your ass for all I care! You are nothing more than a midget with a cleaning disorder and I’ll be damned if I have to spend the rest of my life being within a hundred fucking miles of a freak like you!” Eren spat the words out like molten lava dripping from his mouth, and there was a long pause as they burned through the air.

The phrase “if looks could kill” had nothing on Levi right now. He was far past being described by mere words and phrases.
“Leave.” Eren opened his mouth to say something else but stopped with one look from Levi. “No. Leave, now.”

Anger demanded that he stay and fight.

Self-preservation forced him to leave.

Eren, shoes still muddy, pushed past Levi in one last act of defiance and stomped upstairs.

A stunned Carlton, who’d heard the fighting and had come to investigate, was rooted to the ground just inside the entrance to the room. “Wh... What happened?” His voice was a big indicator to the fact that Carlton really didn’t want to ask for fear of Levi’s reaction. It had been too long since he’d seen his son show such raw emotion.

“I won’t do it,” Levi seethed, absolutely livid, as soon as the slam of a door had been heard. “I can’t do it. There’s no way in this world, or the next, that I’ll be able to marry that... that...” Levi struggled to find a word strong enough and demeaning enough to properly describe Eren. None he thought of were bad enough. “He can burn in hell. Satan himself can drag him down there kicking and screaming, I don’t care. He needs to leave. He can’t stay here any longer. I won’t stand for it. If I have to stand seeing him for one more day one of us is going to be severely hurt. And I’m not going to let it be me.” Each sentence was spoken with ice. The very air around Levi had practically frosted over with the intensity of the chill in his words.

Eren burned with fire.

But Levi pierced with ice.

And Carlton feared the worst.

There was a veil of red, Eren would later remember, that was thrown over his eyes and over any part of his mind that might have been coherent. It had been laced in every word he spoke. It had released copious amounts of adrenaline into his system. It wanted nothing more than to fight.

And it disappeared at the sound of his slamming door.

Eren broke. Without the veil of anger, his tirade shredded away to nothing, leaving nothing but carnage and ruin behind.

He gasped and collapsed to the floor, his legs too weak to support him anymore. His heart thrashed wildly and he hyperventilated, gasping with every weak breath. Tears openly cascaded down his face, leaving behind puffy eyes and streaked cheeks. Panic coursed through his body like an epidemic.

The anger was gone. Eren couldn’t feel it anymore after that outburst. The adrenaline shocked his system into complete alertness, though he knew it was only temporary. As coherent thought flowed through him, the full realization of what had just happened slammed into him, threatening to crush every bone in his body.

The words spoken.

The words yelled.
The words laced with venom and the intent to tear the other apart.

He couldn’t hold it back. Eren sobbed loudly, tearing at his hair and curling in on himself, fueled by feelings of shame, regret, and fear.

Oh God, what had he done?
Hehehe... hey guys... how's it going...? Alright, so I've got some IMPORTANT things to say here. Three to be exact.

1- This chapter officially ENDS the chapter a day week. So DON'T expect chapter 9 to be up tomorrow. Now this story has the same number of chapters on both FF.NET and AO3, I will be updating them together.

2- Speaking of not updating... There is a VEEEEEEEERY HIGH CHANCE that I will NOT update next Monday either. I will be driving AAAAAALL day that day so I probably won't have time. So you'll have to wait two weeks for chapter 9 most likely. There's a possibility that I may update super late next Monday, but don't get your hopes up.

3- And finally, I've gotten some comments about Levi not actually giving Eren a chance despite him saying so... I'm hoping that this chapter will clear things up (so for those who asked, if your wondering why I didn't respond to you, this is why) but if you still have questions or concerns afterwards PLEASE tell me :D

Seriously though, if you're still confused or just want to talk, you can ask me on tumblr, PM me on FF.NET, or comment down below.

And... that's all I have to say for this chapter. So please! Enjoy this semi fluffy chapter :D

For a good half hour, Eren could do nothing but sob pathetically on the floor.

Why did his anger have to flare up then?

Why did he have to be too exhausted to think rationally?

Why did he have to be so fucking stupid?

Why?

Why?!

WHY?!

The only relieving thing about the fight was that Eren hadn’t gotten physical in his rage. The worst part, in regards to that though, was that now Eren’s hands were incredibly sore. Crescent moons that were nearly dripping blood covered his palms from clenching his fists so hard. But biting through the pain, Eren knew that he was lucky. If he’d gone further, those fists might have been bleeding in other places… like his knuckles.

Even so…
The fight played over and over in Eren’s head in excruciatingly brutal detail. Every word said and how it was said. He hadn’t meant to say any of those things to Levi, really he hadn’t. As much as he hated being here and as much as he disliked Levi, he really didn’t want to say things like that to him. The words he’d thrown at Levi were far too harsh, and he couldn’t take them back no matter how much he wished he could. He didn’t think Levi was a freak or a midget with a cleaning disorder… He didn’t. He really, truly didn’t.

But Levi had been pretty harsh too… He said a lot of awful things to Eren… He always said awful things to Eren…

…it basically goes without saying that often times people’s first impression of him is that he’s rude and just wants to put everyone down…

But that wasn’t true for Eren! Levi was actually insulting him and making him feel like shit! Everything he said was some way to try and hurt Eren with words! He always shot jabs at Eren whenever he could! Even if he tried to keep it hidden from Carlton, there would still be times where he would let out subtle, backhanded comments to Eren!

…but that’s only because he’s frank about everything. He doesn’t like to sugar coat anything. Mix that with his love of swearing and other family inappropriate words…

It couldn’t be true! Eren wasn’t wrong about this! He was sure of it! Levi legitimately wanted Eren to suffer! Just because he doesn’t sugar coat things doesn’t mean that he never threw insults! He was always fighting with Eren and never once tried to change that!

I have tried to fucking make this work!

It wasn’t true!!!

You’re the one who’s shut everyone off here!

It wasn’t true!

You’re the one who’s started every fucking fight we’ve had!

It…

It couldn’t be true…

Could it?

Eren calmed down enough, sniffing and wiping at his eyes with his hands. He thought back to his fights with Levi.

The first one: the one about Levi’s bedroom. Well… Yeah, okay, Eren could take the blame for that one. Who wouldn’t get upset about someone trying to sneak into your room? Plus he just kept egging him on with that cocky “fiancé” shit. So that was definitely Eren… But he still believed that Levi overreacted…

The second one: that one was out by the car right? That was Levi! He was sure of it! Levi had just come out and expected him to tell him all of his worries. No, fuck that shit. And he asked in a really rude way! But… that’s just part of his personality right? So of course it would seem rude… And what if he was actually worried for Eren then…? … Let’s just say that one’s a draw.

The third one: that’s the one that the gardener overheard… the one in the tree… Once again Levi
had been rude… after Eren had blatantly ignored him… and Levi was only trying to get him to follow the rules… which Eren had blatantly ignored… And then after that, when Levi asked him to dinner they actually had a semi-decent conversation. And Levi had once again tried to talk to Eren and figure out what was wrong.

Eren thought more and more of the events that had taken place over the course of the few short days he’d been here. Every interaction he and Levi had. Every fight. Every conversation that somehow hadn’t turned into a fight. And it wasn’t looking good. Eren clutched his head from all of the thinking. The truth was forcing its way through and Eren could do nothing but pathetically bat at it while sobbing even more.

Because if that was true, if Levi had almost never instigated a fight, then why had they always been fighting? Levi couldn’t be right about that too, could he? He wasn’t actually upset only because of the marriage, right? It’s not like Levi had nothing to do with it, right? He wouldn’t do the same thing if it had been someone else, right?

It couldn’t be true.

It just couldn’t!

Levi was an asshole!

Levi hated him!

Levi…

He…

He was right…

And it hurt to admit that. It really did. Levi was fucking right. About fucking everything.

Eren had been so obsessed with the idea of hating the marriage that he couldn’t accept that it could be anything but the worst possible thing that could ever happen. He was so convinced that this arrangement was going to be horrible to the point where he unconsciously blocked out anything that didn’t fit with his image of what it was going to be. So when Levi had tried to be civil, and even nice, Eren could only see what he thought he should be seeing.

Levi understood him better than he understood himself. Eren should have known that from last night. And he sobbed for another 10 minutes, because being wrong sucked. Being wrong for days on end sucked. And finding out you were wrong for so long sucked the worst.

Eren knew what he had to do now. It was going to be even worse than admitting he had been wrong. It was going to be a hell of a lot more dangerous too. It was probably going to take more courage, strength, and charisma than Eren actually had to use.

He had to apologize to Levi.

It took another 10 minutes for Eren to find his courage among the broken pieces of himself.

Before going back downstairs where Levi may or may not be, Eren decided that it was probably best if he took off his shoes now. Between the fighting and crying, Eren had forgotten about his
muddy shoes. He also ended up changing pants since the mud from his shoes, which were still sort of wet, had smeared all over his pants. He also washed his face off a bit. While it only helped a little with his red, tear stained cheeks and puffy eyes, at least he looked like less of a hot mess.

As Eren cautiously left his room, he side stepped the now drying mud tracks in the carpet and winced. His mother had always yelled at him for tracking mud into the house and specifically the carpet because it was so hard to get out. He just hoped the maids knew how to clean mud easily…

Eren headed to the scene of the crime. It was probably unlikely that Levi would be hanging around such a mess, especially for 40 minutes. But, as the party room came into view, there Levi was, facing away from Eren and scrubbing frantically at the floor on his hands and knees. The mud on the marble floor all the way from the door to the stairs had been scraped up and now Levi was cleaning up the last remains of mud via washcloth and what looked like simple soapy water. He had only just started, though.

Eren forced his beating heart to slow down, or at least tried, and resisted the urge to bite his thumb. It would do no good to be nervous about this. He had to do it no matter what. He had to apologize for what he’d done. The thought didn’t exactly make him feel better, but it did strengthen his conviction. And good thing too, otherwise Eren wasn’t sure how he’d have been able to move forward and not run back to his room with his tail between his legs.

He bit his lip and wrung his hands together, trying to calm himself down still. His steps were tentative and wary, careful not to startle or invoke any more negative emotions, like rage, from Levi, but they were just loud enough so that when Eren was close enough, Levi noticed.

“I don’t want to see your face right now. Leave me alone,” Levi forced out, not even glancing in Eren’s general direction. Eren couldn’t place the emotion behind Levi’s voice, but as far as he could tell, it wasn’t rage or anger. It just sounded strained. Eren tried to speak, but the words only piled up right in the back of his throat, creating an uncomfortable lump he could feel. But Levi wasn’t feeling particularly patient. “Oi, I said leav-”

“I’m sorry!” Eren blurted, the clump of words finally tumbling out. Levi still didn’t look up, but he stopped scrubbing the floors and his grip on the washcloth tightened. Eren continued, although this time a lot more delicate and apologetic. “I’m sorry for all of the things I said to you. Especially what I said today… That was… really uncalled for.” He took in a shaky breath. “And you were right. I was only mad about the whole… marriage thing. And I was taking it out on you and everyone around me, and that wasn’t fair of me. No one deserved that… You didn’t deserve that. And… I’m sorry…”

For several seconds, neither of them moved. Levi was so still that Eren almost thought he’d transformed into a statue. Finally, Levi let out a long sigh.

“Alright.” Alright? That’s all he got?

“Alright? That’s it? Alright? No!” Courage surged through Eren and he daringly crossed over the line of dried mud and placed himself in front of Levi. Levi finally looked up at Eren, confused but very annoyed. “No, you can’t just say al-fucking-right to me like that! That’s not fair!”

“What exactly do you want me to say?”

“I don’t know!” Eren yelled, cutting off whatever Levi was going to say next. “Yell at me! Cuss me out! Punch me in the fucking face! Do something! I feel fucking shitty about this!”

“If you think I’ve forgiven you-!”
“I don’t know if you have!! You haven’t said anything about forgiving me!! You haven’t told me anything!!”

“Oh, well then join the fucking club.” Eren’s stomach dropped with guilt. Levi continued when Eren didn’t respond right away. “I don’t want to yell at you Eren,” he informed, softer than before. “I’m fucking tired of fighting with you. It’s solving nothing.”

Eren kneeled down in front of Levi, staring straight into his eyes. “Then let me help. Let me help clean this up.”

“Oh yeah, now you offer. Now that all the hard work has been done…” Eren could hear the sarcasm, but now that his mind wasn’t so clouded with anger it was easy to tell that there was no real malicious intent within the words. Now Eren felt even worse because it was so obvious. Especially after hearing what that voice sounded like when there was real malice in it.

“Well, you’re not done yet. Besides, you shouldn’t have to clean it up at all. It’s my mess. I should clean it up. Actually, why don’t just let me clean up the rest?” It wouldn’t be much, but that would help him make it up to Levi.

“Yeah, right,” Levi scoffed. “You’ll probably just fuck it up.” Eren actually snickered at that, shocking both of them in the process. But Eren went along with it.

“Yeah, probably.” After all, domestic housework was never Eren’s strong point. Ever. “But how will I ever learn if I don’t practice?”

Levi scrutinized Eren through confused, narrowed eyes. He looked at Eren like one would a difficult puzzle they were trying to solve. Then, he jerked his head in the direction of the stairs. “Go get a rag.”

It would probably be the only time in Eren’s life that he would squeal with joy at the thought of cleaning. Granted, the only reason he was so happy was because Levi didn’t kick him out like Eren thought that he would.

Since Eren didn’t actually know where a linen closet might be, he went straight to his bathroom. There were sure to be washcloths there. By the time he’d found a washcloth and made it back to the party room Levi had already moved a couple more feet. He worked quickly.

“Work on the stairs and we’ll meet up in the middle,” Levi ordered as Eren dunked his washcloth in the sudsy water. At least that’s what it looked like.

“What is this?” Eren asked out of curiosity, heading towards the stairs.

“It’s just soap and water. It won’t burn your hands, don’t worry.” Eren nodded, accepting the answer and got to work on the stairs. A comfortable silence befell them as they worked, Eren going back over a couple of times for more soapy water, but didn’t last too long. “So…” Eren began once they were closer so they didn’t have to shout. “Why are you even cleaning this up? Don’t the maids do that?”

“None of the servants live here, so none of them stay the night. They were all gone and at home with their families by the time you tromped through here with your filthy shoes. And I certainly wasn’t going to leave this big of a mess to just sit here overnight. This isn’t a pigsty,” Levi scoffed, keeping his eyes trained on his work. But even so, he couldn’t help but ask, “Why were you even walking through the house with muddy shoes anyway?”

“Well…” Eren paused, thinking. He could be honest without telling the whole truth right? “To be
honest, I didn’t even realize that I was inside until you yelled at me… I kind of zoned out there… Sorry…”

“Yeah, no kidding.”

“You clean really fast,” Eren commented, mesmerized by how they were almost done. Levi was already a few feet away from him.

“I’ve cleaned a lot. You get good at it after a while.”

“So it’s true? You really do like to clean?”

“It’s calming for me.” Levi stopped to give Eren a pointed glare. “Most of the time, anyway.”

There was going to be nothing left of Eren but guilt by the end of this conversation, Eren just knew it. “Sorry… So… Why did you wait so long to clean it up?”

“It’s better to clean up mud after it’s dried. Easier too.” Levi pushed the bucket to Eren. “Dump that out and fill it back up with water. And give me your washcloth.”

Eren did as he was told, hauling the heavy bucket of water into the kitchen to dump out the dirty water for fresh, clean water. When he came back, Levi was waiting with a mop.

“What are you gonna do?” Eren set the bucket next to Levi.

“I’m rising the floor of the soapy water,” Levi responded, dunking the mop into the bucket.

“Where’s my mop?”

“As much as I appreciate your enthusiasm, it’s not really a two person job.” Levi got right to work on mopping up the soapy floor.

“Oh…” Eren trailed off, feeling a little bit left out. Levi was right, though, there wasn’t really all that much more that Eren could do, but that didn’t stop him from wanting to help. Besides…

“You don’t have to stand there you know. It’s late. You should go to bed,” Levi suggested.

“Why are you okay with this?” Eren questioned suddenly. Levi paused for a moment.

“Cleaning? I think we already went over this.”

“No, no! Not that. The marriage.”

The air around them turned dense. A quick hush fell over them with the tension.

“Oh, that.” Levi let out a heavy sigh, leaning against the mop in his hands as he thought. “It’s not that I’m okay with it, necessarily. It’s more that I’ve accepted it. Like how some people accept their fate of saving the world even if they don’t want to, I have accepted my fate of being forced into a marriage with a whiny brat that throws temper tantrums.” Levi smirked teasingly at Eren, who glared playfully in response.

“Oh ha ha.” Eren sobered, though, along with the air. “So, you were never upset or angry about it? You just kind of… accepted it?”

“Fuck no!” Levi started mopping again, this time with a little more force. “I hated this stupid idea when I was a younger. Why the hell should I marry some idiot I don’t know? I didn’t want to be
forced into a relationship with anyone I didn’t choose.”

“So what happened?” Eren sat back against one of the walls of the room as Levi talked.

“I… I just realized that it wouldn’t do me any good if I wasted all my time hating something I can’t change,” Levi shrugged. “Besides, at least this way I won’t have to worry about whether or not the person I choose only wants me for my money.” It sounded to Eren like there was a story behind his reasoning, but he had enough common sense not to ask now. Levi might tell him in time if they get closer.

“I guess that’s true… I never really had to worry about that. But I bet that really sucks…” It was at times like these where Eren was happy no one knew of his family’s money.

“So what about you?” Levi finished up the mopping and gathered up the cleaning supplies. “Is there any specific reason why you hate this marriage?”

“Not really. It’s really just for the same reasons as you. I didn’t want to marry someone I didn’t choose. I want to fall in love.” Eren said the last part more to himself than to Levi, but Levi heard it anyway.

“I guess it’s a double blow too since you have to marry someone older than you too, huh?” Eren had to think about it for a moment. He’d actually forgotten that Levi was at least 8 years older than him. Was he just too focused on everything else about the marriage or did he really just not care about age difference?

“Actually… The age was never something that bothered me… I wonder why…”

Another silence wrapped itself around them. Eren contemplating his indifference on their age, and Levi watching him awkwardly.

“You want something to eat?” Levi asked out of the blue. “I think there’s still some leftovers from lunch.”

Eren jumped out of his thoughts. “Uh, sure?”

“Alright.” Levi left, taking the cleaning supplies back to where they belonged (Eren didn’t know where though). When he came back, Levi had two plates. Giving one to Eren, Levi sat down next to him. Eren eyed his food curiously.

“A panini?”

“Yeah, I said leftover lunch remember?”

“It’s cold,” Eren commented, poking the sandwich.

“That’s the best kind of leftovers.”

“I wouldn’t have taken you for a cold leftovers type of person. Or a leftovers type of person in general.”

“Why? Cause I have chefs cook my meals for me?”

“Well… Yeah. I mean, aren’t you always eating like… caviar and fancy shit like that?” Levi straightened up where he sat and faced Eren.

“Okay, first of all, caviar is disgusting as fuck. Second of all, leftovers are delicious as fuck. No
work has to go into leftovers since it’s already cooked and prepared, and on several occasions, cold leftovers are even better than when they were first made and piping hot. Like ham. A cold, leftover ham sandwich is better than anything that has shitty caviar in it, hands down.”

Eren tried to hold it in, but no matter how hard he tried, snickers came out.

“Are you fucking laughing at me?” Levi glared. “Don’t fucking judge me, leftovers are fucking delicious.”

“N-No… That’s not why I’m laughing… You just… You just went on a rant about leftovers! And you were so serious too!” Eren managed between holding back his laughter. “Do you do that a lot?”

“Tch… Of course not…” Levi grumbled, turning away from Eren and stuffing his face full of cold panini. Eren chuckled, guessing that, yes, Levi probably did do that a lot. Or at least more than he’d care to admit.

“By the way,” Eren spoke up after a bite of his panini. “I do agree with you. I love leftovers, too.”

“Fucking good.”

“So… Are we not gonna clean the carpet then?”

“Nope.”

“Really?”

“Yup.”

“Why?”

“Cleaning carpet is a bigger pain in the ass than hard floors. Plus it’s not as big of a mess as the ballroom was. The maids can handle it. And I’m too tired to do anything more anyway.” Levi brushed off with a wave of his hand.

“Ballroom?! Eren exclaimed suddenly, then he blushed. “Oh…”

“What? You didn’t know this was called the ballroom?” Eren shook his head, becoming more embarrassed with every second that passed. “What the hell did you think it was called?”

“I’ve, uh… just been calling it the… the party room…” he admitted shamefully.

“How- Just… How did you not know that?” Levi sputtered, baffled.

“Well, your dad told me during the tour but… well I wasn’t really listening all that well…”

“Of course…” Levi rolled his eyes. “Party room… Seriously?”

“Oh shut up…”

“I’m never letting you live that down you know.”

“It’s basically the same thing!”

“No, they’re not. A party room is for little kids and shit. A ballroom is classy and for grown-ups. So obviously you’re not allowed in here.”
“Hey!”

Eren lightly shoved Levi on the shoulder, to which Levi responded with another shove. They stared at each other before both chuckling lightly and finished the rest of their sandwiches in comfortable silence. It was the most comfortable silence Eren had felt since coming here, and it was really nice. Talking with Levi was surprisingly really nice.

“Hey, Levi?” Eren prodded after they’d finished their food.

“Hmm?”

“Why is this place so big?”

“Because that’s how my grandfather had it built to be. He built it specifically so that all of his family would be able to live here for generations.”

“Your grandpa built this place?” Eren asked, wide eyed.

“No. He had it built. My grandfather isn’t the hardworking type unless it comes to business. My grandmother probably would’ve built it if she had the skill to, though. She loves DIY projects and shit like that.”

“Oh… And they live here?” Levi nodded. “Oh, so… where are they? I haven’t seen them around.”

“Back to back business trips. They won’t get back for a couple more weeks. I believe that was also explained the first night you were here, but now I can assume that you probably don’t know much of anything since you have the attention span of a goldfish.”

“That’s not the right saying,” Eren chastised, playfully. “It’s the attention span of a squirrel and the memory of a goldfish. You can’t mix the two together.”

“With you I can,” Levi sighed. He let his head fall back against the wall Eyes fixed on nothing in particular, he confessed, “I’m actually glad that my grandparents aren’t here this week, though. My grandfather would not have put up with your shit for as long as I had. He would have kicked you out, quite literally, if he had been here for our fight. The wedding would have been called off right then and there and he’d probably get a restraining order too.” Well shit.

“Sounds like a swell guy…” Sarcasm was evident in Eren’s voice, as well as a tint of fear.

“Super swell. And don’t get any ideas, alright. My grandfather is the last person in a one thousand mile radius that you want to piss off. If he called off the marriage because you fought with me, he would ruin your name, ruin your father’s business and then buy it out from him for dirt cheap, and then ruin your family’s chances of ever getting another semi-well-paying job again. And by family I mean you, your father, your mother. Even your future children could be affected, depending on how badly you pissed him off. Seriously. Don’t. Do it.” Well double shit. Eren couldn’t make any promises, but he’d at least try not to fuck up with Levi’s grandpa. At least he didn’t have to meet him for another good couple of weeks.

“Shit… Well that would suck…” Getting out of the marriage wasn’t worth having his whole family’s life get fucked up.

“Yup.” Levi made no move to get up, so Eren figured maybe now he could get some answers out of Levi. Little things that he’d been curious about.

“So… Why do you, your dad, and your grandparents all live together?”
“So my grandfather could keep a close eye on me and raise me “correctly”. As if my dad couldn’t do it himself. As the heir to the entire Voclain fortune and business, he wanted to make sure that I understood from an early age what it would take to run the family business when I took over. Something my father didn’t have the privilege of knowing.”

“You’re father isn’t going to take over the company? Oh! I’m sorry… That probably was really personal wasn’t it?” Wow, way to delve into a topic you probably shouldn’t delve into, Eren. He really should learn to think before he speaks…

“It’s alright. It’s family business and since you’re going to be part of the family… My grandfather never intended for my father to have control over the company. He always envisioned that his grandchild, me, would take over, so my grandfather has arranged it so that all the rights to the company and the entirety of the family fortune will fall to me at his time of choosing.”

Stunned, Eren could only gape at Levi. “That… That seems really harsh…” Levi only shrugged. “That’s Grandfather for you.” With the way he said everything, it seemed like Levi could really care less about any of this. All of his words were blunt and matter-of-fact, and to be honest, it sort of disturbed Eren. How could he be so… nonchalant about this?

“But… To his own son?”

“I guess he just never expected much from my father. He never saw my father as someone who was able to take control of the company and keep it going strong. Maybe he thought my grandmother would be too strong of an influence on him. And really that’s exactly what happened. He sort of fulfilled his own prophecy because he never paid all that much attention to my father’s education like he did with me. So instead of running the company, my father works as the head of one of the sects of the company.”

“And then he made your dad live here?”

“He built this mansion with the idea that my father and mother would live here while I was being raised so that he could raise me himself while still giving my father the illusion that he was raising me. It sounds harsh, but that’s my grandfather.”

From what Levi was saying, nothing made sense. How was Levi’s dad okay with this? Carlton’s dad basically just ignored him but then gave all of his devotion to his grandson. Simply off the idea that maybe Carlton wouldn’t be fit for the job. And then he forced his own son to live with him for his entire adult life? With his wife? How…? But wait…

“So… No, never mind. I’ve pried enough.” Eren shook his head, deciding that, regardless of how tactless he was, that question was probably way too personal.

“No, ask,” Levi goaded. “Come on, tell me what you want to know; I’m willing to answer. Unless you’re going to ask if we do virgin sacrifices. Then don’t ask.” Virgin sacrifice… Sounds like a question that could legitimately be asked to Connie…

“Um… You said that your grandpa built this place so that your mom and dad could live here but… I haven’t seen your mom either?” Please don’t say she’s dead. Please don’t say she’s dead. Please don’t say she’s dead. Eren would feel like the worst piece of scum to ever grace the Earth if he brought up memories of Levi’s dead mother only hours after having the worst fight they’d ever had.

“Divorced.” Levi flashed a wry smile. “Why? Thought she was dead?” Eren’s blush gave away his
answer. “No, she’s not dead, though I’m pretty sure my grandfather wishes she was.”

“Really? Why?”

“She pissed him off.”

“How?”

“The divorce.”

“Why’d they divorce?”

“Man, you sure do take advantage when someone gives you permission to ask as many questions as you want.” Levi chuckled when Eren blushed again and mumbled another apology. “It’s alright. My mother married my father for his money, basically. But after I was born she found out that all of the fortune and power would fall to me and not her husband so… she left. She tried to bargain for half of the family assets during the divorce, including the business and fortune, but Grandfather had a better lawyer and more power. Not to mention that there was no way in Heaven, Hell, or the entirety of space and time that she would ever be able to lay a finger on the business and fortune since she could only bargain for what my father owned and had rights to. And since my father had no ownership or rights to what she wanted, she couldn’t get it. Dumb bitch.”

“So, then does she know about the marriage? You know… our marriage?”

“Who’s other marriage would you be talking about? And no, thank fuck. When I said that she left after I was born, I mean she literally filed for divorce a couple days after she popped me out. She tried to take me along with her, but like I said, my grandfather had better lawyers. So, she had already been cut off from us by the time that agreement had been made. If she did find out, no doubt she would do anything she could to exploit the shit out of it in hopes of getting her greedy hands on something that isn’t hers.” A small spark of apprehension flickered in Eren.

“Should I be worried?”

“Probably not. She’s a smart and cunning woman, but not enough to get anywhere. Now let’s stop talking about me.” Levi twisted himself so that he was facing Eren expectantly. “I want to know more about you.”

Huh? Levi wanted to know more about Eren? Really? But he wasn’t all that interesting. Especially after Levi’s stories. Although, Levi had wanted to know more about Eren since the beginning…

“Uh, like what?” Eren shifted nervously, not used to the attention.

“Well, what’s your family like?” An eye for an eye. Eren got to know more about Levi’s family so it was only fair that Levi got to know more about Eren’s.

“Well… There’s me, my mom, my dad, and my sister. My mom stays at home and she’s really nice, though a little overprotective sometimes. My sister is even worse when it comes to being overprotective though. I love her and all, but she took after my mom way too much. She was here just yesterday too.”

Levi perked up, curious. He hadn’t seen anyone that resembled Eren yesterday. “Really? Who?”

“The girl with the red scarf. I don’t know if you saw her…”

“Her?! –Oh… Huh…” Levi let his eyes wander off to the side contemplatively. Eren threw his
Hands up.

“Wait! Let me guess!” Eren interrupted boldly. “You thought she was my girlfriend didn’t you?” He pointed an accusing finger at Levi, smirking because he knew he was right.

“Of course not!” Levi scoffed, brushing it off in the same way someone would if they didn’t want to admit they were wrong. “You’re not allowed to date, after all…”

“But you thought she would be if I could date right?” Eren laughed, shaking his head. “It’s not an uncommon thought. We’ve had way too many comments about how cute a couple we are… It’s really fucking annoying… And she’s my age so it makes it even worse…”

“The joys of having adopted siblings… She is adopted, right? I don’t see how she wouldn’t be, but you never know…”

“Yes, she is adopted. My parents adopted her when we were nine to my insistence due to… the situation.” Eren turned away, suddenly very serious.

“The situation…?” This was worrying Levi.

“Well, it’s still technically being resolved in court and there’s all this stuff with the hospital and the therapists so I’m not allowed to say anything to protect the innocent or whatever…” Eren trailed off.

“… Wait really? Are you fucking serious?” Levi pulled at Eren’s shoulder, forcing them to be face to face again. Concern and confusion filling up every feature of Levi’s face. A grin burst across Eren’s face, despite his efforts of subduing it, and he laughed like a madman.

“Haha, no! No, I’m just kidding!” Eren tried to explain himself, but Levi’s expression had him rolling in laughter again. He had to take deep breaths to calm himself down enough to talk again so he could explain. “Her parents were close friends with mine, but they died in a car accident, and since she didn’t have other living relatives I decided she should live with us.”

Levi took a moment, or several, to ponder Eren softly before speaking again. “You are surprisingly nice… even though you’re a fucking dick!” Levi glared at Eren and pushed his shoulder. “Shit you really had me worried that you killed three guys or something!”

“Uh, thanks? And sorry! I just couldn’t resist.”

“So what about your dad?”

Eren bit his lip. “Me and my dad haven’t seen eye to eye in a long time…”

“Wait!” Levi mimicked Eren. “Let me guess! It was because of the marriage.” Eren looked away, embarrassed, giving way his answer. “I knew it.”

“Yeah, I was mad at him for that… I’m still mad about it actually…”

“Really? I had no idea… You do a fabulous job at hiding that.”

“Oh, shut up…”

“And what about your friends?”

“Hey! No fair! I didn’t ask you about your friends so you don’t get to ask me about mine yet.”
“Excuse me, but there were no rules about what the fuck we were gonna talk about. Now let’s hear about your friends.”

“Well, what about your friends?”

“Hey! I asked you first!”

“Oh you are so full of shit!”

“Duh, everyone is. I’m pretty sure that’s how digestion works, Eren.”

“I can’t believe you…! You fucking…” Eren stuttered then growled in frustration.

“Do you need me to teach you about digestion, Eren?” Levi asked slowly and carefully, making fun of Eren.

“No thanks! Like I want to waste time indulging you, you ass!”

“Yeah, you’re right. You still need to tell me about your friends after all.”

“Maybe tomorrow…” Eren was cut off by a well-placed yawn, his eyes almost didn’t open after out of sheer exhaustion. Weird, he hadn’t yawned in a while…

“I’m guessing that’s the signal to head to bed? What time is it anyway…?” Levi mumbled to himself, yawning as well. “Shit, it’s 2:30. Definitely fucking bedtime.” Levi stood, stretching, and made to grab the plates, but Eren stopped him.

“It’s okay, I’ve got them,” Eren offered with a small smile. Levi shrugged, too tired to really care at this point.

“Just put them in the sink, alright? No need to wash them or anything. Good night… brat.” Levi toddled to the stairs.

“Hey, Levi!” Eren called after him, waiting until Levi had turned around to continue. “I’m sorry for the things I said earlier… And it was really nice talking to you.”

Levi, after overcoming the shock, smiled a half smile and walked back. He patted Eren’s head gingerly.

“You’re forgiven, because it was really nice talking to you too.” Levi’s smile became more serious and sincere. The most sincere Eren had ever seen Levi be. “And thank you.”

That smile resonated within Eren’s mind, blocking off any other thoughts. It died down when he realized that Levi was almost gone and he called out a “good night.” Levi waved in recognition, and was gone.

At that point, sitting on the floor of the empty ballroom with two equally empty plates in his hands, Eren hated everyone. He hated everyone who had advised him to get to know Levi. Because they were right. He hated himself for not listening to them. Because he was wrong. He hated Levi for being Levi. Because he proved that everyone else was right and Eren was wrong. He hated everyone…

But not really.

He had really enjoyed talking to Levi. There was something about the way he spoke. Something about his body language while talking. Something about the things he’d say. There was even
something about the jokes he’d told, even if they were pretty shitty (pun intended). There was something about their conversation that Eren really liked, something that had probably been there before but never acknowledged or even noticeable due to the circumstances. Thanks to Eren’s stupidity and stubbornness.

Then, there was something about the happy jitters that Eren would get at the thought of talking to Levi tomorrow. But then there was also something about how abnormally tired he was while talking to and thinking about Levi. More so than usual and more so than before. And then there was something about the feelings Eren had around Levi, or rather, the lack thereof. Something had been missing while he was talking to Levi, while he was helping him clean. Or at least something wasn’t as conspicuous as before.

But Eren couldn’t figure it out.

He couldn’t figure any of this out. All of these somethings were just questions without an answer.

Eren pondered all of this as he set the plates down in the kitchen sink… or at least one of them. He hoped it was the right one. There were three right next to each other, after all. Yawning again, Eren was suddenly hopeful that he might actually get some sleep tonight. And he wouldn’t even have to sleep on that uncomfortable bed now that he had his pillow throne. But as he walked up the stairs, past the mud that had now completely dried, and into his room, the anxiety and suffocation and constant alertness that his feeling brought on chased away any thoughts of sleeping. Even after plopping down on the pillow throne.

Eren sighed.

Looks like it was going to be another sleepless night… But he couldn’t write. He learned the hard way that writing for hours on end just would not work. So now he had hours to kill and nothing to do. Or did he…?
I'm really hoping I never have to wait that long to update a chapter again... It was very much needed but took way too long in my opinion... T^T

AND!! Something you all have been waiting for happens in this chapter, and all you're going to think when it happens is "FINALLY!!!!" So have fun with that. :D

Also, I just finished writing the 16th chapter (I write ahead so that you all can enjoy consistent updates otherwise who knows when I'd update next) but it's so weird going back to chapter 9 from chapter 16 cuz it's like "...but wait... what do you mean they're still at this part of the story...? And they're not like... doing the things that they're supposed to be doing in 16...?" If that made any sense, who feels me? It's weird right? Right? Someone understand me....

Since Levi didn’t have work all week, he decided to turn his alarm off. So, when he finally blinked his eyes open to the bright rays of sunlight streaming in through his window, he shouldn’t have been surprised that it was 10:00 am. He should’ve been even less surprised considering he hadn’t fallen asleep until 3:00 am. Hey, he’d gotten a good seven hours of sleep at least. It wasn’t like Levi to fall asleep so late though. He usually tried to cut it off at midnight or 1:00 am at the latest.

Damn that brat. He was so unpredictable. Out of all of the things that Levi had expected of Eren, out of all of the scenarios that Levi had come up with while trying to calm down from his fit of rage before he did anything drastic like break down Eren’s door and kick him in the face, the last thing he’d expected was for the brat to apologize. And Eren didn’t just apologize, he apologized and meant it. And Eren apologized, meant it, and helped atone for his mistake. Even if it meant forcing himself upon Levi and risking making him even angrier.

Levi had to admit, he was sort of impressed.

For one, Levi wasn’t even sure if Eren had ever apologized before and meant it. He seemed like the type that would only say sorry to appease the adults in the room so he could leave. Not to mention that doing something like being the first to apologize took great courage and humility, two traits that Levi had believed Eren didn’t have. Sure the brat liked to start fights, but there was a big difference between courage and stupidity, a trait that Levi was damn sure Eren had. And the fact that Eren had practically begged Levi to let him help still blew his mind.

Furthermore, if there was anything that Levi had expected less than Eren apologizing, it was Eren striking up a conversation that didn’t involve screaming. In fact, before then Levi would have thought himself crazy if he entertained the idea that Eren might want anything to do with Levi that wasn’t another yelling match. But, Eren surprised him yet again.

What had changed?

It was blatantly obvious that something had changed in Eren, but Levi couldn’t for the life of him understand what it was. The only thing Levi knew was that they’d fought, Eren locked himself in his room for almost an hour, and when he came down he was positively… different. He was nicer.
He was considerate. He was curious. Hell, he wasn’t taking everything Levi said as some challenge. He laughed.

He smiled.

Eren Jaeger was a mystery. Eren Jaeger was this confusing mess of quirks and traits that had nothing to do with each other. Eren Jaeger was a puzzle with several pieces missing and no picture yet.

But if Eren Jaeger was going to continue with this attitude, then that was one puzzle that Levi might not mind piecing together.

The puzzle wasn’t going to be solved by Levi lying in bed, though. So with the hope that Eren would be just as agreeable today as he was last night, Levi dressed and got ready for the day. And stopped just as he left his room.

The mud had been cleaned up. Which was to be expected. The morning staff arrived as his father left for work which was 3 hours ago. But if Levi looked closely enough, it was obvious to tell that mud had been there. How strange. Usually the maids were more meticulous than this, especially with the idea that Levi would know if they hadn’t done the job properly. He’d have to talk to them about this.

“Hey!” Levi called out after finding a maid in one of the guest rooms.

“Yes?” she asked, pausing in her work.

“When you are done with your current task I would like you to redo the hallway. There are still faint stains where the mud was.” The maid took a sharp intake of breath.

“Mud?” She was absolutely bewildered. “With all due respect, Sir, there was no mud when I got here…” Levi gave her a curious look, and she continued on quickly. “Th-That’s not to say that I don’t believe you! I’m sure that there was mud there at some point, just… not when I got here…”

Levi continued to stare, just as baffled as the maid. “But you get here at six in the morning. If it wasn’t you or any of the other staff… then who…” Something clicked, and Levi trailed off.

“I’ll be sure to clean up the stains in the hallway, sir, just as soon as I finish this room.” Levi nodded blankly.

“On another note, would you happen to know where Eren, my fiancé, ran off to?”

“I believe he was last seen heading out into the backyard.”

“Thank you.”

When Levi returned to his room, the first thing he did was look out the window. Sure enough, Eren was in the backyard sitting under the tree he’d taken a liking to. Grabbing a throw blanket and a book, Levi headed out himself. He could only hope Eren wouldn’t get mad at him for it like he had yesterday.

“Mind if I join you?” Levi asked, when he reached his destination. Eren jumped, as if he hadn’t noticed Levi had even been there despite the fact the he’d stared right at him the entire time.

“Oh, uh… sure…” Eren stood and let Levi lay the blanket down on the ground. It was still a bit muddy so the blanket was much needed in Levi’s eyes. Though apparently not in Eren’s, whose
pants were muddy once again. But it didn’t seem like Eren even noticed. It was like he didn’t know where exactly he was and really…

“You look half dead,” Levi commented bluntly as he sat down on the clean and dry blanket. Eren plopped down beside him. He made a noise that was probably supposed to be a word, and rubbed at his face messily. Levi was becoming a bit worried. “Seriously, are you alright?”

“Mmm… just tired.” Eren’s words were slurried, and Levi raised an eyebrow. He had a number of dark bag under his eyes and his eyelids drooped so Eren’s ocean eyes were only half open. His entire body just sagged like Eren had no strength to hold them up.

“‘Just tired’? If this is ‘just tired’ then I don’t want to see you exhausted.”

“What are you even doing out here?”

“You tried to spend time with you. That is, after all, what this whole week was supposed to be about.” And they’d successfully managed to avoid it for half the week. “And I wanted to know why you cleaned up the rest of the mud.”

“I wanted to be nice.” Huh. That’s not the answer Levi had been expecting. He’d expected the brat to deny it or avoid the question like some kind of modest hero or even brag about it. “Did I do a bad job?”

“A shitty one.”

“I bet I did…” Eren groaned.

“But you did a good enough job that the maids couldn’t tell. How did you even do it?”

“I don’t even remember anymore…”

“Did you get any sleep last night?” Eren didn’t answer so Levi took it as a no. “Look, as much as I appreciate the help, you shouldn’t sacrifice your sleep for something like that. We have maids for a reason. Besides, if this is how you’re going to act after a night of no sleep, then it’s really not worth it.”

“Mm’kay…” Eren was being far too agreeable, and it was kind of weirding Levi out. “What book are you reading?”

Levi had to stop and think. What book had he brought? He wasn’t even looking when he grabbed it. Please don’t be the dictionary or something stupid like that. “Hamlet.” Hamlet? Really? Fucking fantastic. How clichéd to bring fucking Shakespeare.

“We’re reading that in class… Or we’re going to after break…”

“I see. Are you looking forward to that?”

“I don’t know,” Eren shrugged. “Have you read it before? Is it good?”

“No, actually, I haven’t. I’ve heard it’s good, though.”

“I heard that The Lion King was based off of Hamlet. I wonder if that’s true.”

“The only way to find out is to read it. Or pretend to read it until your teacher tells you what it means.”
“Will you read it to me?”

“Right now?” Eren nodded. “Uh… Alright…” As Levi began to read, he felt Eren shift closer until his head was practically resting on Levi’s shoulder. Levi paused, stiffening up. He wasn’t exactly a cuddler for people who were still practically strangers… Or even most of his friends. The only friend who did ‘cuddle’ with him was Hanji and most of the time it was forced and Hanji ended up hurt. “What are you doing?”

“It’s easier for me to read along like this.” Just grin and bear it, Levi. He’ll probably get bored after the first couple of pages. Besides, he’s nice and warm- stop. There’s no need for thoughts like that just yet. Just because they had been really friendly last night doesn’t mean that now was the time for even more feelings to emerge. These things are supposed to take time, damn it.

So Levi continued on reading, and sure enough, after a couple of pages Eren was no longer listening. Just not in the way Levi had expected. Eren’s head was now fully resting on Levi’s shoulder and since his head was so close to Levi’s ear, Levi could hear soft snoring.

The brat had fallen asleep on him!

“Oi, brat! I did not agree to read to you just so you could fucking fall asleep on me! I’m not a pillow!” Levi nudged his shoulder into Eren’s cheek, but all he accomplished was pushing Eren off so that his head was now resting in Levi’s lap.

“Oi! Brat! Wake up!” Levi shook Eren by the shoulder roughly, but Eren still didn’t wake up. The only thing Eren did was shift around so he was in a more comfortable position…

By wrapping his arms around Levi’s waist.

This wasn’t good.

Levi shook Eren again to no avail. No matter how much Levi shook Eren or yelled, that boy was not waking up anytime soon. Levi began to panic a bit on the inside, not that he would show it.

“I would just let him be, Lil’ Master.”

Levi jerked up curiously to see a familiar face. “And why on Earth would I do that, Chef Hannes? And why are you even out here? Shouldn’t you be preparing lunch instead of poking your nose in places where your nose has no business being?”

Hannes laughed. “I suppose’a should, shouldn’t I? Ah… I was just worried about our little friend here.” Levi glanced down at Eren again. Why would Hannes be worried about Eren? “He came into my kitchen this morning looking like death smacked him around with a baseball bat a couple times. Especially around his eyes.” Yeah, he really did look terrible. “I heard a rumor that Eren cleaned up some mud from the carpet upstairs last night… Would that have anything to do with it?”

“This morning,” Levi grumbled. “And yes. He was apparently up all night last night.”

“Yeah, that’ll do it. I’m curious as to why there was mud on the carpet, though.”

“You can ask Eren once he wakes up… if he wakes up, that is.”

“Poor kid…”

“Stupid brat is more like it.” Levi resisted the urge to grind his fist into Eren’s skull. “I told him
that he didn’t have to clean it up. I told him that we were going to leave that for the maids. But he just had to play hero and screw himself over like that. It’s his own damn fault.”

“Are you sure about that?” Hannes had a strangely serious face on as he asked.

“… What do you mean?”

“Well, he usually gets coffee in the morning, right?”

“Most people do, yes.”

Hannes sighed and shrugged. “I guess’a just don’t think he would be so tired after the loss of one night’s sleep is all.” He didn’t give Levi a chance to retort. “Just let him sleep for a while. He’ll wake up eventually.”

“And what exactly am I supposed to tell him when he wakes up in my lap?”

“I never said you had to stay out here with him.” Hannes chuckled as he sauntered back inside. Levi glared after him.

“Tch… I can’t just leave him out here… My father would only yell at me for avoiding him…” Not to mention Levi would actually feel the tiniest bit guilty if he just left Eren now.

This situation was not looking good.

He was stuck outside with a teenage boy who refused to wake up and his only source of entertainment was a clichéd book he grabbed at random. Why the hell did he even have Hamlet to begin with? When did he get it? Not to mention Chef Hannes’ words were going to plague his thoughts the entire time as well.

Was there something that Chef Hannes knew that Levi didn’t? Did Eren tell him something? It would make sense. It would be very much like Eren to put more trust and friendship into one of the hired help rather than his fiancé… it doesn’t sound like it when it’s phrased like that, but it really does make sense in this situation.

But did this mean that Eren wasn’t getting enough sleep every night? Or at least on other nights? It would explain some of Eren’s more questionable behavior. Although, Eren had said that he’d been sleeping fine when asked… but Levi couldn’t really trust Eren’s answers from before last night, could he? Not with previous severe distrust and projected hate towards everything. But could he trust Eren’s answers now? Now that he’d begun to let down the walls that he’d built around himself? Now that he was apparently comfortable enough (or simply just tired enough) to fall asleep snuggled up against Levi? When Eren woke up, Levi would have to test that.

If Eren woke up.

With nothing better to do, Levi decided that since he had a book he might as well read it. He paused, however, when he glimpsed Eren’s face.

He looked… different. The forever creased brow of his was smoothed out to the point where if Levi didn’t know any better he might’ve believed that it had never been creased. His closed eyes were gentle and still. He had surprisingly long lashes for a guy who put on such a tough front, too. And his mouth was relaxed and not downturned to the point where Levi swore his face was going to freeze like that. His lips looked surprisingly soft too. Were they naturally like that? Had he even heard of Chap Stick? Oh the things you notice when you’re stalkingly watching your fiancé as he sleeps unknowingly on your lap.
Oh but his mouth was open…

Levi cringed as he started reading his book, trying not to focus on it.

Open mouths meant drool, and if that brat drooled Levi was throwing him off before the first drop could drip past his lips.

Hopefully this Hamlet guy wouldn’t be as annoying.

About an hour later, Levi’d had enough of this Hamlet prince.

All he did was bitch and moan about his damn uncle and mother, but did he do anything? No… All he wanted to do was act crazy and monologue like a bitch.

Levi was damn glad when Chef Hannes came out to inform them that lunch was ready. After lunch he was getting a new book. Preferably one without such a bitch for a main character. Fuck Shakespeare.

Of course, then Levi realized that Chef Hannes was carrying a tray of food.

Was he bringing lunch to Levi and Eren? Was he expecting them to eat outside? Levi hoped not.

“I brought you your lunch.”

“Why?” Levi snapped lightly, putting the book down. “Isn’t lunch supposed to be inside?”

“I just figured that Eren would probably want to sleep for a bit longer,” Hannes shrugged, trying not to smile at the adorable sight of Eren snuggling up against Levi.

“He can sleep after lunch,” Levi grunted before going to wake up Eren. “Eren.” Levi shook Eren’s shoulder. “Eren!” Again and again, Levi attempted to wake Eren up, but to no avail. Eren was out cold and didn’t even so much as twitch an eye.

Now Hannes was really trying to keep from smiling. “Shall I set this down next to you?”

“No! I’ll just leave him out here until I finish lunch.”

“Are you sure you want to leave him without his pillow?” Hannes may have found that little joke funny, but Levi wasn’t laughing.

“I don’t care. Hell, it might even wake him up.” But as he pulled at the arms encircling his waist, Levi found that leaving Eren might not actually be an option. “Fucking-! Hell-! What the fuck?! He won’t let go!” It made no sense to Levi. Eren just wouldn’t release his hold on Levi. If anything, Eren’s grip only tightened with each pull of the arm.

Levi let out an exasperated sigh, hanging his head in defeat. This brat just wanted to make his life hell, didn’t he? Hannes set the tray of food down next to Levi.

“I’ll come back for the dishes.” Levi didn’t like that smug smile on Chef Hannes’ face. Damn him. Damn Eren. Levi lightly thumped Eren on the head as a small sort of payback and a small attempt at hopefully waking Eren up.

It didn’t work.

But damn… His hair was really soft. Levi quickly drew his hand back and clenched his fist harder,
resisting the now very heavy urge to pet Eren’s hair. It was bad enough that he had to notice weird things while being stuck under a tree with Eren. He didn’t need to start being touchy feely.

Levi just had to eat lunch and make it through until Eren woke up.

“Damn it,” Levi mumbled to himself. “I should have asked Chef Hannes to get me another book.”

This was not a good day.

No matter how Carlton looked at it, there was just no way he could fix this on his own. He’d seen the fight Eren and Levi had last night. He knew just how bad the situation was. Both Levi and Eren were now refusing to honor the agreement, and with the insults that had flown at each other he knew that there was no way he’d be able to resolve this with just a couple phrases to calm them down. Eren couldn’t care less about anything Carlton had to say, and it was obvious that his own son didn’t respect Carlton enough to listen at this point.

If only Carlton’s parents hadn’t left for those business trips. Levi listened to his grandfather. Levi respected his grandfather. Eren probably wouldn’t listen to Carlton’s father, but Carlton’s mother had quite the ability when it came to talking with other people so maybe she could do something.

And even worse, in all of his thoughts about what he should do, Carlton had neglected just about all of his work. In all honesty, it probably would have been better if he’d just skipped work today and stayed home to demand that those two work it out. Surely a good night’s sleep would calm them down. But Carlton didn’t possess the assertive quality that was needed for a situation like this. And even if he did, it’s not like he would know how to solve the problem.

Forcing them to talk would probably only result in more fighting. In fact, forcing them to do anything would be disastrous in every way imaginable.

Perhaps Levi would listen if Carlton reminded him of his grandfather’s wishes. That might work. Carlton could tell Levi to wait until his grandfather returned home and then they could work the situation out from there. It wasn’t the best plan, but it was all he had.

But what was he going to do with Eren…? That boy refused to talk to anyone more than necessary, and Carlton was almost sure that if he tried to approach Eren with the idea of making up with Levi he’d have his head ripped off.

He needed an expert’s help.

The phone was answered on the third ring.

“Hello, Grisha Jaeger speaking.”

This was going to be difficult to explain. “Hello, Grisha. It’s Carlton. We have a problem.”

There was a long sigh from the other end. “What happened…?”

“… It’s complicated. If you have the time, I’d like you to come over sometime this afternoon so we can discuss this more privately in my office. The sooner the better.”

“I have a meeting at one so will three work?”

“Three is fine.”
“… and that’s where we are right now.”

Grisha sighed heavily, a hand massaging his temple. “Why, Eren…? Just why?”

“I just don’t know what to do… I almost never see Levi that angry… Would… would it be better if we just terminate the arrangement? I’m sure we could find some other way to make this work instead of forcing those two together.”

“We can’t let that be our first option. My son has a… unique ability to push others’ buttons to the point of snapping. Most of the people he’s met has yelled at him one way or the other simply because he was acting like a brat, so I’m almost positive that the fight was entirely Eren’s fault. Then we have to take in the fact that Eren would probably do anything to stop this marriage, so Eren starting the fight to force us to end the marriage is something that’s extremely plausible.”

“Would you be willing to come back with me to talk to Eren? I can handle my own son, but I think it would be best if you talked to Eren.”

“I can certainly try.”

“Great. We’ll leave immediately. Unless you have another meeting, that is.”

“No more meetings.”

“Good. You can follow behind me, then.”

The drive back to the mansion was about as long and nerve-wracking as one would expect it to be. Carlton was not looking forward to the next interaction he’d have with his son. Because not only was Levi probably still in an icy rage and Carlton probably going to be unable to negotiate with Levi, but now all of this was going to be witnessed by a valuable business partner and Eren as well.

His own son’s lack of respect was something he’d dealt with and grown accustomed to over time. That was something he was more or less okay with now. But he didn’t need anyone else to lose what respect they had formed for Carlton.

Confidence and determination surged throughout Carlton’s mind and body as he, with Grisha close behind in his own car, pulled up to the mansion.

His father may have always considered him to be a weak link, but not this time. Not regarding this arrangement, and not regarding the important relationship of Eren and Levi.

This newfound tenacity propelled Carlton forward from the car and into the house.

He was going to do this.

He would not back down!

… He did not know where they were…

The house was… quiet… not quite like the tense atmosphere before, but even so, the stillness still felt unnerving to Carlton… the place was filled only with the soft working of the workers who diligently preformed their tasks.

No screaming voices anywhere.

“Excuse me,” Carlton addressed one of the nearby workers. “But where are my son and his
“Last I saw they were in the backyard—” Immediately after the words had been spoken the two fathers
headed straight for the backyard, only one thing on their mind. “Oh! But you may not want to
disturb them just yet!”

The worker’s warning only pushed them further.

But after all the small fights…

After all they had done to avoid each other…

After that all those harsh insults…

After that one last fight that left both of them on the brink of breaking…

After that one last fight that had left the agreement tittering on the brink of annulment…

After Carlton had spent the entire day focusing only on this situation…

Nothing could have prepared either man for the sight they found waiting for them in the backyard.

Watching Carlton and Grisha burst out into the backyard with the grace that only businessmen who
need to keep an appearance up seemed to have was definitely not the most surprising thing that
Levi had experienced that day, but it was definitely a little bit startling and only the tiniest bit
funny. However, once Levi realized why both of them were here, it stopped being as funny.

He’d never told his father about Eren’s and his make-up.

That probably would have been a good thing to mention to his father at some point. He could only
imagine all of the worrying that his father had done all day. It must have been pretty bad for his
father to call up Eren’s father, too.

The humor of the situation came back full force when he watched as both fathers faltered in
shocked confusion.

Seeing two people who supposedly hated each other cuddling under a tree not 24 hours after they
declared their hatred for each other must be pretty jarring indeed.

Levi had to force an amused smile down and off his face. He was sure Carlton and Grisha
wouldn’t appreciate one. Even so, that didn’t stop the slight teasing tone to seep through in his
words. “Father, you’re home early. And Grisha. What a surprise! Is everything alright?”

“So it would seem…” Grisha hummed thoughtfully.

“Levi… W-What…” Carlton cleared his throat so as not to stutter again. “What is the meaning of
this?”

Levi shrugged. “After the fight, we made up.”

“And you expect me to believe that after you “made up” you two just happened to become the best
of friends?” Carlton demanded, trying to sound like he had everything under control. Levi tried not
to roll his eyes at his father’s show of dominance. Because that’s all it was: a show.

“We are not the best of friends. We just talked it out.” Keep your cool, Levi.
“Then why, pray tell, are you two-”

“He fell asleep.” Levi cut in. He shouldn’t have interrupted his father like that, but he couldn’t help it. He didn’t want to hear that they were cuddling from someone else. Or at all for that matter. “We weren’t... hugging intentionally. He fell asleep; I didn’t want to move him. That’s all there is to the story.”

“That doesn’t explain why you’re practically petting him!” Levi jerked his hand away and cursed himself once he realized, for the third time that day too, that he had in fact been stroking Eren’s soft hair. If he didn’t start paying more attention, Eren was going to wake up and question him too. He didn’t need that kind of set back after finally getting Eren to talk to him.

Grisha stepped, either, intentionally or unintentionally, stopping the fight and saving Levi from having to answer. “Levi, I don’t mean to dismiss your story, but...” He was going to anyway. “I know my son. If what I heard about the fight was true, he’s not going to simply brush it off and make up. He doesn’t give up.” Grisha sighed. “Knowing my son... I can’t help but feel this might just be another way for him to weasel his was out of this marriage.”

To Levi, it didn’t seem like Eren was trying to “weasel his way out”, but he made sure to keep that thought in mind for later. After all, Grisha has known Eren for a much longer time than Levi. Which means he knew things that Levi didn’t...

“Say,” Levi started after a moment of thinking, “is Eren usually a heavy sleeper?”

Grisha chuckled, probably in response to a previous memory involving Eren’s sleeping habits. “You could host the Russian Circus in his room and he’d snore right through it.”

“Really?” That was good to know.

“I take it you couldn’t wake him up? I’ve been there before. It’s even worse after one of his all-nighters. He should wake up in a couple hours, though.” Levi could have danced with relief had he not had a still sleeping Eren on his lap and people watching him. Thank God this was normal for him. “How long has he been asleep?”

“Since eleven.”

“Oh, then I better get home,” Grisha rushed out. “He should be waking up any second now, and I don’t want him to know that I was here. He might not take that too well.”

Levi nodded in agreement. “Understandable.”

Carlton showed Grisha out, shooting Levi worrying glances over his shoulder like he was expecting Eren to wake up right then and there and then start fighting with Levi all over again. It seemed like Carlton wasn’t exactly sold on the whole idea that Eren and Levi made up with each other, but knowing his father, Levi was almost certain it wouldn’t be brought up again. He just hoped that this new found confidence his father had acquired wouldn’t show up much more. He was 26 years old and owned his own multibillion dollar business. He didn’t need to be bossed around by his father who had never been able to boss him around before. Eren, maybe, but Levi? No.

Speaking of Eren... Grisha lied.

It was now currently closing in on 7pm, the leftovers of Levi’s dinner sat beside him, and Eren still had not woken up. How fucking long does that boy need to sleep?! It’s been eight hours already! It was getting cold, Levi’s ass fucking hurt from sitting all fucking day, and he had finished that
godforsaken play hours ago. He was about to throw the damn brat off of him, relationship and marriage be damned. For fuck’s sake he was not going to-

A groan.

Followed by shuffling.

Levi could feel Eren moving more than he had the whole damn day. He was finally waking up, and it was the last time he would ever get to sleep on Levi like that, or in any position, again! Levi was going to give that boy a piece of his mind! He looked down and... oh god damn it all.

One droopy green eye blinked itself open before being rubbed lightly by one of the hands that wasn’t still wrapped securely around Levi’s waist. The boy yawned, a light pink blush dusting itself across those tanned cheeks and hair lightly tousled. He was the picture of sleepy innocence. And Levi was now completely at his mercy.

How was it that Eren already had such control over Levi when it had only been less than a day since he’d hated Levi and he’d spent most of their time together afterwards asleep? It could be that there truly was a thin line between love and hate, but Levi would rather give up his company to the highest bidder than admit that Hanji might have been right about anything regarding Eren and his relationship.

All of that sleepiness and innocence disappeared, though, once Eren realized exactly where he was. He shot up while simultaneously scooting himself back away from Levi. His faint blush from before evolved right before Levi’s eyes, changing into a bright red that went all the way to his ears. It took a while for Eren to find his voice, but when he did it came out in sputters.

“I-I-I... I d-didn’t...”

“You did.”

“O-oh...” Levi briefly wondered just how red Eren’s face could get. It was quite an impressive shade already.

“Oh indeed.”

“H-How long was I out...?”

“About eight hours.”

“Oh no... Why didn’t you wake me up?”

“Why didn’t I? I tried. Several times. I even tried to pry you off and that didn’t even work.” Eren groaned, mortified, and Levi was once again fascinated at how red Eren’s face was. Because it wasn’t just his cheeks and ears now.

“I’m so sorry... I-I didn’t mean to fall asleep on you like that! I’ll... I just...” He made a break for it. Eren scrambled to his feet and started for the door before Levi could react.

“Hey!” Instantly, Levi chucked the Shakespearian plan straight for Eren’s head since he was too far to grab. It hit Eren’s shoulder instead but it still did the trick in that it got Eren to stop running and turn around. “For fuck’s sake get back here!” Levi said without missing a beat. “It’s alright, damn it, just get back here and help me up. And get my book while you’re at it.”
Eren grudgingly followed orders, the blush never leaving his face.

“Never expected you to run. In my extensive experience, you’re more of a fighter than a runner.”

“Whatever…” Eren mumbled quietly. He was just flustered was all, waking up in a position like that… And he’d just woken up too! It’s not like he made sound decisions when he was tired…

Levi groaned as Eren helped him up. “My legs are asleep, my ass is sore as fuck, I’m pretty sure I got bitten by at least a dozen different kinds of bugs…” Eren’s face fell at each complaint. That bastard said that it was okay so why did he have to keep complaining about it. Levi let out a small, sly smile that was surprisingly comforting in its own way. “But at least my father can’t complain about us not spending enough time together.”

Eren let out his own small smile at that. That made him feel a little more at ease.

“And at least you got sleep too since you obviously didn’t get any last night.”

“Oh… uh… haha, yeah. I guess that’s just- I should just listen to you about those things from now on. I mean you obviously know a lot more about cleaning than I do and so do the maids so…”

He was hiding something. That much was obvious.

“Well, at least you’ve been sleeping well before last night… right?”

“Oh, uh, yeah! Yeah, totally.”

Okay, so it was completely obvious that he was hiding something, the only problem was what. What was he hiding? Why was he hiding something?

“Alright, but let me know if there’s a problem, okay?”

“Okay.”

“I’m serious, Eren. If there is any problem, be sure to let us know. We’re not here to hurt you.”

It was small, but he saw it. Eren faltered for just a fraction of a second, like he was concerned about something. But just as quick, the happy mask was back on.

“Okay. But I’m serious, too. I’m fine, Levi. I promise.” Eren sighed and quickly changed the subject, rambling on about being hungry and how he should probably get something to eat. Levi listened on carefully and followed, well, more like hobbled thanks to his still asleep legs.

There was definitely something going on, but for now, it looked like Levi’s only option was to lay low. He had to keep a close eye on Eren, and hopefully Eren will end up telling Levi on his own.

Eren made his way to the kitchen, thankfully without Levi following him. He’d gone straight upstairs after they got back in, muttering something about an extra-long shower, which left Eren all by himself. Which he was perfectly okay with, mind you. He didn’t need Levi trying to pry into his sleeping issues (which were apparently nonexistent today).

In all honesty, Eren knew that he probably should have told Levi about it. It was the best thing to do and the quickest way to fixing it, not to mention that nothing ever went right for characters in movies or books when they lied and the entire problem would have been solved if they’d just told the truth. But as of right now, the only solution Eren knew would work would be to leave the house. That left home and the backyard. There was no way in Heaven, Hell, or Earth that either
dad would cave and cut the week short, and there was no way in Heaven, Hell, or Earth that Eren was going to camp outside for the rest of the week like a loser.

Not to mention that if he did tell someone that the only way to fix his problem was to leave, no one would believe him regardless. Because, really? If that doesn’t scream “this is all a plot to go back home and ditch this stupid week and marriage” than he didn’t know what did. The only thing he would get from telling someone would be a glare and a “suck it up”.

“He’s alive!” Chef Hannes yelled as Eren walked into the kitchen. Eren laughed.

“Yeah, yeah, I’m alive. Alive and hungry, that is! What have you got to eat?” Now it was Hannes’ turn to laugh.

“So demanding.” But even so, he dragged out some leftovers for Eren and popped them in the microwave. “Now what’s gotten you in such high spirits? Last’a saw you were practically dead. You alright?”

“I’m fine! I promise! I’m fine! Levi already expressed concern, and I’m fine. Seriously,” Eren stressed. He was fine, just stop asking.

“Alright, alright! No need to chop my head off!”

Hannes slid Eren’s food over, and Eren dug in. It felt so nice to have food in his stomach again.

“So, on to my next concern…” Eren paused, not liking the sound of that. “What exactly were you doing snuggled up against Levi like that?” Hannes gave a suggestive eyebrow wiggle and Eren hid his face.

“Oh don’t remind me,” he moaned, absolutely mortified. “It was a complete accident, I swear! I don’t even know how it happened… One minute I was under the tree, Levi reading that book, and the next thing I knew I was waking up in his lap! Oh God… what do I even do…”?

That was the other thing bothering Eren. Despite getting a good amount of sleep and feeling better than he had in days, why did he fall asleep against Levi? Every other time he’d been around Levi, the feelings he got only intensified. At least, every time except for last night when they were cleaning and talking. That wasn’t so bad… So why…?

Chef Hannes pulled Eren out of his thoughts. “Interesting to know, but not quite the answer’a was looking for.”

“Huh?”

“It’s pretty obvious why you fell asleep against him, but what I want to know is what you were doing so close to him in the first place. Last’a heard you refused to even be in the same room as him. And what’s all this I heard about mud?”

Eren lifted his head, a small smirk playing on his lips that he couldn’t have fought down even if he tried.

“Oh, Chef Hannes. You missed it.”
“No…!” Chef Hannes wailed. “I can’t believe’a missed such a spectacle!” Eren knew it was wrong to laugh at other people’s misery, but he just couldn’t help it with the overdramatic show Chef Hannes was putting on. “You tracked mud all the way through the ballroom and up the stairs?! Oh what I wouldn’t give to see Levi’s reaction to that!”

That’s where Eren’s laughter stopped. “You don’t want to see it, he was fucking pissed! I swear he was going to rip my head off…”

“But still, standing up to him like that… You’ve got guts. Not a lot of brains, but plenty of guts.”

Eren sighed, slumping his shoulders. “I’m just a suicidal bastard is all…”

“HAHA!! That you are, my boy! That you are!” Chef Hannes smacked Eren’s shoulder playfully. “But, what are you gonna do now that your ‘feud’ is over? Got any special plans?” He wiggled his eyebrows suggestively.

Eren gasped. “We’re just gonna try to hang out tomorrow, so wipe those damn perverted thoughts out of your head,” he growled lightly.

“Oh, I kid, I kid… So what do you have planned?” Chef Hannes leaned forward as Eren shrugged.

“I don’t know… Maybe watch some movies or play some video games?”

“I’ve never really seen Levi get all that into movies or games…”

“Well… I don’t know!” Eren cried, exasperated. “Movies and games are something I like to do, but we didn’t really get a chance to talk about it! He ran off to take a shower as soon as we got back inside.”

“How about you take turns?” Chef Hannes suggested.

“Turns?”

“Yeah! Each day one of you gets to be in charge of what you’re going to do that day! So, let’s say that tomorrow you’ll get to choose movies and games and the primary choice of entertainment, and

It's You, Me, and Plan B

Chapter Notes

Early update in terms of the time of day, but seeing as I’ve got work, class, and eating to do… Yeah, it’s just going up early. Deal with it. Would it probably have been better being uploaded simply a day early? Most likely, but I don’t care! This is the way I’m gonna do it! Yeah! Ughhhhhh…..

Also, I apologize for not responding to any comments on the last chapter T^T you know… just in case anyone was really disappointed by my lack of communication or whatever… yeah…

…I’ll just stop talking and let you guys read now…
then the next day Levi gets to choose!”

Eren thought it over. It sounded like a good idea… “Well… I’ll certainly try to talk to Levi about that if he ever gets done with his shower…”

“I think he’ll like it.”

Eren didn’t see Levi for the rest of the night, so he put his plan into action the next day.

“Movies or games…?”

Eren nodded eagerly. “Yeah, do you have any good ones?”

Levi made a face. “I don’t know. I’m not much of a movie watcher.” He paused. “Games, on the other hand…”

“Really?” Levi began moving towards one of the living rooms, and Eren followed closely. “Wait, you’re not talking about board games or something like that are you?”

“No, you dumbass. I have a PS3.” Eren stopped.

“No…” he moaned. It took only a moment for Levi to figure out why.

“I swear to God if you start whining about my goddamn PS3 then you can walk your dweeb ass back to your house and your precious Xbox.”

“But Xboxes are so much better!” Eren exclaimed, catching back up with Levi. He actually didn’t care too much about the feud between Xbox and PS3 (or so he liked to tell himself) but that still didn’t stop him from wanting his Xbox back. And really, he was only complaining as a sort of payback for all those little comments Levi had made over the past couple of days. Sure he hadn’t actually meant any of them, but Eren didn’t actually mean any of his comments either. So it was even right?

Besides, he complained enough already, so it shouldn’t be too hard.

“I don’t care if you get free ice cream with every purchase of one, I have a damn PS3 so you’re going to sit down, shut up, and deal with it.” Upon reaching the living room, Levi pulled out the aforementioned gaming device and started setting it up.

Eren bit his lip. “… What if they came with cleaning supplies?”

Levi stopped everything and turned to just stare at Eren. Eren let out a small giggle, and Levi rolled his eyes. “… Cheeky shit.”

Eren plopped down next to Levi and started sifting through his games. “So… what kind of games do you have? Any good ones?”

He soon found out that Levi did in fact have good games, though few in number, and that they were all single player games.

“Really? All single player games?”

“I never needed multiplayer games.”

“Then what do you do with your friends? You do have friends right?” Eren teased.
“I do more than stare mindlessly at a TV with them.” Levi ignored Eren’s indignant ‘It is not mindlessly staring at a TV!’ and continued. “Besides, I don’t have a lot of time for most games.”

“What do you do?”

“Work.”

“Oh…” Awkward silence.

Levi broke it by asking, “So, what else did you want to do?”

“Movies are always a good fall back.” So Eren turned his attention to the movie selection. “Let’s see… don’t know it… don’t know it… old movie… crappy movie… You’re movie selection is even worse than your game selection!”

“What were you expecting?”

“I don’t know!” Eren cried, throwing his hands in the air. “You guys are filthy rich! You’ve got to have something!”

“My grandfather is an 80-something year old workaholic, my grandmother spends most of her time reading or tending to the garden, and my father only cares about one thing on TV: football. I’m surprised we even have movies,” Levi stated.

“So you never watched movies as a kid?”

“No.”

“Not even Disney movies?! The Lion King, Toy Story, A Bug’s Life, Peter Pan? None of those??”

“What part of “no” was not clear to you?” Eren could have fainted from shock. He had his work cut out for him.

“Alright. That’s it. First chance we get I’m making you marathon Disney movies with me.”

“Hell no.”

“Hell yes. You’re not getting out of this. You need culture!”

“The only person who needs culture here is you!” Levi retorted, but his words fell on deaf ears.

“So, since you have no good movies here, I’m going to install Netflix on your PS3 and we can watch some good movies there.” That’s where Levi stopped him, about three seconds from throwing Eren away from his PS3.

“I’m not paying for Netflix.”

Eren waved him off. “We’ll use my account. It’ll be fine.”

“Why are you so intent on watching fucking movies?” Levi asked curiously as Eren fumbled around on his gaming console. He wasn’t used to the PS3, so it took some time to get everything set up.

“W-Well… We have to get to know each other right? A good way to do that is to… do things that we like. And I like movies and games. So… we can do things that I like today, and then tomorrow we can do whatever you want.” Eren bit his lip, watching Levi closely for his reaction. After
hearing what he’d said, he realized that he didn’t actually do a very good job at explaining the plan. It sounded so much better last night when Chef Hannes explained it.

Levi contemplated Eren for a moment before nodding. “That sounds reasonable. You could have said so from the beginning, but we can do that.”

Letting out a sigh of relief, Eren returned to setting up Netflix. They exchanged small talk during the process, and, once Netflix was up and running, they eventually decided on an action movie that Eren swore was cinematic perfection. Or at least it was the best out of the selection they had.

And he wasn’t sure when it happened exactly. Perhaps it was just watching the hero and his girlfriend interact so lovingly. But during the movie, Eren had a revelation.

Now that he and Levi weren’t fighting… what would happen to them?

Eren’s first plan of hating Levi for the rest of his life had fallen through, so what was the backup plan? He hadn’t thought of a Plan B when Plan A had seemed so fool-proof. What would a Plan B even look like?

Well… they were getting married… and married people were supposed to love each other…

Eren glanced over to Levi.

He was watching the movie, yes, but didn’t appear to be all that interested in it. If Eren hadn’t felt so conflicted, he would have been offended. As it was, he continued to look Levi over. From his undercut and cold grey eyes, down his lithe frame to his elegantly crossed legs.

Could he love Levi?

There was no denying that Levi was handsome and he wasn’t actually a bad guy despite his terrible conversation skills. Not to mention he was willing to give Eren a second chance after… after that fight (there was no way Eren was going to forgive himself for that. He took his temper too seriously to justify snapping like that). There was no real reason why Eren shouldn’t love Levi, right? At least none that Eren had found yet. And if Eren loved Levi, then neither family could complain either. It would just make everyone’s lives easier if Eren could fall in love with Levi.

He could make himself love Levi, right?

Eren bit his lip in consideration, the movie long forgotten. He was crazy to think that this was a better plan than hating Levi in any way, shape, or form, but what else was there? They were getting married after all. It just… made sense…

But now he had to figure out how… Breaking the ice was always the first step to a relationship, and they’d already done that. What was the next step? Going on a date perhaps? Did this count as a date? Probably not, but for love’s sake Eren could pretend it was. So then what did people usually do at the movies?

Using his knowledge of movies dates that he’d gotten from movies, Eren concluded that physical contact was his next goal. So, he scooted closer to Levi as discretely as he could.

Of course, when your partner isn’t actually paying attention to the movie, everything else suddenly becomes noticeable.

“What are you doing?” Levi asked sharply.
“O-Oh! Just, um…”

“Are you cold?”

Eren took the chance and scooted closer. “A bit.”

Levi stood, unfazed. “I’ll get a blanket then.”

Not exactly what Eren had planned.

He sighed, eyes trained to the blurs of the movie Levi had just so happened to forget to pause… and he was missing one of the best parts. And it wasn’t until after that part when Levi came back, draping Eren in a heavy blanket.

“Better?”

“Uh… yeah.” Not really.

“You don’t sound better.” Well, he was covered in a thick blanket he didn’t even want.

“You missed a good scene.”

“Somehow, I think I’ll survive,” Levi retorted, sitting back down. Eren inwardly sighed, moving onto the next logical step in his failing plan.

“Are you cold? Because if you are we can totally share the blanket-”

“Nah, I’m good.”

Okay, either Levi was truly oblivious when it came to romance, or he knew exactly what Eren was trying to do. That or Eren was just really bad at trying to romance someone, which could very well be true regardless of whether Levi knew or not.

… And now Eren was starting to get hot… That was a really heavy blanket…

But Levi sat back down in the same spot, right next to Eren. So at least Eren could conclude that he wasn’t bothering Levi. That was good. So Levi went back to reluctantly watching the movie while Eren focused more on Levi, the movie long forgotten to him.

It was… oddly comforting to be close to Levi. Eren had felt like this the last couple of times that he’d been around Levi, but now that he wasn’t as mind-numbingly tired it was easier to think about. He didn’t notice his strange feelings as much when he was around Levi. The same one that always kept him awake during the long hours of the night and left him utterly exhausted during the day. And yet… He was able to fall asleep yesterday… Was that because Levi was with him? But he didn’t get those feelings outside either. So was it both?

… Could he test this hypothesis?

It wouldn’t be too difficult to test considering Eren was always tired. And Levi was right there… If he just slouched down some and leaned his head over just like that…

“I trust you got plenty of sleep last night, right?”

Eren froze.

“Um, yeah.” No. “Yeah, I did.” No, he didn’t. He got no sleep last night. Just like every other
night.

“So then why does it feel like you’re about to do exactly what you did yesterday?”

“Be…cause I’m not…?” At least not for that long.

“Eren, you are not going to force me to watch these shitty movies while you loll off to sleep and I can’t wake you up for hours.”

“I’m not that tired! It would just be like… a short nap…” Eren paused as something else registered. “And this isn’t a shitty movie!” Uncultured swine.

“How the hell am I supposed to trust you? And yes, it is shitty. All they’re doing is fighting.”

“It’s an action movie. I told you that before we started it.”

“Well, then I guess I don’t like action movies.”

“Well then what do you want to watch?”

“Something that won’t make you fall asleep.”

“An action movie wouldn’t make me fall asleep…” Eren muttered.

“You were literally just about to put your head on my shoulder.” Eren stuttered out half excuses, and Levi just shook his head. “Yeah, that’s what I thought.”

Eren groaned in frustration. “Okay, what about a horror movie? That’s got enough going on to keep me awake.”

“That doesn’t sound fun.”

“None of the options I give are gonna sound fun to you!” Eren yelled. “You apparently hate movies! I’m sorry I suggested it!” He made to get up and leave, all of his plans be damned, but was quickly thwarted.

“Hey!” Levi grabbed a hold of Eren’s wrist and yanked him back down. “Stop that,” he chided soothingly. “I didn’t mean it like that.” He held Eren in place by pulling him onto his side and letting an arm wrap around Eren’s shoulders.

"You and your stupid sarcasm…” Eren mumbled, making himself comfortable.

"It wasn't sarcasm exactly but…” Levi paused. "I'm… I can stop… if you want."

"What? And have you act even more serious than you are now?" Eren shuddered. “Eww, no.”

"But I've been bothering you this whole time with it. I know I don't have the best conversational skills when it comes to… building friendly relationships, but that’s no excuse. You were obviously mad at me for several reasons and I don't doubt one of them was because of all the things I said. I realized it too late too. I was too harsh with you considering the fact that we'd just met, and I said horrible things to you and-" Ah, he was starting to rant again.

"Levi! It doesn't bother me." Levi went to say something more but Eren quickly cut him off. "And nothing beyond yesterday counts because I was being stupid."

"Eren…"
"I don’t need an apology.” In his eyes, his uncontrollable temper was a worse crime than some simple comments. “You actually act a lot like my friends. And they’ve said worse to me, so if I can stay friends with them, then I can stand your stupid sarcastic comments. It’s just going to take me a while to get used to your particular brand.”

Levi sighed, like he was in pain. He wanted to say more, but gave in and shook his head. "And apparently it’s going to take me a while to get used to your shitty movie taste." Though, he was going to try to keep his comments low. At least for now.

Eren smiled, pleased that he’d gotten Levi back to where he was before, before gasping indignantly, realizing what Levi had just said. "I do not-"

Levi pushed Eren back down. “Just pick one that actually has a semi interesting plot this time,” Levi joked lightly.

It took a few moments, but a pouting Eren finally started scrolling through the movies. “You might like this one. It’s a satire of a horror movie.”

“Will it keep you awake?”

“… We’ll see.”

It did not end up keeping Eren awake, in the end. He’d managed to stay up for as much as he could. Being so close to Levi made him feel awkward, so that helped, as well as the few times where Eren was actually able to watch the movie. But the warmth of the blanket, as well as the comfort Levi apparently gave off and his still lingering exhaustion dragged him under.

The next thing Eren knew was that he was being roughly shaken by a moving shoulder.

“Huh…? Wha…?”

“Oh my god…” Levi breathed. “You actually woke up.”

Eren ignored the light jest. “Uhm… yeah… How long was I out?”

“Just to the end of the movie. So you need to pick out a new one.”

Eren paused, waking up a bit more at that. “Wait, so… did you like that one?”

There was a moment of silence where everything was still as he watched Levi closely. “… Not bad.”

Eren couldn’t keep the grin off his face. “And you want to watch another one?”

“Just so long as they don’t suck like the first movie you tried to make me watch. And actually try to stay awake this time. I still don’t trust you.”

They spent the rest of the day like that, leaning against each other watching mostly horror and thriller movies since those were the movies that really captured Levi’s attention. Eren tried to stay awake as best as he could, but still spent most of his time sleeping on and off. The further they progressed, however, the less Eren needed to sleep. That also made him more aware of how close he was to Levi, but he refused to move. He would have to get used to being close to Levi if he was going to love him after all.

Carlton, thoroughly confused about their relationship, made them take a break for dinner. When
they finished, Levi dragged a laughing Eren back to the couch.

And he managed to stay awake for the whole movie.

The only problem was that he also stayed awake all night too. Again. In fact, it stopped surprising Eren. Staying up all night had become the norm. An unhealthy, emotionally and physically draining, and boredom inducing norm, but a norm nonetheless.

So when Levi banged on his door early Friday morning, Eren scrambled frantically in hopes that he could fool Levi into thinking he’d been asleep all night. Life was against him, however, as he’d stripped the bed of its pillows and blankets to make his still standing pillow throne. So instead he raced to the door and locked it as quietly as he could while throwing out what he hoped was a raspy and sleep heavy “yeah” that sounded like it came from the bed.

“Wake up, pack your backpack with a change of clothes and whatever else you need, and meet me downstairs.” With that said, Eren could hear Levi’s footsteps trailing away from his door and down the stairs. If anything had sounded wrong to Levi, he hadn’t mentioned it, so Eren breathed a sigh of relief.

Levi was already suspicious of Eren’s “sleeping” habits, no thanks to his extra-long nap the other day, and was probably even more aware now because he kept falling asleep yesterday. Don’t get him wrong, Eren was thrilled that he finally got some sleep during this hellish week, but he just didn’t need Levi snooping around and yelling at him for being melodramatic. If he could just hang on for another couple days, then he’d be right back in his own bed sleeping as peacefully as any teenage boy could, and no one but himself would be the wiser.

…

Why did he need to pack?

Levi felt like pacing, but being raised as he had, he remained still in the foyer.

According to Eren, today they would do whatever Levi wanted to do and it sure as hell wasn’t going to be watching movies. Sure, he did end up liking quite a few of the movies they watched, they had just the right amount of action and plot, but there was only so much he could take before he felt like his brain was going to ooze out of his ears. And that kid wanted him to watch more marathons? How Eren managed to do it, he had no idea.

Speaking of, there was something up with him. Sleeping during the day but insisting that he’s fine… and the cuddling… Levi might have excused the first incident under the tree as Eren’s sleep deprived unawareness, but yesterday Eren had been fully conscious. Half of the time at least. For a guy who talked about hating his guts just a couple days ago, he was very touchy feely. Was it because he was starting to like Levi? Was it because he was still just tired from the other day and Levi was a good pillow (though he didn’t know how with his bony shoulders)?

He needed to figure Eren out, because all he knew was that something was up and Eren refused to tell him what it was.

He didn’t like unsolved puzzles.

And speak of the devil, there was Eren tromping down the stairs with his backpack looking as
confused as ever. Just when Levi thought he’d have to go back and make sure he was getting ready.

“You ready?” Levi asked, grabbing his own bag.

“I guess? What are we doing?”

“I thought we’d get breakfast first.”

Levi led Eren out the front door to a sliver BMW already waiting in front of the porch steps. He chuckled when he heard a muffled “Oh, come on!” from Eren. It was obvious that, despite having a filthy rich father, the kid didn’t have true experience with money.

“Wait, so we’re going out to eat?”

“Yeah. I was thinking Burger King.”

“Burger King?!” Eren cried out, obviously that being the last thing he’d expected to hear.


“No, just… why Burger King? I didn’t even know they sold breakfast.” Oh… really?

Levi shrugged, tossing their bags into the back seat. “They have good sized portions. Why? What would you have in mind?”

This time Eren shrugged. “I don’t know. I’ve never had breakfast at a fast food joint before.”

“Oh? Is it time that I educate you? And on fast food too… for shame.” Levi tsked at Eren while shaking his head.

“No! I’ve just never gotten breakfast there before!” Excuses, excuses. “By the time I wake up they’ve usually stopped selling breakfast. Besides, I prefer late night fast food runs. There’s just something extra special about going out and getting cheap food at one in the morning.”

“Yeah, it’s usually called “I’ve hit rock bottom” or something like that.”

“Oh, shut up. Let’s just go get your fast food,” Eren grumbled.

Levi chuckled, and after a moment, Eren did too.

So off Levi drove in search of a Burger King.

While they drove, Eren kept his gaze glued to the outside world. It was the first time he’d laid eyes on it in nearly a week. The farther away they drove from the mansion, the better Eren felt. It was like a heavy fog was finally seeping out of his body. Lightweight with this freeing feeling, Eren rolled down his window and breathed in the morning, spring air, still cool since the sun hadn’t been up for that long.

Levi caught glimpses of Eren as he drove and noted the blissful smile adorning his face, and he was glad that he decided to take Eren out for the day. He was already seeing a side of Eren that he’d only seen once while Eren was in the garden, and they’d only been driving for a couple minutes. Levi wondered why Eren wasn’t usually like this and how he could help so that Eren could remain like this. Not because he was falling in love with Eren or anything, definitely not. But he did genuinely want the kid to be happy.
The ride remained quiet until after they’d gotten their breakfast. As they munched in Levi’s car, which really was Levi’s car and not just a family car, Eren decided to break the ice.

“So why exactly did you treat me to fast food? And why did you have me pack my bag?”

“I figured we’d get out of the house for today.”

“So why did you have me pack a change of clothes?”

“Maybe for two days.”

Eren slowed his chewing. “Will your dad be okay with that?”

Levi shrugged. “There were no rules about having to stay in the house.”

“And why did you just decide to take me out now?”

“Well, since we did whatever you wanted to yesterday, according to your terms, we get to do whatever I want to today.”

“Oh, right… and… what do you have planned?” This kid sure asked a lot of questions.

“You’ll see.”

“Really? Oh, come on! That’s not fair! I told you what I wanted to do!”

“Yes, but I want this to be a surprise. So hush.” Eren groaned loudly, not even bothering to hide his displeasure. “It’ll take a while to get there, though, so you can turn on the radio or something to keep you entertained. It takes about an hour and a half.”

So, once they had finished their breakfast and were back on the road, Eren did exactly that. It took him a while to finally find a station he liked, but when he did, he just let it play as he stared right back out the window.

Levi made sure to keep an eye on him while he drove. Not the best idea, but they were just fleeting glances so it couldn’t have been too dangerous. But for a while, he would catch Eren staring at his right hand which he let rest on the armrest (driving one handed became a habit he picked up while driving stick shifts). Confused, Levi wanted to ask why but knew that the day Eren actually explained himself would be the day his grandfather actually smiled. At least in this early stage of their relationship (whatever relationship that may be).

Thinking back to how cuddly Eren had been before, Levi flipped his hand open, palm up, as a sort of invitation. To what, Levi didn’t know. That would be up to Eren.

Levi heard a soft, almost inaudible gasp so he turned to find Eren staring at him like he’d just been caught stealing cookies before dinner. Levi nearly rolled his eyes and went back to driving but left his hand where it was.

Soon enough, Levi felt fingers gliding gently, shyly, over his hand before they threaded themselves with Levi’s own slender digits. Eren’s grip was tense and timid, not really comfortable at all. It was forced.

But why?

Levi would have pulled out his hair from frustration if one of his hands wasn’t currently being held captive by an awkward child.
And if he wasn’t driving. That too.

For the rest of the car ride, they were silent. Both lost in thought while holding the other’s hand. Levi only let go once he had to downshift and the sudden lack of warmth felt strange.

Pulling off to the side of a wooded road, Levi stopped the car. “Here we are.”

Eren jerkily glanced around, eyes blown wide. “What the hell are we doing here?”

“I’ve come to murder you. Start running.”

There was a long, thick silence. Neither of them moved.

“I shouldn’t have let you watch those horror movies,” Eren decided eventually.

Levi smirked and made to get out of the car. “Seriously though, get out.”

Eren followed suit. “Why? What are we doing?”

“I thought we’d go for a hike.” Levi reached into the backseat and tossed Eren his backpack before slipping on his.

Eren raised an eyebrow. “A hike?”

“Yup.”

“Here?”

“Where else?”

“And what about the car?”

“We’ll leave it here.”

“What?!” Eren’s cry startled the birds nearby. “You can’t just leave a BMW on the side of the road! Someone’s going to take it!”

“It’ll be fine,” Levi assured, locking the car and heading off into the woods. Eren was torn between staying with the car, and not losing sight of Levi.

“No it won’t!”


Eren, after quite a few moments of hesitation, slowly ebbed away from the vehicle and towards Levi. With Eren now following, Levi started back into the woods. But Eren was far from done.

“You do realize that this is the start of a horror movie right?”

“Maybe you were the one who shouldn’t have watch all those horror movies.”

“I can see the headlines now… “Business Billionaire Heartthrob Levi Voclain and Random Boy Torn to Shreds by Backwoods Savages”.”

“You are far too melodramatic.”

“We’re going to die out here, Levi.”
“We are not.”

“And when we do I’m blaming it all on you.”

“Eren, I have been through these woods a hundred times. There are no backwoods savages waiting to eat us—”

“Tear us to shreds.”

“Whatever. Just… trust me. We’re fine.”


“And no one is going to steal my car either.”

“Business Billionaire Heartthrob—”

“Business Billionaire Heartthrob Levi Voclain is going to knock you out and leave you for those backwoods savages if you don’t shut up!”

“So there are backwoods savages!”

“Eren.”

“Alright, fine. I’ll stop.”

“Good.”

Jesus fucking Christ. If this was how Eren usually acted then Levi was going to have a very tough life. He was almost as annoying as Hanji, only several times cuter and annoying in a slightly more endearing way.

“It was kind of fun coming up with those headlines, though. They were funny right?”

“No, they were annoying.”

“Oh come on. You don’t even like the name I gave you?”

“That was especially annoying.”

“I like the name I gave you.”

“If you ever call me that again I’ll hit you.”

“That’s domestic abuse.”

“I don’t care.”

“I could have you arrested for that.”

Levi didn’t even have to say anything. It was all in the look the he gave Eren, who quickly wilted under the gaze.

“Yeah, no I couldn’t… You have too much power Levi.”

“Oddly enough, I’m okay with that.”
Their banter continued on and off for the next two hours as they walked through the woods. There was a nice barely noticeable but still there path that had been carved out, mostly by Levi. He hadn’t lied when he said that he came out here all the time. He was used to the spotlight and media that came along with his world, but it was still nice to be out where no one else was, doing whatever.

Levi looked back often to find Eren turning around to get a better look at the nature surrounding him, and he laughed when Eren tripped on a branch during one of his turnarounds. Then regretted it as Eren had taken revenge on him by whining like a child about anything that he could. It was too cold, there were too many plants, it was too bright, his leg hurt now. It was at that point where Levi decided that stopping to eat would be a good idea. If only to shut Eren up.

And he’d felt bad about making Eren uncomfortable with his sarcasm… this boy complained too much, even if it was mostly to piss off Levi.

“So,” Eren started when they sat down for lunch, which Levi had so thoughtfully packed. “I never knew you liked outdoor activities.”

“I’ve got to like something, right?”

“I just figured you liked work.” Cheeky fucking shit.

“Shut up. It’s quiet out here. That’s what I like about hiking.”

“So you just like being alone.”

“I brought you out here, didn’t I?”

“Yeah, but have you brought anyone else out here? This isn’t something you do with your nonexistent friends, right?”

“I do have friends. They’re just loud. Bringing people out here would just ruin the quiet.”

There was a few seconds of silence while Eren presumably processed the information. “So why bring me out here?”

Levi took a deep breath. “I thought you might enjoy it.” And because apparently that house was doing quite the number on him.

Eren stopped talking after that, apparently satisfied with the answer, but after a while shouted, “Wait! You said we might be out here for two days right? Where are we going to sleep?!”

Levi brushed him off. “We’re getting there. Just be patient.” Then he added with a hidden grin, “We’ll probably get there sooner if you’d stop twirling around like an idiot.”

“Oh fuck off!”

They continued their journey, and Eren, even though he wasn’t spinning around anymore, still took in as much of the scenery as he could. Levi was glad that he hadn’t been wrong about the idea that Eren liked being outside.

Sunlight had been tinted a pale green by the new leaves of the tall, thin trees. The strands that hadn’t been filtered green flitted through the branches in long strands of gold. It brightened up the ground below growing baby ferns, tall grasses, and other such plants that were beginning to cover the dead foliage from autumn. They even got to see a couple deer.
This, unbeknownst to Levi, was exactly the sort of thing that often gave Eren inspiration to write. Seeing beautiful imagery automatically made Eren want to describe it in writing. To see it he could capture the beauty of what he saw in words. Eren spared a glance to Levi, and a fleeting thought passed through his mind:

How would he describe Levi?

Blushing, Eren quickly averted his gaze. He couldn’t look at Levi for a while after that. He knew he was supposed to be trying to fall in love with Levi, but ever since he decided that, being around Levi started to feel so awkward. And he was pretty sure that Levi had noticed.

“Did you want to take a break soon?” Levi asked suddenly. It had been about half an hour since lunch.

“A break?”

“Yeah.”

“Uh, I guess? Why, are you tired?”

Levi didn’t answer. He didn’t even stop. He just plowed right through with a befuddled Eren attempting to follow close behind. Pushing through the last of the greenery Eren found himself at the edge of a clearing and…

“What the fuck?”

… a very large, luxury, lakeside cottage with what looked like Levi’s BMW parked in front.

“You like it? We don’t often use it since no one in my family really likes the woods enough to live there, but it’s great for entertaining guests or a quick getaway.”

He couldn’t believe it. Eren just couldn’t believe it. “You mean to tell me, you forced me to hike three hours to get to one of your many vacation homes when we could have just driven up the driveway?”

“Don’t be silly. The driveway was miles away when we started hiking. Besides, I thought you’d like an adventure. And look!” Levi called out in gleeful teasing. “No one stole my damn car!”

Eren had no words for him. Not because he couldn’t think of anything to say, oh no he had plenty things to say, but because he couldn’t form the words with his jaw hanging open like it was. Levi headed for the cottage, but halted after realizing the Eren was still rooted in place.

“Are you coming?”

“Why…?” Eren managed slowly.

Levi rolled his eyes. “I told you it was a surprise.”

“But… you said…”

“Eren, just because I like walking through the woods sometimes, doesn’t mean I actually like everything else that comes with hiking, nature, and camping. I like working, indoor plumbing, thank you very much.”

“And the car…”
“I had one of the chauffeurs we have on hand drive it up here after we left. Like hell if I was actually going to leave my car on the side of the fucking road.”

“You... You lied to me!” Eren accused.

“I never lied.”

“But you didn’t tell me about this!”

“Yes, hence the “surprise” part of it.” Levi strutted off like the badass motherfucker he was, leaving Eren behind yet again.

Eren stuttered, trying to find excuses as to why Levi was a terrible person for doing something like that, but he couldn’t get past the first couple of words. There just wasn’t a compelling argument since Levi really didn’t do anything wrong.

Eren was just a sore loser.

“Hey! You coming or what?”
I don't have much to say here today... I'm not sure I'm entirely happy with how this chapter turned out but at least it's not terrible! ... right?

Also, thank you to everyone who's read this and/or commented and/or left kudos so far! You're support is much appreciated as well as your constructive criticism! :D

Now go forth! Enjoy this chapter!

The cottage, which was way too big to really be called a cottage in Eren’s opinion, was just as luxurious as the mansion. Only instead of polished marble there was finished wood, probably mahogany or something. It was one floor but apparently had five bedrooms, a three car garage, and-

“Is that a hot tub? On the deck?”

“Yes. You didn’t bring a swimsuit did you?” Eren shook his head. “Yeah, that’s what I thought. I’m sure there’s something here we could use though, if you really wanted to use it.”

Eren might have to take Levi up on that offer.

Even so, despite the luxuries of the place, there were several key differences that Eren enjoyed. The size, for one. While it was extremely large for a cottage, it didn’t have an unnecessary abundance of useless rooms. The decoration of the cottage was another thing. The décor was less “I’m a super fancy, 19th century rich person whose own toilet probably costs more than you’ll ever make in your life” and much more down to Earth. Sure the furniture was probably expensive as hell, but it didn’t look like it. It looked much comfier than that.

But the best part about the cottage, was that Eren found it easier to breath here. The suffocating feeling he’d always felt pressing down on him in the mansion was nowhere to be found. The walls weren’t closing in, and there were no darkening corners. Not even a little itching in the back of his mind.

And he didn’t know why that was.

“So where do I put my stuff?” Eren asked.

“Give it here. I’ll take care of it.” Levi grabbed hold of Eren’s bag and disappeared for a minute, leaving Eren standing awkwardly in the hallway. He fidgeted in place.

Throughout all of yesterday and today, Eren had been going through periods where one minute he’d be as comfortable with Levi as ever and the very next feel so awkward he was pretty sure that if there were other people around him they would start feeling awkward. It was painfully obvious that his plan to woo himself for Levi (like that doesn’t sound wrong) was failing miserably and potentially damaging their fragile relationship. Of course, giving up was not in the Eren Jaeger game.
But… for once Eren had no idea what he was doing.

Every other time Eren had set his mind to do something, he could do it. Beat up some bullies? Hell yeah. Prove Jean wrong? Oh hell fucking yeah. Beat the other team at dodgeball? He’d have to swim through the tears of the losers who didn’t take the game seriously enough, but he’d do it. That’s why, even though he wasn’t the most popular or even really all that well liked by quite a few people, he was always picked first for teams. He never gave up.

But he knew how to fight! He knew how to tear down an opponent, how to make them wallow in their own misery. But building? How did one go about doing something like that? It’s been years since Eren’s had to make friends and he’s had no experience whatsoever when it comes to dating. What was he supposed to do?

Eren was too good at ruining a relationship, and he felt like that was exactly what he was doing.

But what would he do?

Who exactly could he ask about this?

Asking his friends would only mean admitting he was wrong… again… and Eren wasn’t quite ready to do that just yet. He could only imagine the looks on everyone’s faces, particularly Jean, Reiner, and Ymir’s, when he told them. There was no way to contact Chef Hannes and ask him, since he was basically the only one he could tell and who could give advice on this sort of thing. And the only one who he could ask right then and there was the one person who shouldn’t know!

He just had to tough it out until he could talk to Chef Hannes. He could handle that right…? It wouldn’t be too difficult, right?

Eren groaned, falling to the floor in a miserable crouch. Fuck this stupid marriage…

“Hey, you alright?”

Eren gasped, lifting his head. He hadn’t heard Levi come back. “Uh, yeah.” Eren stood, unnecessarily smoothing out his beyond wrinkled clothes, then gave Levi as convincing a smile as he could. “I’m fine.” Levi wasn’t convinced. Pushing the last of his confusing thoughts regarding Levi and the marriage to the back of his mind, Eren tried again. “Seriously, I’m fine.”

“You can say that all you want, but it still won’t be true.” Yup, the one thing Eren didn’t need: an observant Levi. “But, whatever. Now that we’re here, what do you want to do?”

“Me?” Eren questioned, almost incredulous. “Today is your day! You decide!”

Levi only shrugged. “My only plan was hiking up here and spending the night. We’ve already completed one and the only way to complete the other is doing other things until tomorrow. Pick something,” he commanded.

“No,” Eren said defiantly, crossing his arms over his chest. “I refuse. Today is your day, now decide. It’s not like I know what there is to do here, anyway.”

“You are such a brat.” Finally, after a minute, Levi sighed. “Do you… want to sit on the dock?” he asked awkwardly.

“I don’t know. Do you?” It didn’t take long for Levi’s glare to make Eren rethink his last words. “Alright! Let’s go sit on the dock!” He rushed out and away from the menacing look.
The water below the dock was far enough away so that only Eren’s toes were submerged. If he tried he could get about half of his foot, but seeing as how it was early spring the water was really far too cold for anything more than his toes. Still, it was nice to feel something that wasn’t his dirt filled shoes. Eren surveyed the half green trees surrounding the large lake as Levi plopped down next to him, letting his own feet dangle as well.

“My friends are hanging out in a lake house that would probably be like this…” Eren sighed, now missing his friends horribly. “Do you think they would be nearby?”

Levi shook his head. “I doubt it. There isn’t another building around here for miles. Besides, this is a cottage, not a lake house.”

“Oh whatever!” Eren scoffed, resisting the urge to splash Levi. “Don’t get all uppity just because your fancy second house is called a “cottage”!”

“I didn’t take you as a person who’d use the word “uppity”, Levi chuckled. “And besides, this is going to be your “fancy second house” soon, too, you know.” Eren groaned. Great. Now not only was he lonely because he was thinking about his friends, but now he was back to thinking of the dreaded and inevitable marriage. Just when he thought he’d catch a break. But he pushed aside his bitter feelings as best as he could. It was far better to feel lonely than bitter. Not to mention feeling bitter would only make his plan that much harder. Besides, he was just reminded of something he was now much more curious about.

“Speaking of what’s going to be…” Eren swallowed down the lump in his throat, “mine soon… What’s our last name going to be…?” Hearing the marriage and his friends in the same sentence had reminded him of their previous questions. And since he and Levi were no longer fighting, Eren figured now would be as good a time as any.

Levi shrugged. “The most logical option would be to combine our last names like we will with the company.” Oh, well that makes sense. At least he won’t have to suffer through being called Eren Voclain, no matter how much his friends liked the sound of it. “Why?”

“My friends were curious when they visited,” Eren rushed, brushing it off. “So… Jaeger-Voclain, huh?”

“What makes you think your name will go first?” Levi scoffed.

“Well, why shouldn’t it?” Eren wondered, shrugging his shoulders. “It’ll sound a lot better anyway. I mean, Voclain-Jaeger? Really?”

“It doesn’t sound any different to me.”

Eren rolled his eyes. “That’s just because you’re weird.”

It was a trivial matter, and one that Levi didn’t want to deal with at the moment. “Well, we’ll have plenty of time to discuss that later. We aren’t getting married for a while.” In order to keep those bitter feelings down, Eren looked around through the surrounding trees again, only to remind himself of his friends once more.

He wondered what they were doing right now…

“Probably trashing the place and missing you.” Had he said that out loud? Or was Levi a mind reader now? “You said it very softly. I almost didn’t hear.” Oh. No, he’s probably just a mind
A little embarrassed now, Eren fiddled with his hands. “I just… miss them is all,” he mumbled. “I would be with them right now if it weren’t for…” Eren didn’t want to say it. He was suddenly getting very tired of hearing about it.

“You have very good friends, you know,” Levi said suddenly, startling Eren slightly.

“What do you mean?”

“Just that. You have very good friends who care about you.”

Eren leaned closer to Levi, letting his hand closest to Levi support his weight. “How would you know?” he asked, suspicious. “You’ve never met them, and those five minutes where you told me off for giving them a tour doesn’t count.”

“First of all,” Levi started, holding up a finger. “We both know that was hardly just a tour, and second of all, I did actually get to meet some of them.” He then flicked Eren on the nose.

Eren shrank back, rubbing his abused nose. “You talked to some of them? Who?”

Shit, Levi didn’t remember… fuck, what were their names? “Christa.” That one he knew for sure. Then there was that two-toned kid… Kind of looked like a horse… “Jean.” And one more… the freckly kid. “And Marco. Although I may just be guessing on those last two.”

“Jean?!” Eren let out a distressed groan, his head falling to his hands. “Oh no… What did he say?”

“That you’re a jerk and an asshole.”

“Oh that’s original. Fuckface…”

“It was also mentioned that you and him were secretly the best of friends,” Levi teased, “helping each other when you both most needed it.” Eren lifted his head, glaring.

“Oh fuck off, when have we ever helped each other?” He was blushing, so that made it obvious to Levi that no matter how much Eren denied it, he still had a soft spot for his supposed enemy. Just like Jean.

“Well, according to your friends, you saved his ass in a fight, and he often helped you with your…” –should he?– “… episodes.” Might as well. It was, after all, the only way he’d be able to find out more about them, and it was probably better for their still extremely fragile relationship if there weren’t any secrets. Honesty was generally the best policy, right? Especially if that was the main reason for most drama that happens in the relationships in TV shows, movies, and books.

Then again, watching the color drain from Eren’s face, only to be replaced by worried panic might have proved otherwise.

“W… What? What do you mean by episodes…?” Eren was trying to play ignorant of the episodes in hopes that Levi wasn’t talking about what he thought he was talking about.

It didn’t help.

“Your friends mentioned that in early high school, you had episodes of rage and got help for them.” If you were gonna ride the train, you might as well toot the horn.

Eren exploded. “Oh fuck no! I can’t believe it! They told you?! They fucking told you?!”
“Eren. Eren!” Levi leapt for Eren as quick as he could, throwing his arm out and grasping Eren’s wrist before he got too far.

Eren tried to shake it off. “No! Fucking let go! I can’t believe they told you! How could they?!”

“Eren, calm down!” Levi knew that was probably the worst thing to say to Eren at this point, especially considering that Eren’s face was no longer red from embarrassment but from fury. It was too late for “calm down” to work.

“No!” Eren howled, trying to rip his wrist from Levi’s grasp. “No, I won’t calm down! My fucking friends who you said apparently care about me fucking told the guy that I hated the most at the time something that I didn’t want him, or anyone else for that matter, to know!”

“Eren-”

“You don’t understand!” Tears were starting to form in Eren’s eyes. Maybe the some of the redness in his cheeks was from embarrassment. “The whole reason those stupid episodes happened was because of this stupid marriage! And then they went and told you! Let me go!”

“Eren, listen to me! Your friends only told me because they thought it would help you!” Levi tried to reason, still holding on to a struggling Eren, though his grip wouldn’t last forever.

“That doesn’t give them the right to spout off my personal business!”

“It does if the person you’re marrying is concerned that you’re mentally unstable and could hurt him!”

“Oh, I’m sorry! I didn’t realize I came off as such an insane lunatic!”

Goddamn it, Levi. “Fuck… No, I… I didn’t mean… That didn’t come out right. Look,” Levi retorted, just as sarcastic. But he quickly softened his tone. “I pressured your friends into telling me more about you because I was curious, and, at the time, you would hardly look at me. They told me not to tell you because you’d freak out, which you did, but I figured you had the right to know that I knew. Although I probably could have done better at breaking the news to you. And all they told me was that you had some episodes where you were really angry in high school, but you got help for it. Was I concerned that you might be mentally unstable? Yes, for a bit. But I don’t think you’re an insane lunatic. So sit back down, alright?”

Eren glared for a long time, straight at Levi, breathing hard, before ripping his wrist out of Levi’s grasp and sitting back down. This time, however, instead of letting his legs dangle, he wrapped his arms around them, letting his chin rest on his knees. A harsh silence fell over them. Levi watched Eren carefully and cautiously while Eren started hard at the water, occasionally wiping away the tears.

Breaking the silence took all of Levi’s willpower. “I’ve had my share of troubles too.”

“Oh?” Sharp and sarcastic. Great going with handling that Levi.

“Yes, oh,” Levi retorted, just as sarcastic. But he quickly softened his tone. “I wasn’t willing to accept marrying you when I was your age. I hated it. I loathed it with every fiber of my being. I was watching everyone around me find love and be happy while I sat on the sidelines waiting for a ten year old to grow up.”
The sharp, angry lines on Eren’s face ebbed away. “O—… Oh…” His response was much quieter this time, almost shy. Levi hoped that meant Eren was actually taking what he said to heart.

Riding on the hope that it was, Levi continued. “I wasn’t allowed to date or do anything relating to dating either, so during my senior year, I tried to… well… I tried to have sex with my best friend. Just to spite my family.”

“Oh?” Curious this time. “W… who?”

The only other person who he truly considered to be his best friend in every way besides Hanji. “Erwin.”

“Erwin?!” Eren jolted, surprised by his outburst and shrunk back into his little ball. “… Was it good?” he muttered sheepishly.

“What? Oh, no. We didn’t get that far. We kissed and shit but then one of the maids came in and told me to stop, because otherwise they’d have to tell my father and grandfather and that… that was one conversation that I didn’t want to have. Erwin agreed with them so… it didn’t happen.”

“Why Erwin?”

“He was the only friend I could trust enough to do something like that with. There’s Hanji but… that’s a whole different story.” And one he’d rather not get into right now. He had a story to tell after all.

“Did you… love him?” There was a look in Eren’s eyes that Levi just couldn’t place. Even so, he continued.

“Definitely not. We are not good for each other. Besides, being in love with someone actually requires feelings for the other person, and we didn’t have those kinds of feelings.” Eren bit his lip and shuffled in his seat, suddenly appearing very uncomfortable. But before Levi could ask, Eren let out a laugh through his nose.

“Well, I guess the tabloids were wrong about your engagement to him,” he joked weakly.

“They were only half wrong,” Levi returned, hoping to continue the light atmosphere. It didn’t work.

“Yeah…” Now Eren was back to being uncomfortable and closed up tighter than Russian spy. At least he assumed Russian spies were tight lipped.

Time for Levi to play his trump card.

“Do you want to know why I’m okay with marrying you?”

Not even that managed to change Eren’s mood. “Didn’t you say that you just sort of… accepted it?”

Levi resisted rolling his eyes. “Yes, well, do you want to know why I accepted it?”

That grabbed Eren’s attention, but he still tried to act all nonchalant. “Not if you don’t want to tell me. I mean that’s your personal business, and I don’t want to—”

“Do you?”

“Yes…”
Levi almost laughed. “When I was in college, I still hated everything that had to do with the marriage. I wasn’t trying to fuck my friends, at least, but I still hated it. But, while I was in college, I met a guy who was… for lack of a better and less clichéd term, perfect. He was smart, well-mannered, and conveniently handsome. He was actually quite generic, looking back… There wasn’t much else to him besides that. We talked, hit it off, and started dating.”

“But I thought you weren’t allowed to date!” Eren cried, clearly miffed.

“I wasn’t. My family didn’t know. It was one of the perks of going to live in a dorm those first two years.” Eren opened his mouth. “I didn’t do it with him either, just for the record, because I know that was going to be your next question.” And then promptly shut it.

“What happened?”

“I’m sure you’ve seen this scenario plenty of times with your friend Christa: someone only becoming friends with you because you have money. Turns out he only cared about the money I had. He’d try to milk as much out of me as he could, then brag to all his friends and other conquests about how I was wrapped around his finger and would give him anything he wanted.”

“Wait, he cheated on you?!”

Levi held up four fingers. “With four other people.”

“Four?! What did you do? Please tell me you punched him in the face!” If it had been Eren, that guy would have had the shit beat out of him. And then would have had to deal with his friends and, more importantly, his crazy sister.

“No, unfortunately I didn’t. Instead, I exposed him to everyone else he was dating, ruined his reputation at school so no one would date him, ruined his reputation within his heavily Christian family, and ruined his name in the business world so he’d never get a job more than a step above entry level for at least five years after college.”

Eren’s jaw fell open. Forget beating the guy up…

Remind him never to get on the bad side of Levi.

“I don’t know what happened to him after that.” Levi said, inspecting his nails like they were more interesting than his cheating ex’s whereabouts. They probably were. “He disappeared for a while, but after I ruined him I couldn’t care less about what happened to him. I memorized his look though. That look all people have when all they want to do is butter you up for your money. Almost everyone I met had it, and I knew then that it would be near impossible to find someone on my own. Especially after I launched Recon with Erwin.”

Eren picked at the dock below him. “So being in an arranged marriage meant that you wouldn’t have to deal with the heartbreak of finding someone on your own…” he clarified. It was the same idea that his own dad had given him. “And that’s why you’re okay with it.”

“Partially. There’s one more reason why I’m okay with it, and it didn’t show up until recently.”

“…What?”

When Eren lifted his head, he saw Levi gazing at him, completely straight faced. “You. When you got out of that car and stared at me with eyes filled with sarcasm and disgust, I swear I could have laughed from relief. You were honest with me and didn’t care about my wealth, despite being an annoying-as-fuck twat. It’s clichéd, I know, but still the truth.”
“What can I say,” Eren laughed nervously. “You were everything that I hated. You were rich, classy, famous, antisocial, rich, famous, had a permanent glare on your face… Did I mention rich and famous?”

“You may have mentioned that. Although, I’m not sure why you hate money so much.”

“It’s not the money! Money itself is fine… great even. But… the more you have, the more expectations and responsibilities you have. You have to act a certain way to be accepted, and I was never good at doing what I was told…” The mood around Eren started drooping dangerously, so Levi did what he did best.

“You? Never.”

“I’m… I’m too violent to be high class…”

It wasn’t working.

“It’s one of your charms,” Levi tried again.

Eren shook his head solemnly. “It’s not… Do… do you know why I had to get help…? For my episodes…?”

Oh. That’s why it wasn’t working.

But at much as Levi wanted to know, as hard as he’d tried to get Eren to open up… “… You don’t have to tell me just because I told you something.” He didn’t want Eren to feel forced to let it out.

Eren stared straight into Levi’s eyes. “I want to tell you.” Despite having sounded so sorrowful, his words held a certain directness to them.

“… Then go ahead.”

Eren took a deep breath. It had been a long time since he’d revisited this. “In my last episode… before I got help… I hurt my best friend… really badly… I was so angry with this whole arrangement. I felt cheated, like I wasn’t allowed to be happy. It made me angry and… sometimes I just lost control. I could never decide when they happened, they just did. I broke all of the windows in my house one time. Another time I elbowed a teacher’s nose in… And then I knocked my best friend unconscious after pushing him into a glass coffee table. I didn’t even remember doing any of those things either… It messed me up so badly, Levi…”

Eren wanted to hide himself. Even now, years later, he was still ashamed. From denting lockers to breaking in windows, hurting Armin was by far the worst thing he’d done during those episodes.

“I’ve gotten better,” Eren reassured Levi quickly. “Hell, I haven’t felt this great while thinking about the marriage in my entire life.”

“And that must be saying something considering you’re practically bawling your eyes out.”

Bringing a hand to his eyes he found out that he was, in fact, crying. “Shut up…” He rubbed at his eyes, getting rid of the evidence.

“Feeling a little better?” Levi asked once Eren had calmed down.

Actually, he was. “Yeah,” Eren smiled. “Yeah, I am. It’s… nice talking to you.”

Levi felt like he’d just hit the jackpot. Not only had Eren opened up to him, but he’d actually liked
it. If he pressed harder… would he find out why Eren’s been acting so weird lately? And maybe learn something about why Eren was tired all the time? Levi decided to push his luck. “Well, then is there anything else you want to talk about?”

Yes. “No.”

“Really?”

No. “Yes.”

Levi let out a long sigh. Good things to those who wait… unfortunately… “Eren, I can’t force you to tell me anything you don’t want me to. But, I will always be here if you have anything you want to say. Just remember that.”

Eren opened his mouth to tell Levi he had nothing to tell, but nothing came out. The lie was there, right on his tongue, but he could feel it dissolve. And bubbling right at the back of his throat was something else.

Tell him.

Just tell him.

Everything will just be better if you tell him.

Eren’s emotions were overflowing.

“I…”

Levi’s eyes widened. Was Eren actually going to tell him?

“I can’t…” He shouldn’t… but… he really wanted to now. He wanted to tell Levi, who was such a good listener, who only wanted have a decent relationship with Eren, who was willing to listen, that he wanted a decent relationship too.

“Can’t what?” Levi encouraged.

“I can’t do this!”

“What do you mean?”

It came pouring out. “The marriage! It was easier to deal with before because at least I could get away with hating you for the rest of my life, but now I don’t and… and… you’re actually turning out to be pretty cool… and… I don’t love you… I don’t know how… no matter how hard I try…”

Well… That was probably the last thing Levi ever thought Eren would say… “What? Of course you don’t love me. Why do you have to love me?”

Eren threw his hands up. “Because we’re getting married! Married people love each other!”

Suddenly, it was clear.

“Eren!” Levi cut off Eren’s ramblings, losing patience. “Stop thinking about the marriage! Just stop!”

“What…? But-”
“Stop. All of these problems you’re having, the episodes, the anger, the frustration… all of these problems are all stemming from you overthinking this marriage! So just stop!”

Eren was stunned into silence, but only for a moment. “How can I? All my life has been marriage this marriage that! I can’t escape it! Even this whole week is about the goddamn marriage!”

“No,” Levi emphasized. “This week is about two guys hanging out and trying to get to know each other. That’s all. We’re not getting married for at least year, if not more, and we aren’t even engaged yet, and won’t be for months.”

“That doesn’t mean it won’t happen!” Eren argued. “It won’t go away just because I don’t think about it!”

“But thinking about it is what has you in this frenzy!” How could Levi explain this to Eren? “Thinking about it is what made you act like a little shit when we first met, it’s what made you act all weird like this, and it’s what caused your damn episodes! Will not thinking about it make it go away? Of course not. It’s going to happen and there’s nothing you can do about it. But maybe it will help you feel better about everything in general. Now, please…” It wasn’t like Levi to beg, but Eren had a special knack for making him do things he didn’t normally do. “Promise me you’ll stop going on about this godforsaken marriage. I don’t want to get to know “Eren, my husband”… I want to know who you are. Just Eren.”

Eren gasped and lowered his head, flustered. After a bit, Eren asked, “But what if that doesn’t work? What if that’s not the problem?”

“Then I will moon everyone at work.” Levi mentally begged that that it would work.

Eren snorted, before covering his mouth. He hadn’t expected that to come out. “You wouldn’t.” It was just too absurd for Levi.

“You wanna find out?”

After a second or two, Eren looked up and nodded. “Okay. I’ll try.”

“And don’t try to force yourself to love me either. If we’re supposed to love each other, it’ll happen on its own.” Eren nodded once more, and the relief that hit Levi almost made him sigh out loud. Instead, he simply nodded back. “Good.”

There was still a fairly thick layer of tension hanging in the air which made Eren squirm. “So…” he started off awkwardly. “What else did my friends tell you…?” He was scared to ask but felt that it would be best to know. Eren could only hope that they hadn’t mentioned anything embarrassing.

Levi had to think about that for a moment before remembering, “Oh, that reminds me. What exactly is the fire truck incident?” The reaction was instant.

“Whatever Jean told you is a lie it was all his fault!”

“Funny, because he said it was all your fault.”

“Well he’s a fucking liar and a dumbass! It was all his idea! I was just an innocent bystander who got dragged into his delinquent schemes!”

“Somehow I find that hard to believe.” Levi kicked some water at Eren’s leg playfully.

Eren, letting his legs fall back down into the water, kicked back. “Well, it’s the truth. It was his
idea and it was not my fault he didn’t see the watermelon cart soon enough.”

“You were both to blame, I just know it.” He splashed Eren again.

Eren paused in his defensive excuses. “Levi, I know where this is going and you don’t want it to go there,” he warned. “One of us is going to end up in the lake, and I can promise you it won’t be me.”

Levi smirked in response, and Eren fell into the lake five minutes later. But not after getting Levi thoroughly soaked himself.

And despite getting soaking wet, outside in early April, they both ended up laughing. So Levi decided that was good enough.

It wasn’t until Eren and Levi had taken their showers, because like hell if Levi was going to let Eren walk around soaking wet like that, and put their clothes in the dryer that Levi realized he’d only gotten half his questions answered. Sure he’d found out why Eren had been acting so weird lately (thankfully, after the confession, he’d stopped his weird behavior) but he still had yet to find out anything about Eren’s uncontrollable daytime naps. And as of right now, Eren wasn’t going to give any information on it.

Levi decided that if he could find out one more thing about Eren, just one more thing (hopefully regarding Eren’s sleeping habits), then this trip would be a success. And if not, at least he’d gotten Eren to trust him a little more.

But since Levi couldn’t begin his plan until they went to bed, the rest of the day was fairly uneventful. While Levi was taking his shower and getting their clothes cleaned, Eren explored the house for a bit, explored outside for a bit, and then rushed back in demanding to know why there was boating stuff and yet no boat. That left Levi to explain that there was indeed a boat, it was just in storage. After all, there was no need for a boat at a cottage no one used.

Levi lost track of Eren after that. He assumed that Eren had returned to the outside world to continue exploring or whatever Eren liked to do outside (Levi thinks he remembered seeing Eren writing outside before), but he wasn’t quite sure. Not that Levi cared all that much. He himself was exhausted. A pissy, grumbling Eren was annoying, but an energetic and excited Eren was downright terrifying. How in the hell a boy who hadn’t been able to keep his eyes open for the past two day still managed to retain so much goddamn energy was beyond him.

Eren had been talking for nearly the entire day! And when the kid wasn’t talking, he was bounding around like a bouncy ball. Just watching him hike made Levi want to stop and rest.

And he was supposed to take care of this brat? Hell, if this was how Eren usually was then Eren would have to take care of him! Hadn’t Eren ever heard of relaxing…?

Somewhere around five or six, with Eren still missing, Levi received a call from, guess who, his father.

“Levi? Where the hell are you two!?” Looks like he’d put on his responsible father mask again.

“We’re at the cottage. I left you a note explaining everything.” It was right on the table next to the door.

“But why?”
“I figured it would be good to get out of the mansion.” And it was. Eren was happier, albeit exhausting Levi at the same time. Levi could hear his father’s distress over the phone, but couldn’t really grasp why it was so important that they remain at the mansion.

“Levi, the rules were—”

“The rules,” Levi cut off impatiently, “were spending time together, no sleeping together, getting out of our rooms, and eating meals with each other. There was no rule even remotely close to no leaving the grounds.”

“But how is anyone supposed to make sure you follow those rules if you’re not here?”

“Relax, we have one of the maids here. It’s fine.” Actually, he’d given one of the maids the day off with double the pay if they pretended that they had been with Eren and Levi the whole time, but his father wasn’t supposed to know that.

There was a long silence at the other end of the phone before Levi heard his father’s voice again. “Alright,” he reluctantly agreed. “You two can stay there. But I will question whoever is staying with you once you three return, understood?”

So Levi would just have to give the maid a script to memorize of everything they did. “Understood.”

Levi hung up, not bothering to hear anything else his father may have had to say. What had gotten into him? Before, his father would have accepted anything Levi had said or did, leaving any discipline to Grandfather. Now he was suddenly demanding order and checking stories? That was bothersome.

“Levi?” Came Eren’s slightly timid voice. “Who was that?”

“My father, just checking in.”

“He’s not mad that we left, is he?”

“Not at all.” A little white lie, but not exactly important.

“Oh.” Eren bought it. “So what are we going to do for dinner?”

After dinner, aka ordering pizza, Eren mentioned that he’d found some board games and a deck of cards in a closet. The board games were falling apart and old, but the cards were still in playable condition, so they spent the rest of the night playing various card games. They mostly stuck to two player card games, but eventually ended up modifying multiplayer games as well.

Levi won most of them until Uno was brought out. Levi only won once out of the twenty or so rounds they played. So either Eren was extremely lucky, or just really good at Uno…

When Eren started yawning more than usual, Levi put his plan into motion.

“Getting tired?”

“Yeah, a bit,” Eren laughed sheepishly. “Where do I sleep?”

“With me.”

It took a full twenty seconds for that to process.
“What?!” Eren fell backwards from the shock.

“The master bedroom was the only one that’s been properly cleaned, and I will not have you sleep on dirty sheets.”

“S-So?!” Eren stuttered, panicked. “The beds all looked made and fine to me!”

“Those were made the last time we were here as a family. Do you know when that last was?”

Eren pushed himself back into a sitting position. “No, how could I?”

“It was when I was still a child.” Levi paused for good measure. “I’m 26.”

“So what? Why didn’t you have any of the other rooms cleaned?”

“Considering that I’m the only person who actually comes here every now and then, there’s only one room that needs to be cleaned: the master bedroom.”

Eren was getting desperate now. “But… But… the rules! Your dad said we couldn’t sleep together!”

“Is my dad here right now?” Levi asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Well… no.”

“And are you going to tell him?”

Eren deflated. “… No.”

“Then it’s settled. Come on, it’s time for bed.”

Levi heard Eren whine in desperation, but made no other move to argue against it.

Phase one complete. Now all Levi had to do was watch Eren during the night and try to find anything that might lead to daytime exhaustion.

Fun.
All We Found Was a Bump in the Road

Chapter Notes

Are you guys ready for this chapter? I have the strange feeling that some of you guys might hate me after this... But on the bright side, they finally sleep together! :D

Yay...?

Alright, just read the chapter already. And enjoy!

Eren was panicking.

Sleep? With Levi?!

That man was way too cunning. If he wanted to know something he wouldn’t stop until he got it. But he couldn’t let Levi know that! He’d already spilled enough down by the docks, and no amount of “I’ll be there for you” or group therapy sessions was going to persuade him into telling Levi about his inability to sleep. It was nice talking to Levi and Eren felt a lot better afterwards, but talking about it wouldn’t do anything except get Eren yelled at and within the next couple of days it wouldn’t even be a problem anymore.

Eren took a deep breath, trying to calm himself down. It wouldn’t even be a problem tonight. Simply being next to Levi helped him feel better and made it easier to sleep. If yesterday and that day under the tree was anything to go by, not only would Eren be fast asleep but he’d also end up attached to Levi at some point too. That part he was not looking forward to.

Not only that, but the entire time he was at the cottage there hadn’t been a single wisp of darkness in the corners, not one breathe was difficult to breath in. The feelings he always felt at the mansion were nothing but a myth here. That was saying something too, considering that not even being with Levi could get rid of it completely. And that was the reason why Eren had trouble sleeping! He didn’t know why he got those feelings, but regardless, he couldn’t get them here and Eren was planning on using that to his advantage.

Finally… sleep!

Levi, on the other hand, was confident that he was going to learn something about Eren’s strange sleeping patters. He had to. Eren may refuse to tell Levi but whatever was going on was obviously hurting him. So, either he was a masochist or just plain stupid… maybe both. Whatever it was, Levi was going to find out something…

Anything…

He was…

He was going to find out…

THUMP

He was going to find out that Eren was a horrendous sleeper.
Turns out, if Eren wasn’t holding on to something, like a pillow or say… Levi, he didn’t just toss and turn, oh no, he *flailed*… At least in the beginning.

Eren was fast asleep minutes after hitting the pillow, as close to the edge and as far away from Levi as possible. Then, about half an hour later, he damn near simultaneously stole most of the covers, leaving Levi completely exposed and freezing, then kicked them off. What was the point of stealing the damn covers if he wasn’t going to use them?! Of course, once the covers had been properly taken care of by Eren, he splayed himself out like a starfish. What was wrong with this kid?! Was the bed just not comfortable?

Oh, and that thud from before? That was Eren rolling off the bed.

And it didn’t wake him up.

At least Eren’s pillow had gone with him, so now that he had something to hold on to he was much quieter.

Levi was sorely tempted just to leave him there. He was hell in bed, and not in the good way. And now that he was hugging his pillow like a horny teenager, Eren had stilled in his movements and the only noise was the sound of his soft breathing. Plus, with Eren out, Levi might actually get a decent night’s sleep.

But… the floor wasn’t really that comfortable. Not to mention that if Eren did spent the rest of the night on the floor, while Levi would have a good, quiet night’s sleep he would then have to deal with a very loudly complaining and sore Eren all day tomorrow.

Levi’s humanity and his less than thrilled attitude on the idea of a complaining Eren forced himself out of bed and over to the soundly sleeping Eren. He let out a sigh once he laid eyes on the curled up boy who was probably going to have a bruise somewhere on his body from falling onto the floor.

When Levi said he needed to know anything… this wasn’t what he meant. Now had Eren woken up from the fall, Levi might have chalked it all up to Eren always getting a bad night’s sleep because he would flail so much that it would wake him up. But Eren hadn’t woken up… So obviously that wasn’t the problem.

Before Levi could haul Eren’s clumsy ass back on the bed, he pulled a spare pillow from the closet. He wasn’t about to take away the one thing keeping Eren quiet and still, but he wasn’t going to leave Eren without a pillow either.

After placing the pillow on the bed, where Eren’s head should have been, Levi then turned his attention to the problem of actually getting Eren back on the bed.

Levi didn’t really like the idea of waking Eren up, so he would somehow have to pick Eren up without disturbing him at the same time.

Squatting down, Levi gently slipped one hand under Eren’s knees and the other under his shoulder. In small, careful nudges, Levi maneuvered his hands and Eren’s body so that when he eventually did pick Eren up, he’d be holding Eren bridal style. Levi didn’t actually know how heavy Eren really was, so he braced himself for the worst and…

Almost over did it. How was a brat who was taller than him still lighter than him? … Levi didn’t *think* he was getting fat…

Rolling his eyes at the sudden and out of character self-conscious thought, Levi made to place Eren
back on the bed, but faltered when he felt Eren curling into his body. Eren had loosened his hold on
the pillow in favor of making himself more comfortable in Levi’s arms.

“Don’t get used to it, kid,” Levi muttered in a whisper, all while trying to pour ice cold water on
the warmth growing in his chest. Finally placing Eren back on the bed, Levi watched as Eren
resumed his previous hold on his pillow and settle back into the mattress. Levi knelt down and
continued to stare at his fiancé.

The last time Levi had seen Eren this peaceful was under the tree in the backyard of the mansion.

He was just as beautiful then too. Much more vibrant in the open sunlight rather than a dark
bedroom in the woods, but still just as beautiful.

Levi lightly brushed a couple of strands of Eren’s hair back and tracing his fingers down and along
the side of his face, wondering just how he was managing to fall for such talkative, energetic, and
extreme brat who had just barely begun to trust him.

He really wished that Hanji hadn’t been right all along.

In the end, Levi learned nothing.

Eren, though a bit rough in the beginning, fell asleep like any normal person and stayed asleep until
morning like any normal person… Except for the part where he fell out of bed again. Levi wasn’t
sure when it happened, since he’d been asleep the second time, but he ended up putting Eren back
in bed before the boy could wake up. Other than that, there was nothing to indicate that Eren had
any trouble sleeping at night.

The only thing that could be counted as suspicious was that, despite going to bed kind of early,
Eren slept in until noon. As far as Levi knew, Eren had been getting up a lot earlier over the week,
so why would he sleep in today?

Levi pondered over the possible reasons in his head while he read one of the dusty books that had
been left at the cottage. Meanwhile, a newly awoken Eren was scrounging up something to eat for
lunch before they left. All they had was leftover pizza, but it wouldn’t hurt to look, right?

“Just eat the rest of the pizza already,” Levi called out, not even looking up from his book.
“There’s nothing else in there, and if there is then it’s probably not even recognizable as food
anymore let alone edible.”

“It doesn’t hurt to check!” Eren called back. “Ow!”

“Oh? Did you get hurt?”

“Shut up! I just bumped my head, alright?”

Levi snickered to himself. It would never be boring with Eren around, that much was certain. As if
to prove that, Eren came waltzing in with a cold slice of pizza in one hand and the other piece still
shoved into his mouth.

“Web-”

“Do not,” Levi interrupted sharply, “think that you are going to say anything with pizza hanging
out of your mouth.”
Eren made a face, but finished off that slice before he tried talking again. “When are we leaving?”

“So eager to return?” Levi almost laughed again at Eren’s small glare. “We can leave whenever you’re ready.”

Eren nodded, but then hesitated. “We’re not hiking back right?”

“Definitely not. And not just because my father wants us back soon.”

“Are you implying something?” Eren prodded, a slight smile on his face.

Levi turned around on the couch to look straight at Eren and with all of the seriousness he could muster said, “The backwoods savages are more likely to attack us if we hike back.”

But Eren just rolled his eyes. “Whatever, you suck.”

Levi smirked in victory and went back to his book, leaving Eren to finish packing.

Once Eren was ready to leave, Levi had already been ready hours ago, they set off back towards the mansion. Eren gazed back at the cottage as they drove away, the trees quickly blocking it from sight even though they hadn’t made it off the driveway yet.

For some reason, he couldn’t help but have this strange feeling of impending doom the farther they drove.

Eren knew exactly why he felt like that. He was terrified that all of those horrible sensations of the mansion would still be there, just waiting to wrap themselves back around his throat. He wasn’t sure why they’d disappeared at the cottage, but he was pretty sure that spending one night someplace else wouldn’t get rid of them for good. But Eren would just have to endure it for one more night. Just one more night and he could go home.

“You alright?” Levi asked suddenly. Eren’s discomfort at going back must have been obvious.

Still he nodded, refusing to let anyone know. “I’m fine.”


“Drop it,” Eren snapped firmly. Turns out Eren really wasn’t a very good liar, especially not around Levi. Of course, that still didn’t mean Eren had to tell him anything. “I’m fine,” he restated, leaving no room for argument.

It probably took a lot of effort for Levi to keep calm, but after only a moment’s pause he said, “Just remember, if you ever feeling like telling me the truth, I’ll be listening.”

Eren regarded the soft words carefully, feeling a sort of comfort from them and eventually even smiling from them.

Levi, despite the very rocky start to their relationship this week, had been nothing but a sort of rock for Eren. He’d tried to see eye to eye with Eren, tried to be friends with Eren, tried to help Eren, went along with Eren’s schemes… and listened to Eren, like he actually cared about what he had to say. And Eren was eternally grateful for that.

Maybe… that’s why Eren always felt better around Levi. Levi was that one sliver of hope, the one good thing about being forced into this. While they had both been very against the marriage, they at least could take comfort in each other. Levi really was in the same boat as him so… could he
trust Levi enough to tell him everything? About his feelings?

They were getting close to the mansion now, Eren could recognize the nearby neighborhoods. They’d spent the nearly two hour drive back in almost complete silence, a thoughtful yet comfortable silence.

Well, if Levi really would listen like he said he would… then what was the harm in trying? He’d be fine tomorrow so it would be okay right?

Bzzt bzzt

Eren jumped, not expecting his phone to go off. His friends should still be at the lake house and there was not very good reception there… Who was calling him? His dad?

“Hello?”

“Eren, you picked up.” It was his dad.

“Yeah… why wouldn’t I?” Eren asked, confused.

“I just… thought you’d be angry with me,” Grisha answered cautiously.

“No… at least not now anyway.” Eren had, after all, decided to put this whole marriage thing behind him and try to stop focusing on it, per Levi’s request. He couldn’t stay mad at his dad forever. Besides, this week had turned out better than expected.

“Oh! Okay. I was just calling to find out when would be a good time for you to come over.”

Wait, come over? What? “Come over? I’m coming back tomorrow, I thought that’s what was agreed on… right? Unless you were going to pick me up today,” Eren couldn’t contain the tiny bit of excitement that slipped through.

“Oh… They… haven’t told you yet?”

“Told me?” Eren glanced back over to Levi curiously. He was sporting a bit of a worried face, which made Eren worried as well. “Told me what?”

“Ah shit…” Grisha breathed on the other side. Eren could almost see him rubbing a hand over his face, just like he always did when he had bad news. “You’re not coming back tomorrow.”

“What?” It was a small whimper, one that Eren had barely been able to get out in the first place. “What did you say?”

“Francis Voclain, Levi’s grandfather, has insisted that you remain at the mansion until he and his wife returns so that he can be sure to meet you.”

“And when will he return…?” Eren could vaguely remember asking this question before, but could no longer remember what the answer was supposed to be, even if he tried.

“In a few weeks, but the exact date isn’t known. Which is why he wants you to stay-”

Eren ended the call, gripping his phone with white knuckles. The silence was no longer very comfortable.

“Did you know?” Eren whispered.
Levi didn’t have to ask. “I received a call this morning from my father while you were still asleep.”

“And when exactly were you planning on telling me?”

“Eren-”

“Well?!” Eren shouted, startling Levi a bit. “When exactly was I going to be informed about this?!”

“Eren, just listen-”

“What?! Why was it so impossible to tell me back at the cottage?!” Eren could feel the angry bubble up. He couldn’t stop it. How could he? How could Levi? Eren jumped out of the car, not even noticing when they’d gotten back to the mansion.

“Eren!” Levi followed.

“And what about the two fucking hours we spent in the car, huh?! Could you not squeeze it in with all the talking we were doing?!” Levi glared at the sarcastic remark, losing patience.

“I was planning on waiting until we got back to the mansion so we could discuss this calmly with my father who actually knows the details about this change of plans, but clearly that isn’t going to happen! I wasn’t expecting your dad to call you!”

“You left me in the dark!” Eren accused, pointing a finger at Levi. “You purposefully kept something important from me!”

“What difference would it have made?!”

“All of the difference in the world!” Eren took shaky breaths, sniffling a bit while trying to keep back tears. “And you have no idea how…” His lip was trembling. He needed to get away. He needed to be alone.

“Eren, I-”

“Leave me alone.”

“Eren-”

“I said leave me alone!” That last fleeting look Eren gave Levi felt like a punch to the face. Betrayed.

In one simple mistake, Levi knew that he’d just inadvertently crushed what little trust Eren might have had with him.

Eren ran back inside, past Carlton who’d been on the porch waiting for them to return. Levi let him go, knowing that there was nothing he could say to Eren at this point. He just had to wait until Eren had calmed down enough to talk to.

“Damn it!” Levi swore, bringing his fist down hard on the roof of his car. Why did Eren have to take it so far out of proportion? He knew that their relationship was shaky at best, but not telling Eren about the change of plans as soon as he found out? That’s what he was angry about? And he was still angry even though Levi had clearly stated that they were going to talk about? What the hell?!

… Or was it more than that? Did Eren have some other reason to be mad? Damn it…
Carlton shook his head, pretending to be a father figure again. “This wouldn’t have happened if you’d just-”

“Don’t. Even. Start.”

Eren was panting and gasping for breath by the time he’d reached his room, his prison, and it wasn’t because he’d been running up stairs. No, this came from that suffocation, that fucking horrible feeling that refused to leave him. The feeling that attacked him the moment he stepped foot on this property.

He quickly slammed the door shut, locking it for good measure. Unshed tears blurred his vision, but nothing else had changed. It was still the same dark suffocating room. So Eren wobbled over to his pillow throne. He collapsed into it, face buried into one of the makeshift armrests. Anything to try and forget the closing walls, the darkening corners.

He hated it here.

He hated this marriage!

He hated Levi-

…

He didn’t hate Levi… But he couldn’t trust him either. How could he…? How could he?! Eren had every right to know what was going on just as much as Levi. Why would he keep something like that from Eren? Especially after spewing all that bullshit about Eren being able to tell him anything.

How was Eren expected to tell Levi everything while Levi didn’t have to tell him shit?

And now Eren was stuck here… for another three weeks, at best. All because some old fart wanted him here. What was the big problem with the idea of Eren not being at the mansion the moment Levi’s grandpa got back? It’s not like it would kill him. Although, who could ever tell when an old person was going to die…

Regardless, it wasn’t fair.

Eren couldn’t spend another three weeks here! Hell, he could hardly spend one here!

And of course Eren’s dad couldn’t say no. He’d probably sell his own soul to appease the Voclain house. No, that wasn’t right. He’d sell Eren’s soul first. He pretty much already did, with the whole marriage plan.

It felt like his first night here again.

No one to talk to, no one to help him. He was an outcast again, someone who was only there for a means to an end. He couldn’t call Armin or Mikasa until tomorrow at the earliest, his parents wouldn’t be any help, and he couldn’t even bring himself to confide in Chef Hannes. Chef Hannes, who’d always had the best of intentions for Eren, was still a harsh reminder of his situation. And Levi…

Levi was the worst reminder of all.
No matter what he’d done over the past couple of days, no matter what he said, Levi couldn’t stop this anymore. Of that, Eren was sure.

Eren choked holding back his sobs.

Even with everything that had happened this past week, the confidant he’d made in Chef Hannes, the friend he’d found in Levi, the oblivious father he’d found in Carlton, Eren couldn’t help but feel even more alone than that first night here. Because the only thing worse than having no one to talk to is having someone you can’t talk to.

What had Eren done that first night to help him feel better? Oh right, he’d pulled out his notebook and started writing.

Eren shot up to reaching a hand out for his backpack, where he’d put his notebook so he could write at the cottage if need be, but that hand instead found itself pulling at Eren’s hair in frustration.

In his fit of rage, Eren had left his backpack in Levi’s fancy ass car. There was no way Eren would be able to withstand leaving his room let alone going to find Levi and asking for his backpack.

Eren truly felt like crying now.

What was he supposed to do? How was he supposed to deal with this?

He was stuck at this godforsaken mansion for another three weeks, had no more methods to help him sleep or even nap, had no one to talk to or confide in, had no one who could help him at this point, and his one distraction was in the hands of the one person he couldn’t talk to.

With nothing to distract him from his harmful thinking and horrid emotions, Eren could feel the walls shrink smaller, smaller, smaller. The air was thick, unbreathable, choking him. It was becoming darker, darker, darker…

There were footsteps. Outside his door.

Eren gasped, his gaze immediately falling to his door, fearful.

Was it Levi?

Another set of footsteps.

He could only hope that no one would try to talk to him now. It was the last thing he needed.

Stifling whatever noises he’d been making, Eren could vaguely hear a conversation outside his room. One that was obviously meant to be quiet.

“Don’t even think about it.” That was Levi. Definitely Levi.

“I just need to make sure he’s alright.” And Carlton? Trying to check up on Eren? He never could read the mood of a room right…

“Obviously he’s not, and trying to force him into conversation right now isn’t going to help.”

“I have to do something.”

“No, actually you don’t. Doing something now will only make it worse.”
“But he needs to know what’s going to happen from now on.”

“And he will,” Eren heard Levi snap sharply. “But right now he just needs space to calm down. He’ll come out when he’s ready.” Silence fell, and then finally Eren could hear fading footsteps and a door shut. Carlton had left and so had Levi.

Eren stood, ripping the soft towels from his pillow throne.

Why did Levi have to know him so well?

The blankets came off, leaving the carefully arranged pillows to fall apart.

Why did Levi have to be such a great person?

Eren grabbed the closest pillows and threw them anywhere he could as hard as he could. He didn’t care where they ended up.

Why did Levi have to go and ruin it all…?

Eren’s fists were shaking. He couldn’t see the pillows anymore through his tears. Falling face first in what was left of the demolished pillow throne, he clutched one of the pillows to his face and screamed his throat raw. The pillow soaked up every tear he shed. Even when the moisture became uncomfortable, he continued.

Why couldn’t everything just be okay?

It took Eren two hours before he could come out of his room. He’d cried his eyes until they were dry and cracked with tears that had been left to dry there. Then, upon realizing he’d have to face his problems sooner or later, Eren washed his face, trying to dispose of any evidence that he’d been crying that hard.

He could only take a few steps at a time though, so first thing was first. Carefully unlocking and opening his door, Eren treaded across the hall. Two new suitcases stood outside his room, meaning his dad had given up on trying to get Eren to come over and just dropped some more clothes off for him. Kicking them inside his room, he turned back around and knocked on Levi’s door. He hoped Levi would be there so Eren wouldn’t have to go looking for him.

Thankfully, Levi opened the door, a fairly well concealed look of shock (but not well enough for Eren not to notice) dawned his face. “Eren.”

“Do you… have my backpack?” Eren’s voice sounded painful to his own ears. It was scratchy and void of most emotion, and even so… it was the best Eren could do at the moment.

Levi nodded, disappearing from view for a moment. During that short time, Eren gained a quick glance inside Levi’s room. It lasted for only a couple seconds so Eren hadn’t really seen much though. Levi popped back up, Eren’s bag in hand. “Here you go.”

Eren peered over Levi’s head for a bit longer before tentatively grasped one of the straps, taking it off Levi’s hands. “… Thanks.” He turned to leave, but Levi wasn’t going to let him go that easily.

“What were you looking at?” Levi asked curiously. His voice had an undertone of caution to it, as if one wrong word would shatter Eren.
And in all honesty, that was entirely possible.

“Excuse me?” Eren asked back, turning around.

“You were looking over my shoulder. Why?”

He shrugged. “I just… have never seen your room before. That’s all.”

Levi saw his chance, possibly his only chance to attempt to rebuild even the tiniest bit of trust between them again.

“Did you want to?”

“No.” Oh… damn. Levi had hoped that with all the noise Eren had made that first day, he might’ve jumped at the thought of seeing Levi’s room. Now he just looked like a self-centered asshole.

Eren turned to leave again, but Levi called him back. “Eren.”

“What?”

“You… you know that I had never intended to keep that information from you, right? I have no reason to.”

In retrospect, Eren knew that he could have said anything. There were a number of replies he could have used. Instead, all he could manage was, “Okay.”

“Eren.” He turned back around for the third time, obviously becoming very confused. Levi looked as if he’d been frozen mid-sentence, mouth hanging open and hand outstretched towards Eren. He was struggling with something, that much was obvious to Eren. After a while, Levi closed his useless mouth, hand dropping to his side in a frustrated fist. “What do I say to you?”

It took Eren an equally long time as Levi for him to respond. “You haven’t said anything to me.” And now, Eren was done talking. No matter how many times Levi called out, Eren wouldn’t come back. And with the small click of a lock, Levi knew Eren wasn’t going to come out any time soon either.

Levi had to stop himself from slamming the door shut. Eren was so fucking frustrating! How could he go from happy-go-lucky and a general pleasure to be around to acting like a fucking brat in the worst possible way?

Not to mention confusing as fuck too. He hadn’t said anything to Eren? What the hell did that mean?

Levi had set out on a journey to understand Eren, and all he’s gotten from it so far is that Eren hates the marriage and he’s fucking impossible to talk to.

Off on the side, Levi could hear his phone vibrating on his desk. Picking it up, he found that Hanji was calling him. Her obnoxious face filling up the screen. Levi was basically 100% sure that she was only calling to learn more about his “boy toy” Eren.

And that’s when one treacherous thought flashed through his mind: Hanji would know what to do.

And Levi knew it too. Hanji had a knack for knowing how to fix Levi’s problems, and she was much better at handling other people that Levi… But did he really want to swallow his pride, prove Hanji right, and get teased relentlessly for who knows how long? Would he really do that for
Eren?

… Shit.

“Levi! You answered! You never answer on the first call!”

“I need your help.”

Levi waited, but there was no response. After about thirty seconds, he finally realized that Hanji had hung up on him! Levi angrily redialed, prepared to yell as soon as Hanji picked up.

“Le-”

“What the hell, you piece of shit?!”

“-vi! Oh my god, does that mean I had the right number?”

“What the fuck are you talking about?!”

“I thought I had the wrong number! You never ask me for help!”

“You have me on speed dial… You’ve memorized my number… You call it at least a thousand times every month! How the hell could you end up with a wrong number?!” Levi took deep, angry breaths. “And I’ve asked for your help before!” It wasn’t very often, but it did happen.

“You just shocked me is all! You never ask for my help enough,” Hanji whined into the phone. “So what can I do for ya?”

“Well now I’m reconsidering,” Levi grumbled. He wasn’t even joking. This was why he rarely asked Hanji for anything.

“No! No! Tell me! Please!” she begged.

“I… I need help with…” Oh god, here it came… “With my fiancé…” Hanji sputtered a gasp that suddenly had Levi regretting ever considering asking her for help.

“Oh, happy day…” She breathed out. “So what did you do? Piss him off? Freak him out? Clean him too hard?” Hanji snickered at the last one.

“What the hell makes you think that I did something? Maybe he did something!” The silence from the other end was his only answer. Levi took a deep breath, preparing himself for a long chat. “It… it was a little more complicated than that…”

“What happened? Tell me everything.”

One of the few good things about Hanji was that she was a great listener. Because her father had been a scientist, Hanji had grown up believing that the only way to truly understand something was learning all of the details about it. So she became very good at hanging off of every word spoken in a conversation, hoping to milk out as much information as she could and rarely forgetting anything. And that’s exactly what she did here.

“Well,” Hanji started. Levi had told her everything that was relevant to the current problem: Levi had been trying to find out more about Eren (though he was careful not to actually say his name) and he’d had some success and they were almost friends, but then Eren found out about the change of plan prematurely and got angry so now he won’t talk to Levi. “Looks like you’ve got quite the temperamental little bride there.”
“No kidding…” Levi threaded his fingers through his hair, resting his head on his hand. “I have no idea why he could be mad, though, other than he just didn’t like that I didn’t tell him right when I found out.”

“No one likes being kept in the dark, Levi.”

“I wasn’t intentionally trying to keep him in the dark! I just thought it would be best to discuss it with my father who actually knew the details!”

“You didn’t take his feelings into account, though.” Levi said nothing, urging her silently to continue. “From what I heard last time you talking about him, he wasn’t too happy about marrying you. So it would be safe to assume that he wasn’t exactly thrilled about being forced to spend a week with you. Now imagine this from his point of view: you finally get to go back home and away from this horrible situation, when out of the blue the information that you have to stay there for another three weeks is dumped on your head like a bucket of cold water. Then, you realize that not only were you the last to know, but someone could have explained it to you in a calm manner beforehand.”

Levi mentally groaned. He hated when Hanji made sense. “… Are you sure that’s why he’s angry?” If so then that brat was extremely melodramatic and overemotional. He could be mad, yes, but to that extent?

“It’s a logical reason. I know I’d be pretty upset about that if I was in his shoes. But… there’s something else that’s bothering me.”

And this is why Levi asked for Hanji’s help here. Her powers of perception could rival Sherlock Holmes. “What?”

“Well… You basically told your fiancé that he could tell you anything, right? Hoping that he would trust you enough to tell you what you wanted to know? And he actually did to an extent, right?”

“Right, right, and right,” Levi answered, nodding his head to each one.

“Then… you didn’t tell him something important, right?”

“I believe we’ve already established that.”

“And what did he say to you?”

“That I… hadn’t said anything to him… fuck… I’m such an idiot!” Levi smacked his forehead, knowing it was a pathetic punishment for his stupidity.

“The road you’re waking is a two way street, Levi. If you want anything from him, then you’re going to have to give something in return.”

Levi could see that now. And it was so painfully obvious too. Of course he knew he’d have to give something to get something, especially with Eren. He’d already had to do it yesterday. He gave his backstory to get Eren’s.

“The fact that you can understand the situation that well with so few facts is pretty terrifying.”

“Yeah, yeah, you’re welcome. Also, I’m going to need that last part in writing. It’s not every day our young Levi admits that’s he’s an idiot~!”
Levi hung up on her. He’d already shown his gratitude in his own way (that Hanji thankfully understood) so he didn’t need to be pestered by Hanji’s teasing anymore.

Dinner time rolled around, and that’s when Eren finally left his room for more than a couple minutes to grab a bag in an awkward, almost one-sided conversation. However, he kept to himself for most of the time, barely even looking in anyone’s general direction. Levi couldn’t tell if he was lost in thought or still upset.

Over dinner, Carlton explained the new “rules”. Since the old rules had been conditional to the trial week, new ones had to be made for the long term stay. Although, they were less rules and more like guidelines.

Eren would be living in the mansion as if already part of the family. Really, though, the only difference that would make would mean that there would be no scheduling of lunch and dinner and Eren and Levi would have complete control over their free time. Meaning that they could spend time together, but it wasn’t necessary anymore. As for school, since none of his friends were close enough to pick him up easily, Eren could either be driven directly to and from school in as inconspicuous a car as possible by a chauffeur, or the chauffeur could drive him to his house so Eren could be picked up by his friends.

Needless to say that Eren chose the last option without hesitation. It would mean waking up earlier, but Eren wasn’t about to give up spending as much time with his friends as possible.

Carlton was surprisingly the first one to finish. And as if he knew that Eren and Levi needed to talk alone, Carlton was also the first to leave. As soon as he was out of earshot, Levi was going to-

“Levi?” Or not. He paused in picking at what was left of his food (just like Eren was doing) giving Eren his full attention. “I’m sorry. I… overreacted earlier today…” Turns out the one good thing about Eren acting like a little shit is that he’s apparently always the first to apologize when he was.

But Levi shook his head. “You had every right to be upset. I should have told you when I found out so you wouldn’t feel… in the dark about everything. You have the right to know.”

“But you were going to tell me when we got back-”

“And in hesitating, you ended up finding out when you weren’t prepared.”

“But-”

“Will you stop? I’m trying to apologize here.” Eren shut up. “I didn’t have the right to keep that kind of information from you… especially after insisting that you could tell me anything. It wasn’t fair and… I’m sorry. Can you forgive me?”

Eren couldn’t stop the small smile that slipped out. “I think I can do that.” Levi smiled back, unbelievably relieved.

Eren wasn’t going to trust Levi just yet, but he could definitely forgive him.
Eren didn’t talk to Levi as much anymore. Granted, Levi wasn’t a very conversational person, but over the past few days he’d already gotten used to Eren’s excessive talking and now that it had been limited Levi sort of… missed it. To Levi, if Eren was talking that meant everything was okay. Now that there were more periods of silence in their interactions, it left Levi with an uncomfortable feeling that something was wrong and he had no way to fix it.

Eren could see all of the worried glances Levi sent his way when he thought Eren wasn’t looking, but he just wasn’t ready to be as open with Levi yet. Eren knew he’d overreacted just a bit, but it still hurt. He knew he’d be comfortable around Levi eventually, maybe some time soon even, but he just needed a little time.

So that Sunday had been quite awkward indeed.

It was a relief when Monday morning rolled around. Even if Eren could have slept he wouldn’t have that night. He was far too excited. So excited, in fact, that he’d run out of the car before it had fully stopped in front of his house.

Mikasa was waiting on the front porch.

“Eren!” She was clearly worried about the fact that Eren had just jumped out of a moving vehicle, but she was happier about the fact that Eren was alright and hadn’t ended up burning the mansion down in anger.

Eren ran straight into her arms. “Mikasa oh my god you have no idea how happy I am to see you!” he rushed out, nearly tripping over his own words.

She laughed, returning Eren’s bone crushing hug. “You dropped your bag in the middle of the yard!”

“I don’t care! It’s not like there’s anything important in it anyway!”

“Are you telling me school isn’t important?” A new voice chimed.

“Mom!” Eren released his hold on Mikasa only to latch onto his mother. Carla returned the hug
wholeheartedly, a great big smile on her face.

“Oh, my son… I hope this last week wasn’t too horrible…” She gently stroked her son’s hair as he buried his face in her shoulder, and Eren couldn’t find a reason to be mad at her.

“It’s fine, mom…” he whispered. He didn’t want to get into any details or give her any reason to ask any more questions. Not right before school. Eren swallowed a lump in his throat. “Where… Where’s-”

“Out of town,” Carla informed gently. She knew what he wanted to ask before he finished asking. “One of the hospitals had an emergency and your father needed to be there.”

“Oh…” Eren was only slightly disappointed. Seeing his dad would have been great, but their relationship still wasn’t the best right now.

“He’ll be back in a couple days and when he is we can all sit down to dinner and you can tell us all about your adventures with Levi. I hear he’s quite handsome.” Carla smiled knowingly, hoping to lighten the mood. It worked.

“Mom…” Eren whined.

“What? Did you think I wasn’t going to find out? Sweetie, I’ve known from the beginning.”

Eren hid his face farther into his mother’s shoulder, hiding his blush. “No, just… don’t call him handsome…”

“Oh? Is Eren embarrassed by how attractive Levi was?” Carla teased.

“Mom!”

Mikasa couldn’t help but laugh at her brother’s distress. But, thankfully for Eren, help came in the form of a honking, powder blue Prius. “Come on, Eren.” Mikasa pulled on Eren’s sleeve. “Jean and Marco are here to take us to school.”

“Oh my god I never thought I’d be so happy to hear that sentence in my life.” Giving his mom one last hug, Eren made a mad dash for his bag, still in the middle of the lawn, and followed Mikasa to the car.

Once they were situated comfortably in the car and they’d all exchanged greetings, Eren cut off anything Jean was about to say with, “Don’t ask me anything about last week. I’m not going to repeat everything a thousand times just because you all couldn’t wait for everyone else. Got it?”

Jean shut his mouth, grumbling incoherently as he pouting in the front seat.

For the first time in his life, Eren was ecstatic to be back in class. School was the one place that didn’t remind him of marriages or Levi or-

“So as you all know, we’re going to begin reading Hamlet!”

Memories of a warm nap under a tree with a rich voice reading the words of Hamlet came flooding back. Why did that have to be the book Levi wanted to read that day? They had a library for god’s sake! Out of all the books he could have chosen…
“We’ll begin reading tomorrow,” the teacher informed as she passed out their personal copies. “As for today, I’m going to take you deep into the setting of Hamlet, so you can fully appreciate the world that they live in as we read.”

This was going to be one long class…

The rest of Eren’s classes were fine, despite the occasional pester from his friends about his week with Levi Voclain. There was only one problem Eren was noticing.

He almost fell asleep in almost all of them. Since the horrible feelings at the mansion stayed at the mansion, Eren was getting the full effect of the toll staying up all night took. It didn’t help that some of his teachers were just generally boring, which made it easier for sleep to pull Eren under. There was no hiding it either. Everybody could see it, even if they couldn’t see just how bad it was.

Eren wouldn’t tell his friends, he didn’t want them to worry, but there was no way he could keep it from Mikasa and Armin. Even if he didn’t want to tell them, Mikasa was sharper than a knife and could notice any minor changes in anything and Armin was so observant and smart he could probably figure out exactly what was wrong without Eren even saying anything.

So at lunch, he managed to isolate them from the rest of their friends who also had lunch that period and told them.

“I thought something was wrong.” See? Sharper than a knife and he didn’t even have any morning classes with her. “At first I thought you’d just done another all-nighter to game but you’re usually not this tired.”

“And you haven’t tried talking to anyone about this?” Armin asked.

“How could I?” Eren demanded, sitting on one of the desks in the empty classroom they’d found. “I’ve made it so obvious to everyone that I’d do almost anything to get out of this shitty marriage. They wouldn’t believe me!”

“Well you can’t just keep going like you are! You’ll pass out who knows where!” Mikasa sat on the desk right next to Eren’s.

“Avoiding sleep for so long isn’t good for anybody. How you’re still awake now is a complete mystery to me. You have to talk to someone!” Armin stressed. He chose to sit in an actual seat nearby.

“Maybe I can ask the chauffeur to pick me up late each day!” Eren offered. “Then I can nap after school before he picks me up!” It was foolproof in Eren’s eyes, but his friends weren’t buying it.

“For three weeks?” Armin couldn’t believe that anyone, even Eren, could do something like that.

“It’s not possible, Eren,” Mikasa stated definitively. “Your mom is going to worry about you, and you know you won’t be able to lie about it to her.”

“Not to mention that even with those naps you’re going to get worse. You can’t function even remotely well like that!” Nobody could, but it couldn’t be helped.

“It’s either that or no sleep at all! The only other thing I could do is sleep outside—”

“Absolutely not.” Mikasa’s Mother Mode. “You’ll just get sick among being sleep deprived.”

“You see?!” Eren cried out, waving a hand at Mikasa and her counterargument. “I don’t have a
choice! I just need to suck it up until Levi’s grandpa comes back and everything will be fine.”

“Let me guess,” Armin deadpanned, “that’s exactly what you thought before they decided to keep you there for another three weeks.” Damn Armin for being smart.

“… They can’t possibly find any more reasons to keep me there after this.”

But it couldn’t be argued any more. They had to get to lunch before any of their friends became too suspicious.

And now, the moment he’d been dreading all day… The moment he couldn’t have gotten out of no matter how hard he tried…

“All right!” Ymir commanded pinning Eren to her truck. “Time to spill the beans, boy.” The rest of his friends surrounded them, all nodding in agreement with Ymir.

Eren groaned, wanting so badly to disappear. “Can we not…?” he whined pathetically.

“Hell no!” Jean shouted, pushing to the front of the small crowd. Because twelve people in between two cars in a parking lot, even with an empty parking space separating the two cars, was a crowd. “You spent a week with Levi-fucking-Voclain, and we have a right to know what happened!”

“It’s called privacy, horseface!” Eren shouted right back. Then he looked around nervously. “And lower your voice. I don’t need anyone else knowing!”

“You know what I think?” Marco offered. “He secretly liked it and doesn’t want to admit it.”

Eren blushed at the shouts of agreement. “Wha-? N-No! That’s not it!” That most certainly was it, but like hell if Eren was going to admit it without a fight.

“Then tell us!”

“He was an asshole,” Eren said without missing a beat, and it was partially true. Not mostly, but definitely partially.

“Oh, come on! He couldn’t have been an asshole all week!”

“Didn’t you take my advice?” Jean wondered, scoffing. “He was probably really nice and just wanted to be friends with you but you were an asshole!”

Eren clenched his fists. Jean’s whole speech on getting to know Levi made a lot more sense. “Oh, which reminds me… What gave you three the right to tell Levi anything about me?!” Jean, Marco, and Christa shrank away from Eren’s accusing finger.

“He… told you?” Marco pushed Jean in front of him, trying to keep out of Eren’s line of fire even if it meant sacrificing his own boyfriend.

It wouldn’t help. “Damn right he did! And you guys suck!” Eren would shoot through both of them at once.

“We were just trying to help…” Christa voice was heard, but Christa herself couldn’t be found. Ymir was much better protection than Jean.
“But wait!” Jean threw out in a last ditch attempt to save himself (and his boyfriend). “He wouldn’t have told you unless you two were actually getting along, right?”

Eren faltered. “W-Well… maybe he let it slip while we were fighting?” It could have worked had Eren had more conviction when he said it, but alas, he was caught off guard.

“Oh really?” Reiner smirked. “Is that what happened?”

“What?” Eren squeaked… in a very manly way, mind you.

“Did he let it slip while you two were fighting?”

“Uh… Of course. He’s an asshole after all.”

“You liar.” Eren gasped, shocked that his own sister, who was innocently avoiding eye contact with Eren, would sell him out like that.

“Seriously, you’re blushing hella hard.”

“You really like him don’t you?”

“Alright fine!” Eren caved, scuffing his foot on the ground and crossing his arms over his chest, definitely not pouting. “He… wasn’t… isn’t as bad as I thought he was going to be…” There was a collective “awwww” from most of the group that only made Eren blush harder.

“So when’s the wedding?” Connie snorted. Eren shot a fierce and deadly glare at Connie, effectively silencing his obnoxious laugh.

“So after you stopped being the dick we all know and love—” another glare was shot to Ymir “—what did you guys do?”

Eren shrugged. Had a water fight (that Eren totally would have won if Levi hadn’t cheated). “Nothing really worth mentioning…” Fell asleep on Levi’s lap. “We didn’t really do much…” Shared leftover paninis at three in the morning. “And there really wasn’t much to do…” Slept in the same bed alone and deep in the woods.

“Seriously? You had to have done something!”

“We… watched some movies, played some games, and he… took me hiking… to his… fancy cottage…” A collective gasp swept through the group.

“He took you to a cottage?”

“Were you guys alone?”

“Did you guys do it?”

Honestly, if there had been a weapon within easy grabbing range of Eren, he probably would have tried to bash Connie’s skull in… At least a little bit.

“Yes, he took me to a cottage, yes, we were alone, and no, we didn’t fucking do it! I’ve known him a week and I fought with him for half of it. There is nothing more to say. It’s really not that interesting!” Definitely not pouting again.

“Yes it is!” Sasha argued merrily. “Our little Eren finally has someone he can call his own!”
“And it’s not someone from our group! How are we supposed to know if he’s not a crazy serial killer?” That was possibly the most sane and sweetest thing Connie ever said to Eren while being totally serious.

“Yeah, we only want to make sure you’re doing alright.” Reiner laid a large but gentle hand on Eren’s shoulder, his face sympathetic and caring. Glancing around Eren found that all his friends shared similar looks. Even quiet Annie smiled, in her own special way.

Eren dropped his gaze to the ground, a little bashful. “Well… thanks… But I’m not lying, there really isn’t anything else that happened.”

“So then what’s Levi really like?” But Armin cut Eren off before he could say anything. “Aside from him being an asshole.”

“He’s….” How could Eren describe Levi…? “Different… from what most media describes him as. He’s not… very good at talking to people. He’s very honest, but doesn’t quite know what to say. And he’s very… considerate of the people around him.” He also listened very well, really paid attention to details. Tended to be a bit of a dork too. But he really seemed to care…

When no one responded immediately, like they usually would, Eren looked up only to flinch back from his friends who now looked at him like he’d just appeared in front of them out of nowhere.

“What?!”

They began muttering among themselves but loud enough for Eren to hear.

“Did you see the way he talked about Levi?”

“He had such a dreamy look on his face.”

“I don’t think I’ve ever seen Eren like this.”

“Me neither.”

“It’s like finding a unicorn.”

“He’s in love with Levi!”

“I am not!” Eren yelled, thoroughly pissed off. That was so like his friends. Caring and kind one moment and the next they were right back to teasing him like no tomorrow. It was the kind of friendship that made everyone always question why they were friends in the first place. “Alright, show and tell is over now so just go home already!”

“First, answer me this or I’m not driving you home,” Jean demanded, pointing a finger at Eren. “Are you in love with Levi?”

“I will walk home,” Eren growled menacingly.

“Please?!” everyone begged.

Eren’s response was to start walking from the parking lot. He wasn’t joking about walking back. He’d do it. And everyone knew he would.

“Alright, feisty pants,” Marco laughed as he grabbed on to Eren’s arm, pulling him back. “Calm down. Let’s get you home.”
It was only when Eren had been shoved back inside the Voclain company car, and he was quite literally shoved inside, that he realized he’d forgotten to mention to his friends how he’d be staying at the mansion for the next three weeks…

Eh, they’ll find out eventually. In the meantime, if they don’t know, they can’t constantly ask to come over. Eren will probably end up telling them by the time the weekend rolls around, but he didn’t need them showing up during the week. He could only imagine how they would bother him every day about coming over to “study” or some other lame excuse like that.

The car pulled up to the front of the house, which Eren was glad for. He actually hadn’t seen the garage at all and didn’t even know how to get there.

He would never get used to the echoes of the front doors closing in the front hall, though, similar to the sound iron bars of prison doors locking a prisoner in. This place was far too empty and large.

“I’m back…” Eren called out unsurely. Did everyone usually announce their arrival here? Carlton did, but did anyone else? And was there anyone here to even tell? It really felt far too empty in here.

He just stood there awkwardly until he noticed a maid in the other room.

“Excuse me.” She looked up. “Is Levi here?” He knew Carlton wouldn’t, but what about Levi?

She shook her head. “Both Levi and Carlton are still at work.”

“Oh… Oh. Okay… Thank you.”

Eren meandered upstairs before she could ask any questions. If she was going to, that is, but he doubted it. Most of the employees here didn’t try to stand out much. And they did a fantastic job of it. He entered his room, dropping his bag by the door.

He could get on his laptop and play games all night. That’s what he did yesterday. Now that the trial week was over, Eren’s dad had packed Eren’s laptop in with one of the suitcases that was brought over. At least now he wouldn’t be totally bored at night.

But Eren wasn’t really feeling like gaming right now… Actually, he was pretty lonely. Levi had been with Eren every day for that whole week and now… he wasn’t there. Of course, Eren couldn’t expect Levi to come home early because Eren wanted company. So he wandered downstairs to the kitchen. Chef Hannes would be there unless he was sick.

And there he was, preparing for dinner.

“Eren!” he bellowed once he caught sight of Eren. “Haven’t seen you in a while. Heard you went with Levi up to the cottage.” He wiggled his eyebrows and Eren chuckled softly.

“Yeah, he took me up to the cottage. Oh, wait, scratch that. He made me hike up to the cottage.”

“Exercise is good for you, ya know.”

“Yeah, but give a guy some warning! Do you know what it was like realizing you’d just hiked for hours when there was a damn driveway?”

Eren fell comfortably back into the rhythm of conversing with Chef Hannes. He was surprisingly
easy to talk to, and the more they talked the more Eren relaxed. They continued talking as Chef Hannes began to actually cook dinner, and Chef Hugo threw in a few comments of his own from time to time as well. The three of them joked around, and, despite Chef Hannes’ insistence, Eren did in fact see him sneak quite a few bites from the meal-in-process.

It was while they were laughing at one of Chef Hannes’ jokes that an unexpected Levi walked in, searching for Eren.

Eren straightened up, ceasing the laughter in shock. “Levi!”

“Eren,” Levi was just as shocked, but only for a moment, “You’re here.” Eren was sure that Levi had wanted to say something else, but words were eluding him for some reason.

“Yes… I am,” Eren said. “Did… You need something?”

Levi shook his head. “I just… wanted to make sure you got back okay… School was good?”

Eren nodded. “Yeah… It was fine… And… work was… good?”

Levi nodded. “Yes.” And, after a pregnant pause, Levi left. Once he was gone, Chef Hugo had trouble keeping his laughter in check.

Eren didn’t blame him. That exchange was laughter worthy with how horridly awkward it had been. And this is how all their interactions were since Saturday. If not trusting Levi meant he’d have to endure this then Eren was going to have to try harder to trust Levi. A lot harder.

“Kid, you’re gonna have to talk to Levi.”

Eren sighed miserably, staring at the door Levi had just left from. “Don’t I know it…?”

“No, I don’t think you do.”

Eren turned sharply. “What? Why do you say that?”

“Well, if you did then you’d be talking to him. You can’t blame him for what happened. It’s not his fault.”

“I don’t! That’s… That’s not why I’m…”

“Then why? Did something else happen?”

Eren wasn’t sure what he was going to say to that, whether to tell Chef Hannes the truth or try to lie, but before he could decide he was bombarded with thoughts of what he said earlier. For some reason he was remembering how he’d tried to describe Levi earlier. He wasn’t sure why. Did their awkward conversation have anything to do with it?

Either way, Eren was struck with a thought he couldn’t get out of his head. “He… Levi isn’t good with people is he?”

“He’s had the same few friends for years. He may be good with the media and business partners, but I’m guessing he’s not so knowledgeable about more personal relationships.”

Eren hung his head, hiding his face from view of either Chef Hannes or Chef Hugo. His shoulders started to shake, and the two chefs shared a glance and a shrug, both thoroughly confused. Chef Hannes, thinking Eren was crying, stretched out a hand to pat Eren comfortingly on the shoulder. Why Eren was crying, he didn’t know, but that wouldn’t stop him from trying to comfort the kid.
Before Chef Hannes’ hand could make contact, however, Eren lifted his head, hand not quite covering his smile.

He was laughing.

Oh how bad they both were at this, Eren and Levi. Two guys who hadn’t needed to make friends in years trying to figure things out. They’d gone from fighting, to actually kind of being friends, to two awkward turtles flailing around on their backs for no other reason than Eren being an overreacting spaz. Their relationship was hysterical.

“I’m an idiot.” There had been a miscommunication that upset Eren and both Levi and Eren had apologized for it. So there really was no reason for acting like he had been.

Chef Hannes had a knowing smile. “Go talk to him you ditz.”

Eren smiled back, leaving the kitchen.

Now that the trial week had ended, dinner was no longer going to be scheduled. It was going to start being served around seven instead, since apparently Levi took after his grandpa and would often stay later at work. So Eren figured he’d be able to sneak in some time to talk to Levi.

Eren had to stop on the stairs to keep himself from laughing again. Really, what had he been thinking? What was not talking to Levi going to solve? They’d both made a mistake and Eren was just prolonging everything from being the way it used to be.

If he was completely honest… he missed Levi’s company.

Although, this time around, he wasn’t going to make the mistake of thinking he could tell Levi that he couldn’t sleep. He must have just been high off of the surreal night they’d had or whatever, but now that he could think clearly he for sure wasn’t going to tell Levi. It wasn’t that he thought Levi would yell at him… maybe only like… 5 percent of him thought that… maybe 8ish…? …Possibly 10, but no higher than that! Eren wasn’t the only one with a temper…

Besides, Eren could totally figure this out on his own. He felt bad about keeping Levi in the dark and knew it wasn’t fair to Levi, who had shown that he only wanted to help, but telling him would only cause unnecessary drama. Levi wouldn’t be able to do anything so he’d just be needlessly worrying about it while Eren tried to do exactly what he would do if Levi didn’t know: trying to find a way around it.

Plus, he could just tell Levi everything after it was all okay. Levi had tried to wait for a better time to tell Eren about the change of plans, so why couldn’t Eren wait for a better time to tell Levi?

A small voice in his head told him that Eren had gotten mad at Levi when he didn’t tell Eren right away and that Levi had even apologized for it when he knew he shouldn’t have kept it from Eren and that Eren probably shouldn’t do the same thing, but Eren quickly silenced that voice.

He could live in denial for as long as he wanted.

Eren knocked on Levi’s door.

“Eren?”

He quickly spun around, really not expecting Levi to be walking down the hall rather than in his room.

Levi, raised an eyebrow. “No… I was getting a book to read.” He held up his book as proof. That would explain why he was walking from the direction of the library.

Eren nodded once. “Right… that makes sense.”

“I’m sorry, did you need something?”

“How was your day?” Eren hadn’t exactly expected the best, but he didn’t expect to revert back to the awkward turtle.

“Fine…” Levi drew out the word suspiciously. “Didn’t you already ask me this?”

“No, I asked you how work was.”

“Work was all my day was, so it’s basically the same thing.”

“Well maybe something happened during lunch!”

“I eat at work.”

“You don’t drive at work, maybe some asshole cut you off or something!”

“Fine, my drive to and from work was fine.”

“No, that’s not what I… Ugh!”

Levi glanced from Eren to his door. “Do you… want to come in?” he asked, figuring out what was going on.

Eren smiled, relieved, and nodded.

There really hadn’t been any real reason why Eren had avoided talking to Levi, and he knew that now. Slipping back into that level of comfort had been mindlessly easy. They’d talked about everything and nothing. Eren even did his homework in Levi’s room. They left when dinner was ready, but almost immediately after dinner they were right back where they were before.

Around ten, Eren started yawning, and keeping his eyes open was becoming increasingly difficult. He almost fell asleep on Levi’s couch (Levi had a couch in his room. A couch a chairs! What? Why did he need a couch and chairs?). And Levi noticed. So around half an hour later, Eren had been kicked out to get some sleep.

Yawning once more, Eren plopped across his remade pillow throne. Through his exhaustion, Eren was excited. His heavy eyes were closing steadily, and he thought that maybe, just once, he might be able to fall asleep. Talking to Levi always made him feel better and they’d talked for hours. Surely this once…

Eren couldn’t have closed his eyes for more than a couple of minutes, but they slowly blinked open.

Something wasn’t right.
Eren could feel it creeping up inside him, slow and dull, but there.

Groaning, Eren pulled one of the towels over his head, still as soft as when he first found them. Curling up under it, Eren tried his hardest to ignore the feeling. He closed his eyes tight, but even then there wasn’t much he could do.

The feeling didn’t grow though, which surprised Eren. Usually he had to fight by distracting himself to keep it quiet like this.

It made for a restless night. One where Eren would almost be asleep, only to wake up before he really could. And by the time morning came, Eren wasn’t really sure if he preferred it like that.

He nodded off almost anytime he could once he left the mansion for school. There were bags under his eyes that seemed more pronounced than before. And if physical appearance wasn’t enough to suggest he didn’t have a very good night, he was also lethargic to the point where he personally compared himself to a slug.

It was so obvious. The driver kept asking questions to keep him awake, which Eren appreciated. Mikasa, after clearly expressing her obvious disapproval of his state of being, got him an extra cup of coffee and viciously pinched his arm as many times as she could. Eren was going to have a mega bruise there tomorrow, he just knew it.

And the worst part was that everyone commented on it. Armin and Mikasa especially, considering they knew why he was so tired. They all suggested he go to the nurse to lie down or something, but he was determined to see this day through. He could sleep back at home. The driver would just have to come back later. He didn’t care what Levi or Carlton would say. He wanted sleep. Sleep…

Eren pinched his arm again, just like Mikasa had. He couldn’t sleep now. Later.

That method worked pretty well for his first two classes, and he could only hope that he could make it through this class too. English.

That was when Marco, who shared his English class, spoke up.

“Eren, are you really okay?” His voice emanated worry like a hot stove emanated heat. “You look like you’re about to drop dead.”

“Look, I’m all ready for college.” Eren’s poor attempt at a joke just sounded like the delirious slurs of a drunk, and they both knew it. Groaning, Eren sobered up his speech. “I just had a rough night. I’ll wake up soon enough.” He hoped.

Marco didn’t look convinced, in fact, he looked even more worried than he was before, but didn’t press it anymore. Eren almost wished that he would press more, if only because the talking was keeping Eren more awake.

The last time Eren had felt like this, he’d fallen asleep on Levi for the whole day. But that had been after… four? Four days without sleep. It hadn’t been that long yet… Had he just not gotten enough sleep beforehand to be able to make it another four days? Could he even make it through this class?

Another pinch.

He’d have to start pinching harder. He was getting used to the current level of pain they inflicted.

Their teacher came in not too much longer after. He didn’t listen to too much of what she said other than that they needed to get their books out. Eren stared at the cover of his, not really seeing it.
Eren jumped, his teacher’s copy of the book still sitting on his desk where his teacher had thwacked it with.

“I suggest you wake up, Eren,” she warned. Some of his classmates giggled. Others, if Eren had been looking, looked more concerned for Eren’s general wellbeing than they were entertained by it. “Open your book to Act I.”

Following the instructions, Eren put all of his effort into focusing on the words being spoken.

It had the opposite effect.

The more the tape recording spoke, since no one knew how to read Shakespeare, the more it sounded like Levi.

The classroom faded away, desks and chairs forming into bushes and flowers. Students turned to trees, tall with trails of sunlight like streamers flowing through the baby green leaves. And somewhere beside him was a soothing voice, deep and rough, but rumbling with a strange warmth that Eren couldn’t place. It spoke words he couldn’t understand, but he lost himself in them. The scenery turned black.

“Eren!”

“Levi!” a short, auburn haired woman called. “Your phone’s ringing.” She brought it over to Levi, who’d been tending to another coworker. The office around them buzzed with workers.

“Thank you.” He didn’t bother checking to see who was calling, a nasty habit he’d picked up from working fast paced. “Hello?”

“Levi? It’s Grisha. Can you head back to your home?”

“Go home? Why?”

“Something’s happened with Eren.”
Eren was warm. Very warm. And he didn’t remember having such a soft pillow.

Wait… Wasn’t he supposed to be in school?

Why did he have a pillow in school?

…

Why wasn’t he more concerned about the fact that he’d just fallen asleep in school?

Slowly, any sudden movements might alert his teacher to the fact that he’d been sleeping (if they hadn’t already figured it out), Eren peeked out through one open eye. Then, both eyes shot open in mortifying recognition.

He most definitely was not in school, and he was resting, not on a pillow, but someone’s torso. A remarkably well-toned and very familiar torso. His cheeks lit up as he realized just who he was cuddling and he gasped aloud.

“Finally awake?” Eren quickly detangled himself from Levi, who was watching him with a raised eyebrow as he closed his laptop. Eren frantically looked around, trying to figure out what exactly was going on.

Okay, so, first, he was sitting on Levi’s bed.

Second, he had been fast asleep on Levi’s bed.

Third, he had been cuddling Levi rather fondly on Levi’s bed.

Fourth, it was… (Eren spared a glance to the clock next to Levi’s bed) 4:47 in the afternoon. Well past when school was supposed to end.

Fifth, Levi was now expecting Eren to say something, anything, but Eren had no idea what to say. He didn’t even remember ever going to sleep! He hid his face in his hands, too embarrassed to even look at Levi.

“Hey,” Eren jumped and peered through the spaces in between his fingers. Levi’s face was a mix of confusion and worry. “Are you alright?” Eren took a deep breath to calm his nerves before
answering.

“H…How did I get here?”

“Don’t answer my question with another question.” Eren sighed, pulling his hands from his face.

“Yeah, I guess. I don’t know why I wouldn’t be.” He paused. “Well, other than the fact that I seem to have teleported from English class to your bed.” A weak laugh tumbled out of Eren pathetically. Levi wasn’t laughing.

“You were sent home sick after falling asleep in class.”

…That’s it? He fell asleep in class? If being rich and pampered meant being sent home sick for falling asleep in class, then he wasn’t sure how the rich managed to supposedly be so smart… or maybe that just explained all the dumb rich jokes.

“Hah… Are you serious?” Levi said nothing. “Why didn’t anyone just wake me up?”

“They tried. For at least an hour, too, from what your friends told me.” Oh no…

“… What?” Not again…

“Apparently, you fell asleep somewhere around your third period, and when your teacher noticed she tried to wake you up. The whole class supposedly tried to wake you up to no avail. It was then that your friend, Marco, carried you down to the nurse’s office and contacted your sister. They called your father, who then called me to let me know. In order to keep the engagement a secret, your mother picked you up and dropped you off here. You’ve been asleep ever since.”

Eren frowned and dropped his gaze to the bed, trying to process it all. Falling asleep in class he understood and was not exactly unexpected. He should have known better than to think he could make it through the day (but it still hadn’t stopped him from trying). But not being able to wake up? That was a little weird since Mikasa almost always had some trick up her sleeve for waking him up when it got that bad. He must have really been out of it then, although that was more understandable than he’d really liked to admit.

But, that still didn’t explain why he was on Levi’s bed.

“Actually,” Eren brought his attention back to Levi, who was staring thoughtfully at the laptop in his lap. “There was one point where you woke up for a bit.” There was a small pause. “It was right after I placed you in your… pile of pillows, which I will expect an explanation for. As soon as I placed you down on your bed, you started to toss and turn. Then, as I was about to shut the door, you… woke up.”

Eren was entranced by Levi’s words. It was like hearing about what you did under hypnosis.

“I don’t remember that…” he muttered, almost to himself.

“I doubt you would. I don’t think you were really awake.”

“Did I… do anything?” He was almost scared to ask. No, scratch that, he was scared to ask. Levi shook his head.

“Not really. You fell out of the pile and said “Don’t leave me. I’m going to suffocate.”” He turned to Eren sharply and studied him closely with narrow eyes. “Do you know what that means?” Eren tried his hardest to keep his facial expressions under control. Of course he knew what it meant.
That was usually how he described the feelings he got around the mansion, the difficulty with breathing was just one of the symptoms. But he shook his head, feigning innocence.

“Not at all.” Levi continued to study Eren for a few more moments, and let out a small, almost nonexistent, sigh. He knew Eren was lying, but like usual, tried not to pry too much.

“Alright…”

“Did I… do anything after that?”

“I went back to you to see what was wrong and you latched on like a fucking leech. I held you up a bit but you went back to sleep. I couldn’t get you to let go so,” he shrugged, “I just brought you back to my bed. I figured if I had to deal with you sleeping on me again, I might as well be on my own bed.”

“Oh… right…” He’d fallen asleep on Levi like that before. “Heh… I’ve really got to stop doing that, huh?” Eren had meant it like a joke, but Levi didn’t seem to get it.

“That’s right…” Levi mumbled to himself. “And that time it was also impossible to wake you up…” Suddenly, Eren found himself face to face with, and very close to, Levi, who had a tight grip on both of Eren’s shoulders.

“Levi! Wha-”

“Are you sure everything is alright?” Levi demanded, fierce grey piercing into startled green. “Are you absolutely sure?” Are you absolutely sure you don’t want to tell me what’s wrong? Levi didn’t need to say that part out loud. Eren understood that that’s what he meant. Eren held up one hand in defense, the other went to rubbing the base of his neck.

“I’m sure! Everything’s fine! I swear!” Yes, I’m sure. Stop worrying. Eren gently grasped Levi’s hand, pulling it off of his shirt. “But, I think I’ve bothered you enough for one day, so, now that I’m awake, I’m gonna go…”

With that, Eren darted out of the room without looking back. He ran straight to his room and shut the door. It probably wasn’t the best way to leave the situation. In fact, it was probably the worst way. But what about this situation wasn’t the worst? If he didn’t get this whole sleeping problem under control and soon, Levi would start taking matters into his own hands… that is, if he wasn’t going to already…

Eren sank down to the carpeted floor of his room, clutching the fabric over his racing heart.

How was he going to face Levi now?

First thing was first, though. Eren had to call Mikasa.

He grabbed his phone, rushing to press the buttons.

There were about a dozen missed calls and even more text messages.

Mikasa… Marco… Mikasa… Armin… Marco… Mikasa… Mikasa… Jean… Mikasa… Christa…
The list continued. Eren was not looking forward to explaining everything to them… Still, he had to call Mikasa, the one who was most concerned. Armin and Marco would be next, and then he’d text everyone else. He’d tell Mikasa and Armin the truth, of course, but he’d tone down the seriousness of it all to everyone else. He didn’t want everyone to worry, and even if that wasn’t a force keeping Eren from telling them, he still wouldn’t due to the fact that he’d have to go into
detail in explaining why. And that wasn’t a path he wanted to take just yet. Maybe one day.

And that wasn’t his only problem.

Levi wasn’t talking to him.

Throughout the rest of the night after that last awkward conversation, Levi kept to himself. He’d barely even acknowledged Eren at dinner.

This must have been what it felt like when Eren refused to talk to Levi, and now that the tables have turned Eren felt even guiltier about his previous behavior. Levi was upset with Eren, and even though Eren knew how to fix it, he couldn’t. Fixing it would mean telling Levi, and Eren wasn’t ready yet. Eren could only hope that things would blow over soon enough.

Until then, Eren would have to be even more careful around Levi. He had to really pretend that nothing was wrong and get as much sleep as he could in between school and his nights at the mansion. Maybe if he had the driver take him to his house earlier in the morning... That could easily give him at least an hour of sleep... And after school he could be picked up later. Another three hours...

Eren spent that night contemplating how much extra sleep he could get out of the mansion. He’d given up on actually trying to fall asleep (because his extra-long nap earlier today was proof that trying to sleep at night was a bad idea) and instead did what he usually did. Distract himself.

At 3:30 in the morning that night, Eren sat on his pillow throne (another thing Eren was hoping he wouldn’t have to explain), where he usually sat, writing in his now half full notebook. He would have gotten on his computer, but the inspiration he couldn’t ignore hit him.

Without warning, his bedroom door slammed open, making Eren jolt, nearly throwing his notebook across the room in shock. He gripped his heart and stared at Levi, dressed in all his pajama glory, in the doorway.

“Jesus fucking Christ, Levi! What the hell?! Like seriously, what the actual fuck?! Are you trying to give me a heart attack at the ripe old age of 18?!”

Levi glared. “Why the fuck are you still awake?” he demanded.

Eren faltered. “Excuse me?”

“Why. The fuck. Are you still awake?” Levi growled, growing impatient. Shit, looks like Levi decided to take matters into his own hands sooner than expected. And he was pissed about it too.

Eren didn’t know how to respond. “Uh... Because... High schoolers like staying up late?” That was a good excuse right? Now if only he hadn’t hesitated in the beginning.

“Yeah, well normal high schoolers don’t fall asleep in class and fail to wake up for six hours straight.” Well, shit.

“Well, w-what do you want me to say?” Eren was quickly losing control of the situation.

“How about the truth!” Levi yelled. “That seems like a good place to start!” Eren glared back, though it was fairly weak.

“Well, maybe this is the truth.” A state of puzzlement crossed Levi’s face.
“… What? What the hell do you mean by that?” he questioned.

“You know, maybe me staying up late and falling asleep in class is just normal for me? Did you ever think of that?” Eren responded, hoping that sounded believable enough, hoping that Levi would buy it and leave it alone. Levi scowled at Eren.

“Yeah, I did.” Fuck. “But then I thought about how everyone was so shocked and concerned about you and realized that if this was normal, they wouldn’t be shocked. Including you.” Levi jabbed an accusing finger at Eren.

Eren gaped at the finger, not wanting to look directly into Levi’s fierce eyes. He couldn’t think of anything to say, anything that could help him.

Levi took a deep breath, trying to calm himself down and pinched the bridge of his nose. Eren’s gaze broke from the finger that had just change positions and stared at his lap. Levi continued.

“Something is wrong, Eren, and I know that. Hell, you know that I know that. I know you do. And I also know that you don’t want to tell me, which I respected. But, this has gone too far. Whatever is wrong is hurting you! Whatever is wrong is clearly taking a toll on your body! You can’t keep doing this to yourself!” Levi was desperate, half yelling half begging. “Tell me. Maybe I can help.”

“You can’t help me,” Eren insisted, his voice shaking.

“Tell me,” Levi reiterated even stronger than before but still holding an air of gentleness.

“It won’t make a difference.” Eren’s voice shook harder, and he wasn’t sure if it was from the tears or the outburst that was bound to happen.

“You don’t know that.”

“I can’t…” It was getting closer now.

“Eren, our relationship doesn’t work if we keep secrets like this. You know that.”

“I…”

“Eren. Why are you still awake? Why aren’t you asleep?”

There it was. “Because I can’t!” Eren screamed, feeling the words rip his throat as they flew out. “I can’t fucking sleeping in this goddamn mansion! I haven’t been able to since day one! This whole last week has been hell for me! The walls close in on me, everything gets darker, and I can’t breathe. It’s suffocating…” Levi’s eye lit up in recognition. “I feel it every minute that I’m here and it keeps me up at night and torments me during the day. Even now…” Eren was whimpering by the end, his face buried and hidden in his hands. He gasped as he tried to regain his breath, tears flowing freely, but not sobbing.

“Why didn’t you tell anyone?” Levi was aghast. Eren had been dealing with something like this and kept it to himself all this time?

“Do you really think anyone would believe me?” Eren’s voice cracked shakily. “My only purpose in life was to get married, and I spent every moment of it until now trying to fight it in any way I could. How could anyone not see this all as some kind of plot to break the engagement?”

Levi was reminded of what Eren’s father had said that day under the tree. Knowing my son… I can’t help but feel this might just be another way for him to weasel his was out of this marriage. “I see your point… But still, this is hurting your body! You should have told someone sooner!”
“I only thought I had to deal with it for a week. I… I thought if I could just make it through the week… just one week… then I could go home and act like nothing happened and no one would be the wiser. And then… And then I find out I have to stay here for another three weeks… I… I can’t not sleep for three weeks, Levi! But… I still couldn’t tell anyone because… I’d just fought with you and… no one would believe me…”

“Why can’t you sleep?”

“Isn’t it obvious?” Eren half scoffed half sobbed. “I don’t belong here. Nothing about me fits here. I’m in a completely different world! I go to public school! I spent my days at the arcade or getting in a fight! No one even knows I’m the heir to this super rich and successful company. I was never taught how to act perfect and polished for fancy parties and the press. I don’t have this refined, classy air about me that apparently all rich people are supposed to have. And it shows. Hell, the fucking staff here act more sophisticated than me! I… I’m so lost…” Eren felt like he was going to panic. The more he talked, the closer the walls seemed to get, the darker the room got despite the light being on. The air got thicker, threatening to choke him if he didn’t leave. It was bad enough just thinking about his problems, but voicing them only made them that much worse, that much more real.

“It’s true.” Levi agreed with Eren, never missing a beat. “You don’t act like most of the people I have to meet. You are rude and loud. You have no filter for any given situation so you’ll speak your mind regardless of what the consequences are or what others will think of you. You are unsophisticated, unrefined, uncivilized, boorish, crass, vulgar, dense, and just about every other variation of those words. You are everything this “world” I’m in hates.” Eren was most definitely not amused.

“Gee, thanks,” he deadpanned.

“But, I don’t care. There is no possible way for me to care any less than I do now. Because you’re so much more than that. You’re friendly, passionate, caring. You’re honest and adventurous and when you smile, it’s always with this smile like someone’s just offered you the world. It’s so bright and cheerful it puts the summer sun to shame.”

To hell with anyone who said that Levi wasn’t charming as fuck. If their current topic wasn’t so heavy, Eren might have better noticed how hard his heart was fluttering at Levi’s words.

Levi finally moved from Eren’s door, maneuvering himself over to Eren and kneeling down in front of him. “And you know what? You don’t have to fit in to my world, just like I don’t have to fit in to yours. We can create a world of our own. Our own little kingdom. Just you and me. Because I still like you, good and bad qualities and all.”

And all of a sudden, everything around Levi snapped back into place. The walls returned back to their original positions, the light around him seemed to grow, and the air thinned out, making breathing a whole lot easier. Eren had the sudden urge to reach out to him, pull him close and never let go.

He settled for bowing his head, hiding it from view as he weakly laughed out, “You’re not allowed to say things like that.”

“Oh? Why not?”

“Because,” Eren’s laughs mixed with his sobs, “you’re supposed to be a douchebag… I’m supposed to hate you for all eternity remember?”
“Hey.” Levi reached out, placing his fingers under Eren’s chin and lifting his head up so they were face to face. Eren’s cheeks and eyes were red and puffy from crying, but a small smile graced his face nonetheless. “Sleep with me.”

“What?!” Eren pushed Levi away, kicking his shoulder in the process, and crawled back in his pillow throne as far as he could, mortified beyond belief (but surprisingly not disgusted).

“I meant sleep in my bed,” Levi gritted out, rubbing his wounded shoulder.

“O-Oh…” Eren relaxed, still embarrassed but for different reasons. “Why?”

“You’ve never had a problem sleeping while I’m around. I don’t know why, but I figured we could use that to your advantage.”

“Makes sense… but… are you sure you’d want to share a bed with me? I mean… isn’t that a little… you know…?”

“It’s fine, I don’t mind. After all, I’ve already had to do it twice.” Levi stood, making his way to the door. “But,” he paused, “I don’t need you stealing the covers on me, got it?” Eren nodded. It wasn’t something he could really help, but oh well. “Alright, get changed then, and I’ll see you in a few minutes.” The door shut, and Eren was alone.

He couldn’t tell if this was a good idea, but he didn’t care. He’d regret it in the morning, but at least he wouldn’t be as tired. It had been a long time since Eren last put on pajamas. Never has his simple sweats and t-shirt been so comfortable.

Eren didn’t even look back as he ditched the mess of his room, turning off the light and shutting the door in the process.

Levi’s room was still dark so it took a few moments for Eren to adjust. When he did, he wobbled his way over to Levi’s bed. His nerves started acting up, reminding him exactly of what he was going to do.

But they were just using the same bed, right? It’s not like they were gonna cuddle or… anything more…

Levi, already lying down in bed, patted the other side. “Come on.”

Eren pulled back the sheets and sat down, testing the mattress. It was pretty soft. He tucked himself in, back facing Levi and curled up into a small ball.

This would be good.

So, he closed his eyes. After waiting for a few minutes, Eren wanted to cry.

It was still there. Only… different. It wasn’t coming from inside of Eren anymore. It was like he could feel that horrible sensation swirling around in the air just outside the door.

Eren opened his eyes. There was a familiar darkness slithering under the door of Levi’s room.

Subconsciously, Eren began moving back, away from the black mass. That is, until his back hit Levi’s.

Immediately, Levi spun around and wrapped one of his arms over Eren, finding one of his hands with his own and intertwining them. He pulled Eren close.
“I’m here. It’s just us, Eren.”

The mass dissipated, like it had never been there to begin with.

Relaxing, Eren snuggled back into Levi’s body.

Clutching Levi’s hand back, Eren succumbed to sleep.

When Eren finally stirred awake, he almost didn’t want to get up. He was so comfy and couldn’t remember the last time he’d slept that well. Without moving too much, Eren peeked out from underneath sleepy eyelids, and he his heart sped up a bit. One of his arms was thrown lazily over Levi’s lap as he laid flat on his stomach. He was so close to Levi that his head was resting on Levi’s pillow… while Levi was still using it. A smell that was purely Levi filled his nose. Not an unpleasant smell at all.

Levi was typing away at his laptop. Careful not to snoop too much, Eren noted that Levi was answering emails. He was fully dressed and sitting atop the covers, leaning against his pillows enough so that he was comfortable sitting up but also so that Eren could still rest his head on them without bending his neck at an awkward angle. A small thought whispered to Eren about how good Levi looked in that crisp button up, and Eren had to agree. Especially with the top buttons undone. He might as well have been a magazine model. A tie rested over on the night stand which caused guilt to swell up inside Eren.

Levi was probably late for work.

Eren shifted around, trying to determine how easily it would be for him to detangle himself from Levi’s sheets.

“How are you feeling?” Levi asked, pausing in his typing. Eren, in response, buried his face where Levi’s back met his pillow, mumbling something unintelligible. Levi elbowed Eren. “I can’t hear you.”

“Embarrassed,” Eren said, lifting his head up slightly for Levi to hear.

“Well you’d better get used to it.”

“Used to it?” Eren pushed himself back, resting on his elbows to better see Levi. “What do you mean?”

“You don’t honestly think this was a one-time thing, do you? I’m not letting you go back to whatever you had planned before because it obviously wasn’t working.”

“I… I don’t need you to help me. I appreciate what you did last night, but I really need to be able to handle this on my own.” It was a convincing argument… too bad Eren was only using it as a cover for the real reason as to why he didn’t want to sleep with Levi.

“And what if you can’t? You can’t ask me to stand by and watch as you dig yourself deeper into your own damn grave.”

“I’m not going to kill myself from lack of sleep.”

“You could.”
“Besides… I’d be sleeping in your bed every night… Your bed… That’s… I mean… Aren’t you…”

“What? Why are you so opposed to sleeping in the same bed with me?”

“Be-Because we… we cuddle. People who like each other share beds and cuddle.”

“I like you.”

“I mean more than that. More…” “I wanna kiss you” like.”

Levi leaned forward, the palm of his hand caressing the side of Eren’s face. Grey bore into green.
“I already told you, I don’t mind. I would rather have to deal with the horrors of cuddling you than watch your body degenerate in front of me.”

Eren was finding hard to breath, and for once it wasn’t because of the mansion. “O-Okay…” he stuttered, unable to form any other words more complex than that because damn that man’s hand felt really good against his skin. And he was so close… too close.

Regaining his senses, Eren leaned back and away from the distracting sensation. “I… I should get ready for…” he trailed off, openly gaping at the clock on the nightstand.

A clock that clearly read 12:18 pm.

“Holy shit! I’m late! I’m-” Eren began scrambling off the bed, nearly making it before a harsh yank on his shirt threw him back. He bounced on his back at the force with which he was thrown and stared, confused, at Levi.

“I already called you in sick,” Levi explained calmly. He’d already gotten used to Eren’s sudden reactions. “You should take a day to rest after missing so much sleep, and I doubt your teachers can argue against that.”

“It’s not my teachers I’m worried about.” Eren rubbed at his neck, sore from where the shirt had dug into it. “Make up work is going to be a bitch, though…”

“Oh? What are you worried about then?”

“My friends,” Eren exhaled. “They tend to worry about me a lot.”

“Would the nickname “suicidal bastard” have anything to do with that?”

“They told you that too?” Eren wasn’t really upset about that. He’d almost expected Levi to know actually.

“I only just remembered, but yes.”

Eren twisted his face in disappointment. He didn’t care that Levi knew but… “You know so much about me but… I feel like I know nothing about you…”

Levi raised his eyebrows at the statement, probably not expecting that. “What do you want to know?”

“I don’t know, everything? You found out all this stuff about me from my friend so… How about I ask your friends?”

“No.” He didn’t even think about it.
“Why not?” Eren whined. “It’s only fair, right?”

“Eren, I’m doing this entirely for your own good. The later you have that conversation the better. My friends are… an interesting group…”

“That just makes me want to meet them more!”

“Just trust me on this, Eren. Besides, talking to them now would only distract them from their work.”

“Work!” Eren gasped out. “You’re missing work!”

“Yes,” Levi said. “I am.”

“You… you should go to work!” Eren cried out in a rush. “You already missed a week because of me.”

“Could you fall asleep in here if I was at work?” Levi asked.

Eren furrowed his brow. “… What?”

“The only reason I’m missing work right now is to make sure you get some sleep.” Great, now Eren felt even guiltier. “If you don’t think you need me here, then I’ll go.”

“I… I’m sure it’ll be fine.” It had to be. Eren didn’t want to be the reason for whatever problems may arise from Levi missing work.

“Eren…” It was a stern warning.

“Well, I don’t know,” Eren shrugged in frustration. “I’ve never tried to sleep alone in your room before.”

“Then I’ll stay.” Levi settled back into the pillows. “I can work from home well enough and it’ll give me time to come up with some story to feed Hanji and Erwin tomorrow.”

“Levi, please,” Eren moaned, helplessly grabbing on to Levi’s arm. “I don’t want to keep you from your job. You hate missing work.”

“And you thought you didn’t know anything about me,” Levi smirked proudly.

“Levi…”

“Eren, I missed work for a week. One more day isn’t going to kill me. Just try to get some more rest. And if you’re not too scared we can even…” he gasped sarcastically, “… cuddle…”

Eren threw a pillow right at Levi’s head, almost hitting the mark had Levi not held up an arm in defense. “You’re an asshole.” Levi laughed once, and turned back to his laptop, reading over the new emails he’d just received. “I’m…” Eren started, thinking about what he should do now that he was awake. “I should go text my friends, let them know I’m alright. Unless you took care of that too.”

“I don’t have any of your friend’s numbers. I called your mother, so I’m assuming she told your sister, but that’s it.”

“Okay.”
Eren hopped out of bed and strolled out of Levi’s room and into his. His phone laid next to his notebook on the floor where both had been left last night. Once again, Eren had numerous text messages. Rather than texting out a dozen individual replies, he sent out a group text informing everyone that he was resting from the day before and that he’d be back in school tomorrow.

Turning to leave, Eren quickly ran through a list of any other items he’d want to bring back to bed with him. He doubted Levi would let him leave bed for too long today after all.

… Dear god that sounded horrible.

Eren tried to keep his thoughts clean as he grabbed his phone, notebook, and laptop.

When Eren returned, he found two plates of food and Levi waiting for him.

“On no,” Levi said as soon as Eren entered the room. “Go put that computer back. You’re supposed to be resting.”

“I can’t sleep all day, Levi.” Eren dropped his stuff on the bed, letting it bounce. “As great as it sounds, I’ll go stark raving mad if I have to endure that.”

“At least find something useful to do.” Levi had to resist kicking the laptop off. It wouldn’t do to break Eren’s computer. “Don’t you have homework?”

Eren’s eyes lit up. “Oh! Right!” He quickly dashed out of the room, and returned with a book in his hands. “We’re reading Hamlet in class.”

“You mean the book you fell asleep to only a couple sentences in to?”

“Yup. Twice.” Eren moved his other entertainment to the nightstand on his side of the bed, the one that was mostly empty. Levi must not sleep on that side very much.

“Twice?”

“Uh huh.” Eren jumped back onto the bed, snuggling under the covers. “We had just started reading it in class when I fell asleep yesterday.”

“I don’t blame you. Hamlet is a pretty boring little bitch.”

“I guess so. So since you want me to rest so badly, I figured this could put me right back to sleep.”

“Good plan.”

Eren leaned back on the set of pillows that was supposed to be his, a good couple of feet in between him and Levi. As comfy as Levi was, there was no friendly way to snuggle up against your fiancé. There shouldn’t even be a way to friendly sleep with your fiancé either, but Eren and Levi were apparently trying to pull it off. If they ended up as more than friends in the future, that would be proof to Eren that none of what was happening now was purely out of friendship and caring.

But that was enough of those kinds of thoughts. Now it was time to put all of his attention into trying to understand what the hell these guys were saying.

Shakespeare was annoying.

Eren’s plans to bore himself to sleep failed miserably. After half an hour he was no closer to sleep because he was too distracted by his confusion. He kept flipping back and forth between the pages
of the first couple of scenes, not understanding anything that was going on. Eren never realized just how much he’d relied on his teachers to provide him with the meanings behind the words in class.

But Levi had read it right…?

Eren sighed in defeat, scooting closer to Levi so that he was resting his head on Levi’s arm. “Do you… know what’s going on here? I’m lost…” He held out the book for Levi to see.

Levi was simultaneously shocked and pleased. Eren was asking him for help? And willingly staying close to him? Levi smiled inwardly. He may hate Hamlet with a passion but he’d suffer through it.

Because believe it or not, Levi liked Eren.

In a “he wanted to kiss him” kind of way.
The next morning, Eren was bombarded with questions concerning the last two days from his friends. Why did he fall asleep in class that day? Why was he so tired? Why didn’t he show up yesterday? He gave them half truths about what happened, blatantly sidestepping around the parts where he used Levi as a pillow and just how bad his situation had really been. He even skimmed over the truth with Mikasa and Armin.

He didn’t think they fully believed him, but they stopped asking questions.

Over the next few days, Eren tried his hardest to adjust to sleeping with Levi. They’d moved his suitcases into Levi’s room which prompted a conversation concerning pillow thrones and Eren trying to justify his love for those soft towels.

Carlton suspected nothing. Levi knew that his father wouldn’t agree with Eren sleeping in his room, let alone his bed. Before, Levi wouldn’t have cared if his father found out about Eren sleeping in his bed. Carlton would have huffed a bit, but wouldn’t have done anything. Now, however, he was much more… parental than before. Levi wasn’t sure what his father would do if he found out. So they both laid low and tired their hardest to keep Carlton from finding out.

It wouldn’t be too difficult since Carlton hardly ever traveled anywhere near their rooms, but they couldn’t let their guards down. One surprise visit could ruin everything.

And after the first couple of days, Eren didn’t want that to be ruined.

The idea that he was sleeping with Levi was quickly becoming less of a problem.

Not constantly feeling tired was the best feeling in the world. Eren had a renewed energy during the day that had been missing. There was still a ways to go before Eren was perfectly back to normal, but he wasn’t sleeping in class anymore at least, much to the relief of his teachers.

Make up work wasn’t as big of a problem for Eren either, also to the relief of his teachers. Eren didn’t often need help with homework in general, and when he did it was mostly with Hamlet, but Levi would always be there to lend a hand if things got tough. Even if he was still a bit rusty on some things given that he’d graduated college four years ago and high school eight years ago.

Levi had actually forgotten just how mundane and ridiculous most of the assignments were back in high school. This often led to Levi complaining about the assignment (that wasn’t even his) and adding comments like:

“Why the hell would you have to do that?”

“That’s stupid.”
“There is no point to this.”

“They don’t even do this in college! What the hell?”

“I can guarantee that this will never show up in real life.”

Which is what he was currently doing now.

“Levi, not that I don’t one hundred percent agree with you but… why are you so worked up?” Eren was giggling, trying to pry his homework from Levi’s hands.

“Because they’re forcing you to do useless garbage!” Levi reluctantly handed over Eren’s homework, glaring at the offending work. “You could be doing a lot more relevant and important things instead of this.”

“Well this new movie did come out-”

“What part about “relevant and important” did you miss?”

“Movies are relevant and important to me!” Eren defended, leaning back against his pillows to continue his homework.

Even though Levi had a desk and couch, which would have been better for working, they spent most of their time on the bed. After Levi got Eren to agree to sleep in his bed at night, they wound up spending their evenings curled up in bed too, so if Eren ever felt the need to sleep, he could. They spent a couple days outside as well, but only if it was warm and dry enough.

They sat in an easy silence as Eren worked for a while before Levi’s phone buzzed. He picked it up, confused, and Eren watched on curiously as Levi squinted at his screen.

“Surprise…?” Eren read faintly, getting a peek at Levi’s phone. A flash of horrified recognition sparked in Levi’s eyes, but only for barely a second as not a moment later there was a loud series of bangs at Levi’s door that startled both of them.

“Shit,” Levi swore. A long and rather impressively extensive vocabulary of curses followed after. Each one louder than the last until finally Levi was outright screaming, “I’m going to kill you fucking bastards!” probably with every intention of making sure whoever was outside hear. Giggles came from the door. They’d heard.

“Levi, who-”

“Shh!” Levi clamped his hand over Eren’s mouth, whispering quietly. “They don’t know you’re in here, there’s still time to hide you.” He pulled Eren from the bed, looking around wildly and quickly. Eren was thoroughly confused.


“My worst nightmare.” Finally deciding on where to hide Eren, Levi started shoving him in the direction of his walk-in closet in his bathroom. He shoved Eren in not too gracefully. “Stay in there, don’t make a sound, and for the love of all that is good do not let them find you.” And Levi shut the door, leaving Eren confused and stuck in a dark closet.

Eren almost screamed.
Back outside, Levi threw his bedroom doors open. Glaring daggers would be putting it mildly. Hanji and Erwin grinned in response.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing?” Levi gritted out, holding onto the door with white knuckles.

“We haven’t visited you in a while!” Hanji’s voice was sweet, dripping with fake innocence. “We thought we’d stop by.”

“And since your fiancé isn’t here anymore we figured there’d be no problem,” Erwin said, voice laced with his own brand of sugar.

“You both know perfectly well that he’s supposed to stay here for another couple of weeks. I believe I told you that earlier this week.”

“Oh, did you?” Erwin gasped, covering his open mouth in fake shock.

Hanji laughed, waving a hand around. “It completely slipped our minds!” Bullshit. “So where is he?” Down to business at last.

“Hanging out with friends.”

“Then whose backpack is that on your bed?”

“His. I was helping him with his homework before he left.”

“Well, if he’s not here then why were you making such a commotion?”

“You know damn well why!”

“Because he’s really here hiding in your room?” Hanji guessed hopefully.

“No!” Levi yelled. “Because he could have been here and you bastards barged in after I told you to stay away!”

“Honestly, why are you so against us meeting him?”

“Because I know exactly how you’re going to act once you meet him and the weeks after.”

“It’s not healthy to run away from your problems,” Erwin advised.

“Now seriously, where is he? I know he’s in here.” Hanji pushed past Levi and Erwin followed suit right after.

“He’s not here,” Levi tried. There had to be something he could say to convince them.

Hanji rolled her eyes. “Yeah right, you liar.” She kneeled down, checking under the bed, moving over to check the curtains, under the couch, behind the doors. She even check the clear-walled shower. What was she expecting with that last one? Even so, she was getting worryingly closer to Eren.

“Hanji, seriously, what makes you think I’d shove him in my closet?” Other than the fact that that’s exactly what happened. Though, Levi had to commend himself for keeping his voice so even this whole time. It was to be expected since he was raised to keep his cool under pressure, but unlike business partners or the media, Hanji knew him a lot better. Even the slightest waiver would alert her.
“It’s exactly what you’d do!” Fuck Hanji for knowing him so well.

“He’s not in there!” Levi stressed. “You’re wasting your time!”

“Why do you care if I’m wasting my time?” Her hand grasped the handle of the closet door.

“Because you’re wasting my time as well!”

“What’s the harm in checking, Levi?” Erwin asked, shrugging. “If he’s not there then you have nothing to worry about.”

“And if he is then you had this coming!” Hanji threw open the door with a maniacal laugh and…

No Eren.

Levi, who’d been internally bracing himself for the worst, felt as if he’s stepping into an alternate universe. He wasn’t going to argue that Eren should have been in there, obviously, but how the hell did Eren manage to hide himself from Hanji in there? Not even Levi had been able to, and he was a damn good hider, or he liked to think so.

“See?” Levi didn’t miss a beat, expertly keeping his shock under control. “He’s not here.” And once his two friends left, he’d grill Eren on his skill at hiding from Hanji.

“But… But…” Hanji whimpered, desperately flipping through the clothes on the hangers. “I’m never wrong about these things…” Erwin gently guided her out of the closet, patting her shoulder comfortably.

“First time for everything,” Levi stated curtly. “Now did you actually have something important to discuss with me, or was ambushing my fiancé the only reason you came?”

“We just wanted to ambush your fiancé,” Erwin admitted, still consoling a distraught Hanji.

“Well then, if you two are done wasting my time-”

“Levi?”

Oh no.

That couldn’t be…

Eren poked his head through the doorway of the bathroom. “I heard a bunch of noise over here, is everything al- oh! You have friends over!”

Levi was in between murdering Eren with his eyes and trying to understand how in the hell Eren ended up walking into the bathroom from the bedroom when the little shit was supposed to be in the closet. There was only one entrance to the closet which was through the bathroom. So either Eren was stealthy enough to slip past Hanji, Erwin, and Levi or he was really a ghost and walked through the walls. And given how diligent and observant Erwin and especially Hanji were, it was more likely he was a ghost.

Eren, obviously finding Levi’s expression hysterical, hid his grin by disguising it as a polite smile. “Hi, I’m Eren.” He extended his hand in a warm greeting.

Great… even after sneaking past Levi’s friends, Eren still decided to screw Levi over and introduce himself.
The expressions on his friends’ faces made Levi want to shoot himself. They were excited, smug, and promised an endless amount of teasing for Levi. Hanji was the first to react, getting over her bout of self-pity real quick.

She shot up and firmly grasped Eren’s waiting hand. “I’m Hanji and that’s Erwin! We’re Levi’s closest friends! You’re his fiancé right?!” The sentences were fired like a machine gun, but they didn’t phase Eren.

He nodded eagerly. “I am.”

Hanji cheered victoriously before throwing her arms around Eren and pulling him close. She spun around a couple times and Eren had trouble keeping his footing. He sent a slightly panicked glance towards Levi, but Levi merely shook his head.

“Oh my god!” Hanji squealed. “He is such a little cutie! Levi, you horrible old grouch, you can’t have him!” She twisted them around so she was in between Eren and Levi, protectively stroking Eren’s hair and squinting suspiciously at Levi. “You don’t deserve him…”

“Eren, aren’t you supposed to be with your friends?” Levi’s mouth was a hard line and he glared at Eren.

Eren laughed nervously and pried himself from Hanji. “No,” he answered, playing along. “I’m hanging out with them tomorrow. I already told you that, Levi.” Eren raised his eyebrows, daring Levi to argue and blow the whole cover.

Levi sighed, and asked in a defeated voice, even though he already knew the answer, “So I’m guessing there’s no way I’ll be able to kick you two out, huh?”

Hanji and Erwin didn’t even waste time glancing at each other before they burst out laughing.

Levi ground his teeth together and growled out, “So, Eren, why don’t we go get some snacks for our guests?” Translation: we need to talk. Eren nodded, still smiling even though he knew what was about to come, and they left their laughing guests in the bathroom. Once out of earshot, they started their talk.

“Eren, how the hell-”

“Did you know,” Eren cut in matter-of-factly, “that there is a ventilation shaft that connects your closet and what used to be mine? I just found that out. I thought it was very interesting.”

Levi stopped dead in his tracks. “You… climbed through the ventilation…”

“And you said movies weren’t important,” Eren laughed out, continuing on down the stairs.

Levi couldn’t believe it. “You climbed through the vents because of a movie?!” he shrieked quietly, keeping in mind that Hanji and Erwin might hear him if he screamed too loudly. “And then continued to fucking introduce yourself to my friends as if nothing happened?!”

“Reality TV show actually, but they still use that little trick in movies too. I didn’t think it would actually work. So…” Eren paused, tapping a finger against his chin as he thought, before grinning broadly. “Yes. To both.”

“Eren, you idiot!” Levi smacked Eren on the head. Not hard enough to really hurt but hard enough to get the message across. “You could have hurt yourself! Not to mention you just screwed me over with that little trick of yours!”
“How in the hell did I screw you over by climbing through the vents? If anything, I did you a favor.”

“Yeah, and then you waltzed into my room to talk to my friends! Why the hell did you do that?! I’ll never hear the end of it!”

Eren leaned in close, half serious. “I don’t like being shoved into closets without a reason.”

They glared at each other for a moment, before Levi caved. “Fine. But just remember, you brought this on yourself!”

Their journey for snacks resumed. Once they were down by the kitchen, Levi poked his head through the door and demanded snacks, he didn’t care what kind. Easy ones so that the two chefs in there wouldn’t be too overwhelmed.

“You know,” Eren began thoughtfully after Levi came back. He was shoeless, yet again, in the ballroom, mindlessly shuffling around. “What I find interesting is how out of the two things I did in that situation, you’re more concerned about your friends meeting me.”

“If you knew them like I did, you’d understand.” Levi considered doing the same, but with friends upstairs and snacks being made, he figured that he’d rather just wait and watch Eren.

“What is so wrong with your friends?” Eren scrunched up his face, partly from confusion and partly from concentration at trying not to fall. “They seem really nice.”

“They’re just…” Levi sighed and shook his head, leaning against the wall. “You’ll find out. Did Hanji not give you any hints, though?”

“She was just happy to finally meet me right?” Eren looked to Levi and tilted his head curiously, reminding Levi of a puppy with his wide, innocent eyes. Innocence that would no doubt be ruined by Hanji or even Erwin at one point or the other.

“That’s how she usually acts. Always yelling, won’t stop talking, and has no definition for personal boundaries.”

“Wow…” Eren smiled wide. “How are you friends with her again? She’s the exact opposite of you!” Levi’s heart tried not to flutter at Eren’s mirthful laugh. It failed.

“I ask myself that every day.”

Chef Hannes came out then with a couple bowls filled with various chips and snack type food and some drinks. Levi grabbed the bowls leaving Eren with the drinks, and they headed back upstairs calling out a thank you back towards the chef.

“By the way,” Levi asked when they reached the stairs. “If your only objective was to fuck me over, why didn’t you just walk out of the closet?”

This time, Eren was the one who stopped on the stairs. He fidgeted a bit. “I… um… didn’t want them finding out about… us… and the whole sleeping thing…” A bashful blush graced his cheeks.

“We could have just said I was helping you with your homework. They wouldn’t have found out about it just because you were in my room,” Levi said softly.

Eren shrugged off his embarrassment, knowing Levi was right. “Well… it also just seemed like the better option at the time.”
Levi rolled his eyes at that, starting back upstairs. “The fact that you would choose the more difficult of the two options doesn’t surprise me. The only reason why you should choose climbing through the vents versus walking out the door is when there are ravenous wolves outside…” He hummed in light realization. “Oh, so I guess what you did was the better option.”

“I bet you anything I’m going to end up loving your friends,” Eren teased.

“If that happens then I’ll shoot myself because like hell if I’m gonna be outnumbered by you psycho bastards.”

When they got back to Levi’s room, they found that Hanji had taken over the bed, lounging on her back, while Erwin had chosen to rest on the couch in a much more… polite manner. Hanji straightened at the sight of food, though. Levi, knowing that Hanji was the only reason he’d brought food up (otherwise she’d complain the entire time about the lack of food), immediately brought the snacks over to her.

Eren set the drinks on the table by the couch.

“Hello, Eren,” Erwin greeted, extending a hand once the drinks were out of Eren’s hands. “As Hanji said earlier, I’m Erwin. It’s nice to meet you.” Eren stole a quick glance over to Hanji who’d stolen Levi, then he smiled at Erwin. If he was going to meet both of them, why not Erwin first? Hanji was clearly occupied. Besides, this was the perfect chance! He was talking to his best friend’s idol! If Eren couldn’t build up Armin in the eyes of his own fucking idol, than what kind of friend was he?

“Oh, I know who you are,” Eren said, taking Erwin’s hand. His mouth fell open as he realized just how rude he’d been in saying that. “B-But, it’s nice to finally meet you!”

If Erwin had been offended, he gave off no indication. “Yeah, I suppose it’s difficult to not know who I am while being engaged to Levi McGrouchy-Pants.” Eren choked out a shocked laugh and covered his mouth with his hand.

“I heard that!” Levi yelled across the room. This time, there was no covering of the mouth. Both Eren and Erwin snickered over on the couch. The tense atmosphere that Eren had imagined between them was gone.

“No, no… That’s not it actually,” Eren corrected, calming himself down. “I have a friend who absolutely adores you.” And who would totally kill Eren if he ever found out what Eren had just said to his idol. “He would totally freak if he knew I was talking to you.”

“Really? Is it because of my,” dramatic pause, “dashing good looks?” Erwin batted his eyelids suggestively, giving Eren an intense stare. Eren had to collect himself. He wasn’t necessarily attracted to Erwin, but this man knew he was attractive and sure knew how to use that to his advantage. Even during a joke.

“U-Um… There’s that… But he really just thinks you’re a genius, what with all of the work you put into Recon and all…”

“Oh? I take it he’s a fan of Recon then?”

“Definitely.” Eren was internally scratching his head, digging through to try and remember exactly why Armin liked the website, and Erwin, so much. “He likes the design of it, it’s easy to use for
most people… um… God, he gives me this speech every time the topic comes up. How the hell do I not remember it?” Oh, right. Because Eren always tended to block him out once the speech started.

“Well, I’m glad he enjoys it.” Eren mentally groaned. That was a tone that was usually reserved for famous people in regards to their basic fans. And Armin was anything from a basic fan. Eren’s one chance to give a good first impression of Armin to Erwin before they even met was swept away. Some friend he was.

Eren let out a sigh, deflating as the air escaped. But he perked up. “Oh!” He’d remembered another part of the speech. “There was this other thing that he liked about Recon. The uh… bonus level of the game?”

Erwin looked taken aback. “Bonus level?”

“Yeah, yeah. It was like an Easter Egg or something? I think that’s what he called it. I don’t know how he found it but apparently it had… teacups? Like, instead of the titan things?”

Recognition flooded Erwin’s face and then he was amused and very impressed. “That level?”

“Your friend managed to find that monstrosity?!” Levi blurted out, incredulous. Hanji was rolling with laughter.

“Oh my god! I forgot about that!” she cried.

“W-why?” Eren was starting to get nervous. “What’s wrong with it?”

“No! No, definitely not,” Erwin reassured. “We’re just impressed. No one was supposed to find that.”

“Kudos to your friend, though.”

“You see,” Erwin explained. “Levi and I made that as a half joke half present for Hanji.”

Levi continued the explanation. “For my first birthday after me and Hanji became friends, she got me a teacup. And then tripped, fell on it, and crushed it before she could even give it to me.” Hanji burst out in a new fit of giggles, remembering that day clearly.

“She tried to redeem herself the next year by getting him another teacup.”

“Which she then proceeded to knock off the table where it shattered on the floor.”

“After a few more failures, she just gave up and started giving Levi non-breakable gifts.”

“But continued to buy a teacup so she could smash it every year for my birthday. Claims it’s good luck.”

“Really?” Eren was both intrigued by the story and the fact that the story was the reason for the secret level.

“We made it almost impossible to find, though. Didn’t we?”

“I thought so.” Erwin turned to Eren. “Your friend is incredibly talented to have found that. What was his name again?”

“No! Eren, don’t do it. These two, and especially him, are fucking stalkers. Don’t give him
anything! Not even a name! Why do you think I never told them your name?"

“I’m not going to stalk your fiancé’s best friend, Levi.”

“Yes you are,” Hanji intervened, finally getting over her laughing fit. “Don’t even deny it.”

“Regardless,” Erwin said loudly, drowning out the peanut gallery’s comments. “I would love to meet your friend sometime.”

Eren couldn’t stop his whole face from lighting up. “Are you serious?!?”

“Of course. But, knowing what he’s like beforehand would be nice.”

“Be careful with what you tell him! I wasn’t joking about the stalker part!”

“I’m a little more considerate than you may think, Levi. He is my best friend after all. I’m not gonna give out information like that to some stranger.” Eren turned back to Erwin and they resumed their conversation. Hanji pulled Levi back into what was supposed to be theirs.

“If you don’t keep randomly jumping in like that…” She ‘tsk’ed at him. “You’re awfully distracted aren’t you?”

“So what?” Levi kept his eyes trained on Eren and Erwin.

Hanji glanced back and forth between Levi and the pair on the couch. It wasn’t hard to put two and two together. “Are… Are you jealous of Erwin?” she asked, giddy with the idea.

“No, I’m not,” Levi stated firmly.

“Oh my god, you are! You’re jealous of Erwin!” she whispered excitedly. “You secretly like Eren. Just admit it!”

“Okay, I secretly like Eren.”

“W… Wait, what?” It wasn’t often that Levi could manage to catch Hanji off guard like that, so he couldn’t help the small smirk at her confusion. Even if it was at the expense of letting her of all people know of his budding feelings for Eren.

“I secretly like Eren. Isn’t that what you wanted to hear?”

“Yeah, but… do you really mean that?”

Here was his chance. He could take it back if he wanted to. Save this dreaded conversation for another day. “… Yes.” Or maybe it was better just to get it over with.

“Oh! Oh! I knew it! I knew it!” Hanji leapt for joy, bouncing on the bed with pure delight. Maybe Levi should’ve waited until Hanji was confined in a straightjacket with heavy duty duct tape over her mouth.

Eren and Erwin peered over curiously at Hanji, and silently questioned Levi about why. Levi just shook his head, mouthing the words “ignore her”. They shrugged and Erwin commanded Eren’s attention once more.

Levi yanked Hanji into the bed, ceasing her celebration. “Will you keep it down?” his hissed vehemently. “He doesn’t know and I don’t intend for him to find out until I’m sure he likes me back, which, as of right now, he doesn’t.”
“Don’t worry, my lips are sealed.” Says the woman who nearly gave it all away with her reaction to finding out. “I won’t tell a soul.”

“Oh shut up. You’re going to tell Erwin the first chance you get.”

“Yeah, but Erwin doesn’t have a soul. So I’m still telling the truth.”

Levi leaned forward slightly, tensing as a strange feeling gripped him. Eren kept laughing at things that Erwin said. And smiling. And he was really into that conversation… They must’ve really clicked.

Oh, how Hanji wanted to tease her close friend so badly with how Levi was acting, but teasing wouldn’t help. “You have no reason to be jealous of Erwin you know.”

“I told you, I’m not jealous.” As if she was going to believe that bullshit. So Levi continued. “I’m… worried.”

“Why?” Hanji nearly exclaimed. “You’re the one marrying Eren.”

“Getting married means nothing for us,” Levi snapped. “We have to do it whether we like each other or not. So what if… what if Eren decides he likes Erwin?” There was a clear tone of worry laced with each word. Hanji was finding it difficult to choose between giggling at her poor friend and offering him sympathy. It was just too hysterical for in her eyes for such a scenario to occur.

“Do you really think Erwin would do that to you?”

“It doesn’t matter what Erwin does, you can’t help who you fall in love with.”

“You don’t seriously think Eren’s going to fall in love with that soulless bastard do you?” Sure, Hanji didn’t know Eren on the same level as Levi, but she knew Erwin like the back of her hand. And from what she’d heard about Eren, there was no way Eren could fall for Erwin.

“Why wouldn’t he? He’s smart, charismatic, conveniently handsome, and has a hell of a lot better attitude than me.” Oh great. Having a crush was starting to make Levi an out of character, whiney, self-deprecating pouter.

“You make it sound like you’re not any of those things!” She was going to hit him with a pillow, god damn it.

“He thought I hated him for a good few days when we met.”

“Sure, you’re not very charismatic and your attitude is shitter than manure, but you’re still handsome and smart. And conveniently richer than Erwin.”

“Found out he hates being rich. And if that’s my only redeeming quality, I’m fucking screwed.”

“Who hates money?”

“The money is fine. It’s the prestige that he doesn’t like. Which is another bad quality that Erwin doesn’t have that I have in spades.”

“You’re selling yourself too short.” Pun intended, but Levi didn’t need to know that. “Here, let me help you out.”

“Hanji, no wait-” But it was too late.
“Alright, Erwin! You’ve hogged him long enough. Now it’s my turn!” Hanji leapt off the bed. In an instant, she’d latched onto Eren and begun dragging him out of the room. Eren struggled to find some kind of footing. Levi could only watch in internal horror as his crazed friend kidnapped his fiancé to talk about god knows what in privacy. The door slammed shut after them, and Levi collapsed onto the bed, accepting his fate.

“Okay,” Erwin said, amused. “What did you two talk about?”

“I think I should be asking you that.”

“Then I guess it’s time we talk.”

“Um…” Eren said awkwardly. “Hanji? Why did you drag me out like that?”

Hanji shut the door to guest bedroom they’d commandeered. “Because I don’t want those two listening in. Now,” she tossed Eren onto the bed and flopped down next to him, peering at him with wide, innocent, curious eyes, “what do you think of Levi? And be honest! What you say next could very well effect everything around you…” Eyes shifted around mysteriously.

Eren leaned as far away from her as he could without losing balance. “Uh… why…” He was starting to understand what Levi had said earlier about his friends.

Hanji sighed philosophically (Eren didn’t know how she managed it, but she did). “Eren, do you know why I’m such a good friend of Levi’s?” Eren shook his head. “It’s because I know him better than anyone else… Other than Erwin. Do you know why he puts up with my crap?”

“Because… you’re such good friends?” Where was this going?

“Nope! Because he knows me better than anyone else, besides Erwin and Moblit,” –Moblit? Who was…? Eren shook his head. Now wasn’t the time– “and he knows that I won’t stop until I get what I want. So,” Hanji leaned closer to Eren, giving him a cheeky smile that he could only interpret as threatening. “What do you think of Levi?”

Now Eren really understood what Levi was talking about earlier. “L-Look, I already get these sorts of questions constantly from my friends and they’re getting old.” He avoided Hanji’s gaze. “I just…” Twiddling his thumbs, he trailed off, not entirely sure what to say. “But… if I had to say something then… Levi… He’s very different from what I thought he’d be…” It was difficult pinpointing exactly what he thought about Levi, making questions like that hard to answer right off the bat.

Hanji hummed thoughtfully. “Alright, so then what do you think of Erwin?”


Hanji smirked, as if knowing something that Eren didn’t. It unnerved him a bit. “Okay, that’s all I wanted to know! Well, actually I’d like to know more about you, like what kind of hobbies to you have? Oh! You’re young right? Still in high school? Senior right? Do you know what college you want to go to?! What do you want to study?!”
“Levi, I have no reason to try and steal Eren from you.”

“You two aren’t understanding the problem.” Levi was about to throw his hands up in frustration and leave. “It has nothing to do with you! Of course I don’t think you’re going to steal him from me, but I don’t know if Eren doesn’t want to be stolen.”

“He doesn’t.” Erwin reassured point blank. “And even if he did, he doesn’t want me to steal him. Trust me. He was more focused on talking about his friend, who I have more interest in than Eren and I don’t even know his name, than me.”

“But even if it’s not you, who’s to say he won’t find someone else?”

“Levi, snap out of this.” Erwin grabbed both of Levi’s shoulders, giving him a firm shake. “This isn’t you! Yes, having a crush can make you act differently, but right now you sound like a whiny teenage girl.”

Levi twisted out of Erwin’s hold. “I know that.” He knew it the moment he saw Erwin and Eren together on that damn couch. “There’s no need to rub it in my face.”

Erwin continued. “What do you usually do when you want something? You go for it. You don’t loiter around worrying about “but what if” or “so many things could go wrong” now do you? You take whatever you want in the fastest and easiest way possible.”

“Eren isn’t an object.” Levi stressed, hissing out every word. “He’s a human being with feelings and morals and goals. I can’t and don’t want to treat him like a business deal, that would only insult him.”

“Then just be considerate of his feeling, morals, and goals in the process.”

“You’re a soulless bastard.”

“One of us has to be.”

But Erwin was right. Levi certainly wasn’t acting like himself right now. He’d never felt jealous before, and he wasn’t sure how to process that emotion yet.

“Guys! Guys! Guys!” Hanji bounded into the room, once again dragging a disoriented Eren behind her. “We’ve just had the best idea ever! So this guy here,” she pulled Eren up beside her, gesturing to him, “is a writer. Not only that but a damn good one too. So here’s the idea: this guy,” another gesture, “can write a story based off of the Attack on Titan game for us and we can publish it on the website!”

Erwin immediately lit up. “What a great idea!” What a great way to make more money!

“Are you okay with this?” Levi asked, tentatively.

“Yeah!” Despite the rather dizzy feeling he had, Eren still managed to sound chipper about the whole idea. He wrestled himself out of Hanji’s grasp and practically dove for his notebook. “I think it would be really cool! The whole concept of the game is already interesting enough, but what if you gave the characters names, stories, lives? I even have some scenes already written that could be used as a rough draft in whatever storyline we decide to do…”

Hanji and Erwin listened intently to the rambling boy, taking note of the different ideas he spouted off about the project. Plot lines, possible characters, the setting. But even with the mental notes they were taking, there was still one person paying more attention than anyone else.
Levi took in everything, a lazy smile relaxing on his face. He watched as Eren hummed with excitement, his whole aura giving off an admirable glow the more he talked. He didn’t know why, but Eren’s passion made his heart swell, and not in an entirely unpleasant fashion.

It may just be a crush now, but both Hanji and Erwin knew that at this point, Levi wasn’t going to be able to catch himself when he fell.

They just hoped Eren would be there to catch him instead.

Time seemed to fly after that, and it wasn’t long before Hanji and Erwin were gone.

Curl up in bed, Eren still had a hard time controlling his jitters from all the planning for his story. “I’m glad your friends came over today,” he told Levi, who was just climbing into bed.

“That makes one of us, but all in all that went a lot better than I thought.” Levi automatically wrapped his arms around Eren once he was situated in bed.

Eren wasn’t entirely sure why Levi was this cuddly tonight, as usually they really only held hands and once or twice spooned (if the feeling that night was really bad), but he couldn’t really find it in him to push Levi away. So he buried his face in Levi’s chest. “We sound like we’re married already.”

It was more joking than sorrowful, which Levi counted as a win. “Then we better be careful, we don’t want anyone to think we actually like each other.” That elicited a laugh from Eren. “But you know what this means right?”

“Mmm… what?” Levi could tell Eren was already on the verge of slumber.

“I have to meet your friends now.” The long, drawn out, and melodramatic groan that came from Eren made Levi smirk. “It’s only fair. And I’m going to meet them eventually, right?”

“Alright! Alright!” Eren reluctantly agreed. “But you only get to meet Armin and Mikasa. Understood?”

“Sounds good.”
A week or so passed. Maybe a week and a half? Eren wasn’t really counting anymore. In between school, hanging out with his friends, and spending time with Levi, Eren found that he couldn’t really spare a thought to it. Levi and Carlton failing to mention the time as well made it easier to forget. And there was something else on his mind…

For the most part, the horrible feelings the mansion gave off weren’t really bothering him. He hardly noticed anything most of the time and they were all but a distant memory while Levi was around or when he was in Levi’s room. But now… there was a different feeling… A fuzzier feeling closer to his heart. It wasn’t a feeling Eren was particularly familiar with, but he knew what it was.

He was starting to like Levi, wasn’t he?

There was a part of Eren that truly looked forward to getting back to the mansion to spend time with Levi, and he absolutely loved talking to Levi. He always listened to what Eren had to say, and whenever he talked he always had something interesting to say in return, even if it was a terrible joke. He always tried to show Eren things he thought Eren would think was cool, too. One time, he showed Eren how to get onto the roof. Another time, he brought Eren down to the music room and tried to teach Eren how to play the piano.

Let’s just say it… didn’t work out… But Levi had played quite well and Eren offered to teach him to climb trees as payment. In the end, they both decided it was best if they just stuck to what they were good at for now.

But it was so much more than that. Whenever Eren was around Levi, he felt… warm, comfortable, at ease, safe… Not to mention that he was actually really enjoying being so close to Levi in bed when they cuddled.

Because they were cuddling now. There was no denying it. Even if it was only to help Eren sleep, which he seriously doubted was the only reason now, it was still cuddling.

And, honestly, with the way things were moving, Eren was sure that by the end of the month, they would end up kissing.

And, honestly… that scared him a bit… Only three weeks or so ago Eren hated Levi’s guts, and now he was sure they would be kissing in the near future? How was that not ridiculously
terrifying?

His friends weren’t helping either. They would always make comments and tease him, especially Armin after he brought him and Mikasa over to meet Levi. And heaven forbid if Levi texted him during the middle of the day and they noticed. Hell, Ymir, Reiner, and Jean once stole his phone and ended up texting Levi the whole morning before Eren even realized it had gone missing.

The amount of horror that balled up in the pit of Eren’s stomach when he found out nearly brought him to his knees. He didn’t even want to say half of what they sent out loud it was so crude.

He didn’t talk to them for three days.

Eren understood that it was important for both of them to have each other’s phone numbers but there was nothing to gain from it if he couldn’t keep his phone from his own friends. He was going to have to find out Levi’s secret soon since Eren never received messages like that from Levi’s friends. That is… unless Levi actually liked getting those kinds of messages from Eren’s friends.

Luckily, today his friends hadn’t been as enthusiastic. It could have been because they were getting tired of teasing Eren (unlikely but oh how he hoped) but it also could have been because it was Monday and the more adamant teasers of the group had spent the night before pulling an all-nighter for a huge test in one of the classes they shared.

Unfortunately, Eren also had that class so by the time he got to the mansion, he was beat.

Trudging up into the mansion, his first stop before anything was to grab a snack from the kitchen. He’d get an apple or something, talk to Chef Hannes for a bit, and then head upstairs for a possible, but well deserved, nap. He’d actually gotten back on time rather than hanging out with his friends for an hour or two, so if he could manage to fall asleep for a bit, he’d have enough time to before Levi got home.

He just wasn’t expecting the little old lady already seated at one of the counters in the kitchen.

She was fairly short but far from delicate. Grey hair was loosely tied back in a bun and even though she must have been years older than anyone else in the house, she had very few wrinkles save for the laugh lines around her mouth. There was a generally nice aura surrounding her.

“Hello,” she smiled, her laugh lines deepening.

“Uh… h-hello?” Who the hell was this woman?

“You must be Eren.” She knew his name. Shit, she knew his name. Who was she? Someone Eren was supposed to know? “I want to say I’ve heard so much about you but I never get to talk to Levi about anything that isn’t work while my husband and I are away. But judging by your age and the fact that you’re in this house to begin with, I’m going to guess that you are Eren.”

Well then. “U-Uh… Yeah… Yeah, I’m Eren.”

“You can’t wait to finally meet you, Eren.” She held out her hand. “I’m Genevieve, Levi’s grandmother.”

Eren grasped her hand firmly. “It’s nice to meet you too.”

Genevieve sighed. “Oh, why wasn’t I allowed to meet you sooner? You’re just the sweetest little thing!”

“Well, I’m not sure what gave you that impression…” In everyone else’s opinion he was more of a
brat. “Sweet” doesn’t really factor into that.

“Oh, nonsense!” Genevieve, still holding on to Eren’s hand, pulled him down into a seat. “You mustn’t be so hard on yourself. I’m sure you’re lovely.”

“So…” Eren pulled his hand from hers. “You’re Levi’s grandmother?”

“That I am.”

“So then… You’re back from your business trip!” How many obvious questions was he going to ask?

“Oh, no.” Genevieve shook her head. “I’m just a hologram.” She’d had such a serious face that Eren almost believed her… almost.

“Haha… funny.” Eren rolled his eyes but couldn’t help smiling at the same time. “Did you have a good trip?”

Genevieve gasped. “Oh, look at you! Asking me how my trip was… I knew you were lovely. My trip was fine, thank you for asking. Most of it was listening to my husband’s complaints about work, but the countryside was fantastic.”

“Countryside? Where did you go?”

“Well, we stopped out in vineyard country in California and made our way to France. I stopped by Germany while my husband was working. Then we went home.”

What? You’d think Eren would be more used to statements like that considering he knew just how wealthy this family was. “California? France? Germany? Wow… What’s it like there?” Because despite his family’s wealth, Eren had never gotten the chance to really travel.

Genevieve perked up a bit, a little startled. “Where? California, France, or Germany?”

“All three!” Eren grinned. “I’ve never been…”

Genevieve grinned right back, her face lighting up the room. “Then I’ll be sure to take you along with me the next time I go!”

Now Eren was the startled one. “Are… Are you serious?” he choked out.

“Of course! And it can be just us too. None of those silly workaholic boys to drag us down.” Genevieve winked at Eren but caught the slight hesitation in his eyes. “That is… unless you wanted to bring Levi?” she suggested nonchalantly. “I’m sure he wouldn’t mind indulging you.”

Eren bit his lip to keep from smiling too much and giving himself away. “I mean if he wanted to go I wouldn’t stop him… But… wait. I think I remember Levi saying you guys were originally from France?” Genevieve nodded. “So then, do you have family there?”

“Oh, only my sister and she is awful to be around. We don’t visit her much… At all.” Eren couldn’t help but laugh. Levi’s grandmother was really fun to be around.

“Is it pretty there? France?”

“Gorgeous.”

Eren smiled widely, and so Genevieve launched into a full presentation about how beautiful and
fun it was traveling around. Since everything business related was handled by Levi’s grandfather, Genevieve had more time to actually see the countries and cities they visited. That left her extremely knowledgeable about the different cultures and filled with stories each more interesting than the last. The kind of stories that Eren could listen to for hours.

“But, all in all,” Genevieve said, finishing up her travel stories for that trip. “It was really a fairly short trip.”

“Short?!” Eren exclaimed. “You were gone for nearly a month!”

“Oh darling… sometimes our business trips can last up to six months.” Six… six months? Meaning there would be times were Eren wouldn’t get to see Levi for six months! Noticing Eren’s quickly changed mood, Genevieve continued hastily, “But they’re not as often as you’d think. And we usually travel several places on those trips, often passing back through town! And my husband surely wouldn’t mind staying at the house for a night or two while we pass through.” She narrowed her eyes slightly, staring off to the side. “At least he better not,” she muttered.

The reassurance didn’t make the thought of a six month long business trip sound much better, but Eren set that aside for the time being. “So then… I take it since you’re back… so is your husband?”

Genevieve nodded. “Yes. He’s been yelling with Levi and Carlton the entire time that we were talking.”

“Levi?” What? “Levi’s back? And he’s getting yelled at?! Why?!” It wasn’t his fault was it? Eren wasn’t the reason why Levi was in trouble was it?

“Not at. With. And I didn’t stick around for long to find out. I generally wait until everyone’s temper has passed before trying to reason with anyone. That’s why I was out here. And then I got to run into you! See? Not all bad.”

“But… why are they yelling? Levi hasn’t done anything wrong has he? I need to go check on them.” Eren tried to throw himself from his chair in an attempt to run to Levi’s side, but was quickly thwarted by Genevieve.

“Now hold on,” she said, grabbing hold of his hand once more. “It was pretty bad when I left, which is part of the reason why I kept you so long. I don’t know if they’ve cooled down yet.” She patted Eren’s hand gently, sitting him back down. “Besides, barging in on my husband’s study will only make matters worse.”

The careful caresses to his hand kept him seated but did nothing for his nerves. Why were they yelling? Eren needed to know why. He needed to help. He needed to make sure Levi was okay.

But it wasn’t long before a maid came in. She informed them that Eren was wanted in the master’s study.

Biting back his nerves on his thumb, he obediently followed Genevieve as she led him to the study he specifically remembered that he wasn’t ever allowed to go in without permission.

They could hear the argument from outside the two elegantly decorative doors.

Genevieve knocked on one, waiting as the noise died down until a strong sturdy voice replied, “Come in.”

Eren wasn’t particularly interested in what the room looked like. No, he couldn’t care less about
that right now. What he was more concerned about was the people in the room.

Carlton stood off to the side of the desk and two chairs in the center of the room. He glared at Eren in a way Eren had never seen him glare. It was that parental “I know you did something wrong and I’m mad about it”. Something Eren wasn’t sure Carlton was able to achieve.

Levi sat regally in one of the two chairs, the one closest to his father. Looking back at Eren, he had an expression of what Eren thought was worry and… something else. Like he was trying to channel a set of directions to Eren so that he wouldn’t fuck this up. But knowing Eren he’d probably fuck it all up anyway.

Now at the desk… Eren felt himself tense up… At the desk was Levi’s grandfather. He was just as old as his wife and might as well have been simply an older version of Levi. Narrowed eyes (dark enough to be charcoal?) pierced right through Eren. Neither happy nor mad, Levi’s grandfather showed next to no emotion, but gave off bad vibes in spades. Bad probably wasn’t the best word to use, but at the moment, it was all Eren could think of that made sense.

“Eren Jaeger, I presume?”

Eren nodded, keeping his cool. He would not let himself be controlled by the aura of this man. “Yes.”

“Francis Voclain.” Otherwise known as the reason why Eren and Levi were even engaged to begin with (not that that was such a bad thing anymore…). “Sit.” Well… sitting wouldn’t be considered being controlled by that man’s aura would it? So he sat down in the chair next to Levi. “My son has laid down some charges against you.”

Charges? What? Were they in court?

Carlton, taking that as his cue to speak, began, “Eren, why were you sleeping with Levi?”

Fear seized Eren. They’d been caught red-handed, and yet he didn’t know how? How did they know? Hadn’t Eren and Levi been extra careful? And… wait… why was this such a big deal? Is this what they were yelling about?

“I already told you why!” Levi interjected, his patience had been worn through a long time ago.

“Levi.” Francis’s commanding voice silence Levi as he hung his head, leaving Eren stunned. He’d always imagined Levi as the one in charge, so watching him take orders so willingly from someone else was almost surreal.

“Well, Eren?” Carlton pressed.

“I… had trouble sleeping. Being near Levi helped.” Short, sweet, and to the point. It’s not like they’d understand if he tried to explain it any further.

“And crawling into his bed, even though you knew it was against the rules, was the only thing you could think of?”

“It’s not like it was my first resort!” Eren seethed, pissed off that Carlton thought that. “I tried to think of several things before he even suggested that!”

“So you’re saying it Levi’s idea?” Uh… whoops?

“Well… yeah…” That didn’t count as throwing Levi under the bus did it? “He noticed something
was wrong with me, and when he figured out what was wrong he did his best to try and help me! The only solution that we knew worked was that.

“The house keeps him awake and considering the fact that he passed out on more than one occasion, one time at school, it’s kind of a big deal,” Levi explained. “Being near me makes it easier for him to sleep, and I wasn’t about to sacrifice his health for the sake of you not liking us sharing a bed!”


“But-

“Levi!” It was the first time Eren heard Francis raise his voice. The cry was almost… stunned? But Levi shut his mouth, gritting his teeth. He wasn’t going to say anything else.

Damn it. Eren really didn’t want to explain this anymore. Levi knew the details, he knew what had been going on. Why couldn’t they just believe him?

Levi spared a glance to Eren, and, though he couldn’t specify what expression Levi had, he realized what Levi was doing. He knew Eren wasn’t going to tell his side that easily. Hell, he’d barely been able to tell Levi what was happening, so why would he want to say anything to Carlton or Francis?

Eren, comforted just by the thought of Levi looking out for him, gave Levi a small, reassuring smile.

He’d be okay.

“It wasn’t just Levi,” Eren continued, a little calmer than before but just as upset. “The whole problem stemmed from the house so being outside of the house helped too, but it’s not like anyone was letting me go home so my only other option was sleeping with Levi.”

“If something was wrong then your option should have been telling someone!” Oh? Eren should have told someone?

“And what would have happened?” Yeah, that calmness didn’t last for long. “Nothing would have changed! You all would have brushed it off as nothing because you’d think I was trying to weasel my way out of the marriage, I’d still have to stay here for an extra three weeks, and I’d still be climbing into Levi’s bed because he actually cared about what was wrong with me! There is only one side of this story: the truth. And Levi’s already told it to you.”

A heavy silence fell over them after Eren’s outburst. Eren panted as he caught his breath, no one, not even Carlton had anything to say for a moment.

Until that commanding, bitter voice pierced the air.

“You’re quite headstrong aren’t you?”

Everyone in the room turned to Francis.

He leaned forward in his seat, all of his attention on Eren. “So, according to you, your only option in this situation was to sleep with Levi and nothing could have changed that?”

Eren glared. He could hear the slight mocking undertones in Francis’s voice. “Because of you, yes.”
Francis raised an eyebrow. “Me?”

“Staying here a week would have been fine. I didn’t start sleeping in Levi’s bed until the second week. So if I’d gone back that Sunday like I was supposed to instead of having to wait around for you to get back, then we wouldn’t be having this conversation now.”

Francis laughed without humor. “Headstrong and stupid, too.”

“The term is suicidal, if you don’t mind,” Eren growled. This man was getting on his every last nerve in a way that neither Levi nor Jean had ever been able to accomplish.

“You don’t say…” Francis trailed off, looking Eren over. “Levi, Carlton, you two are dismissed.”

“But, you can’t-”

“I said,” Francis stressed, sending a harsh glare at Carlton. “You’re dismissed.”

Carlton, defeated, marched out the door. Whatever plans he’d had at being a stern parental figure had been crushed by his own father’s egotistical aura. Levi lingered a moment longer, clearly worried about Eren, but with another soft smile from Eren, Levi too left.

The door shut behind them, and once it had, Eren could feel whatever horrid vibe he got from Francis increase. Almost instantly.

They met each other’s gaze, neither one of them willing to let up.

“I don’t like you, Eren Jaeger.” Francis’s voice had fallen deeper, but at the same time, colder.

“Ditto.” Eren was not about to give up.

“You’re wrong for Levi.”

“I think Levi is old enough to decide that for himself.”

“Shut up,” Francis snapped. “You’re rude, loudmouthed, stubborn, ‘suicidal’…” Eren glared at the mocking tone Francis used. “You’re childish, crass, uncouth, and you have no respect for those who are older and much wiser than you.”

“I give my respect to those who deserve and earn it. Age has nothing to do with it.” Meaning he had no respect for the man in front of him.

“You’re naive, boy.”

“Or maybe you’re just upset that I didn’t bow down to you right away.”

“Well, you’re going to learn to.” Francis might as well have slammed his hands down on the table with the amount of force his voice had. “Do you know who I am?” His voice slithered around Eren’s throat. Suffocating. “I’m the one who controls your future. I control your family’s future. I can ruin your name and your family’s name to the point where not even McDonalds would want you. I can ruin you in this country and any other country of my choosing. You are nothing to me. What does your family have that I haven’t gotten a hundred times over? And you? I could find another, better bride for my grandson in no time.”

“And where exactly would that get you?” Eren gasped and spun around, realizing that Genevieve had been in the room the whole time. Her mask of indifference was so perfect, he hardly recognized her from her smiling self from earlier. “Do you even remember the last time you chose
a bride? For your son?"

Did she mean Levi’s mother? That had been an arranged marriage too…? But that had ended in divorce…

“He stays. You’ll be dead in your cold, miserable grave within the next several years anyway, so what should it matter to you?” She shrugged, and Eren wondered what kind of relationship they had where she could openly talk about his death to him like that.

“I am not getting rid of him yet, but I will not let him ruin this family.” He pointed a bony finger at Eren. “Listen here. I don’t care what you do with your time, it’s probably pointless anyway. But what you will not do is keep Levi from his work or bother me. Furthermore, you will address me like everyone else in this house, as Master Voclain. Understood?”

Eren clenched his fists. “You mean like the maids?” he gritted out, remembering how the maid had referred to him as.

“Exactly. Now go pack your bags. Your stay here, and in my grandson’s bed, is over.”

Eren said nothing. Rather, he pushed himself off the chair, nearly toppling it over in to process. He stomped over to the door and slammed it shut, leaving the married pair by themselves.

“Figures you’d take a liking to him,” Francis sighed. Having to deal with that brat was going to be annoying.

“He’s just what this house needs,” Genevieve said firmly.

“He’ll ruin this house.”

“Your company is fine,” she snapped, knowing what he really cared about. “And even if he could actually affect anything about your company, it’s too late to change anything now.”

“What do you mean?” Francis inquired slowly, his eyes narrowing dangerously. But Genevieve knew he wouldn’t do anything to her. He hadn’t ever tried anything the entire time they’d been married.

“You’ve just begun a power struggle with an opponent I actually like and you think I’m going to give you a head start?” The idea was laughable.

But Francis wasn’t troubled by it. “If it’s a power struggle then I won’t need a head start. He’s already lost.”

This time, Genevieve did laugh.

“Oh, on the contrary… He’s already winning.”

Levi paced his room. He knew that he was brought up not to, but this was important.

Eren and his grandfather… in the same room…

Fuck. This wasn’t going to end well.

He could see it now… His grandfather would flare up his dominance which… Eren would then
reject… in a loud and angry way… causing his grandfather to become angry as well… And an angry Grandfather was a scary Grandfather.

God Levi could only imagine what his grandfather would do… and what Eren would do in response…

Levi took deep breaths.

Now was not the time to think worst case scenarios. Maybe… Maybe his grandfather actually liked Eren?

HAH! Who was Levi kidding? There was no way in the seven levels of Hell that his grandfather would ever like Eren. Not to mention that there was an equally small chance that Eren would like his grandfather. Well… maybe there was more hope for Eren…?

The faint stomping that started getting louder and louder proved Levi wrong.

When the door slammed open, Levi was there, arms wrapped around a furious Eren in an attempt to both calm him down and to restrain his arms from causing any kind of damage. And good thing too, otherwise Eren probably would have destroyed half his room at best.

“I fucking hate him!” he screeched as Levi kicked the door shut. “He’s a horrible grouchy old man and I fucking hate him!”

“Eren, getting mad isn’t going to do anything.”

“I know that but…” Eren stilled, confused. “Okay, what are you doing?”

Levi paused too, but didn’t let go. “…Trying to calm you down… and keeping you from possibly destroying my room…”

Eren sighed, gently pushing Levi off of him. “I’m not that mad I just… god I hate him so much! He-” Eren cut himself off. He was so upset that he was physically shaking, keeping himself from lashing out.

Levi led him to the bed and encouraged him to sit, which he did gratefully. “Eren…” Tell me about it.

“He… he called me rude… an-and uncouth and said I had no respect for those who deserved it well guess what fucker you don’t fucking deserve it you asshole!” Eren took in shaky breaths as often as he could while he spoke. “He-He said I was going to ruin the family and that he could… ruin my family and me to the point where… where not even fast food joints would take us and that other countries wouldn’t even want us and god he hates me Levi. He hates me so much and I fucking hate him back he’s a horrible person…”

“Shh…” Levi rubbing comforting circles on Eren’s back. “I’m here… It’s okay… It’s just us…” Eren wiped his eyes with his sleeves, and Levi stood. “I’m going to get something for you to wipe your eyes with.”

“I’m not crying…” Eren mumbled, not even bothering to try and sound convincing. He always cried when he was too angry and that only pissed him off more.

“I know you’re not,” Levi sighed. “I’ll get you the softest towel I have.”

“You’re a jerk…” Eren sniffed, not meaning a word of it. “And… And you know what else he said
“to me?” he called after, still sitting on the floor as Levi retrieve a towel. “He said that I had to address him as Master Voclain! Master Voclain!! What the hell I’m not one of his fucking hired help that he can just boss around!”

Levi returned, tossing the towel towards Eren, who caught it graciously, and resumed his spot next to Eren. “There’s not much you can do about him. He’s as stubborn as you, maybe even more so.”

“I’m not going to take this Levi! He’s marrying me to you, not buying me! He doesn’t own me!”

“Eren, getting in a fight with him isn’t wise. You’re probably not even going to see him much until the wedding-”

“Yeah, then I’ll have to live with him.” Eren buried his face into the soft towel, extremely grateful that Levi had grabbed one for him.

Levi rested his hand on Eren’s shoulder again. “Just… If you can last until the wedding without pissing him off enough to kick you out, then he can’t hurt you. Once we’re married, he can’t touch you.”

“Divorce…” Eren muttered into the towel.

“He can’t file the papers for our divorce,” Levi reassured, nearly rolling his eyes. “If there’s one thing I know he won’t be able to have a say in, it’s our marriage… once we’re married.” Eren nodded, taking deep breaths to calm him down. But it only worked for a moment before he started wringing the towel out of frustration and hate. “Eren…” Levi tried, placing a cautious hand over Eren’s. “You need to calm down. Deep breaths, deep breaths.”

“I know, I know but… I just can’t help it, Levi! He pushes my buttons in all the wrong ways! Every last one of them! He’s so horrible and I hate him so much…” Eren gasped as he caught his breath. “I… I hate him more than I hated you when we first met!”

“Wow…” Levi whistled lowly. That was saying a lot.

“Oh…” Eren breathed, mellowing out instantly. “I-I just realized… I’m sorry… I’ve been trash talking your grandfather this whole time right to your face and-”

“Don’t,” Levi interrupted. “Even think about apologizing. As someone who has had to live with him his whole life, I know exactly what you’re talking about.”

“But he practically raised you.”

“Not practically,” Levi corrected. “He did raise me. But just because he raised me doesn’t mean he’s a good person. As far as I know, from a young age he focused solely on his work. After he got married, actually, to my grandmother.”

“They don’t… seem very close…” Eren observed, remembering how Genevieve had spoken to Francis.

“Oh they hate each other.” Point blank. “That’s why Grandfather put so much into his work, to distract himself from it. They spent most of their time hating each other in the beginning, but over time they’ve gotten better. They still hate each other, don’t get me wrong, but now they just… tolerate each other. They also have this silent respect for each other that can only be formed through years of a hateful marriage.”

“Oh shit…” And if Eren had kept it up… Eren and Levi would have been in the same boat 60
years later. Then, another memory hit him. “And that reminds me, you didn’t tell me your dad was in an arranged marriage too!”

“Huh… I didn’t?” Levi leaned back, thinking back.

“No! You told me she married your dad for his money.”

“Oh… sorry. But both statements are true. My mother did marry my father for his money but was also chosen for spot by Grandfather. God only knows how much schmoozing she did to get selected…”

Eren slumped down. “Your grandfather, your dad, and now you…” That was a lot of arranged marriages…

“Welcome to the family of forced love,” Levi said bitterly. And for a couple moments, neither of them spoke.

“Levi,” Eren spoke up after a minute of comforting silence.

“Hmm?”

“If we… assuming I don’t get kicked out by your grandfather… if we decide to have kids… like adopt… I don’t want them to have an arranged marriage.”

Levi smiled softly. “I wholeheartedly agree.”

A loud knock on the door brought them back to reality. And right to the voice neither of them wanted to hear at the moment.

“Eren, I sure hope you’re packing in there. We don’t want to keep this car waiting for longer than necessary.”

“He can’t even stay for dinner?!” Levi asked, bewildered. After all, what was so wrong in letting Eren eat dinner?

“I don’t want to stay for dinner,” Eren said immediately. Eating dinner with that old man would be an even worse end to his stay.

“Good.” Francis had somehow heard Eren through the door. For an old man he had remarkable hearing. “I don’t want you to stay for dinner. No doubt you’re a gluttonous pig too, among your other not-so-charming qualities.”

Levi threw his arm over Eren’s chest, keeping him from charging at the door in a fit of fury. Which he was on the verge of doing whether Levi’s arm was there or not.

“Tick tock.”

They both waited until they heard the footsteps lead away from the door before either one of them spoke.

“Well now I know where you got some of your horrible comments from,” Eren sighed, throwing Levi’s arm off him.

“Yeah… sorry about that…”

It was a good thing Eren never really unpacked to begin with. Getting all of his stuff back into the
suitcases was never as much of a problem when most of it was already in them to begin with. But the silence weighed down on Eren heavily, so he struck up what he hoped was a much lighter conversation.

“I love your grandmother though, Genevieve.”

Levi snickered. “You would.”

“She’s been so many places and has so many stories… And she stuck up for me while your grandfather was…” Eren trailed off. It wasn’t really necessary for him to explain it again.

“Then you have more protection than I thought.”

Eren glanced up curiously. “What do you mean?”

“I told you that they had a certain respect for each other, right?” He nodded. “Well, Grandfather is less likely to do something if Grandmother opposes it. The more she opposes, the less Grandfather wants to do it.”

Eren perked up a bit. “So then… he can’t kick me out?”

“No, he can,” Levi said matter-of-factly. “There have been plenty of times where he’s completely ignored her, like with my mother for example.” Eren’s shoulders dropped, as did his hopes. “I do believe part of it is because he doesn’t want to have to hear her complain about it later. So he’ll weigh just how much the decision is worth against how much he doesn’t want to hear her complain.”

“So there’s no respect at all,” Eren pointed out flatly.

“I said part of it. He does listen to her on occasion.” When Eren didn’t respond, Levi realized that he’d basically just killed the conversation. Albeit unintentionally. Either that or Eren just didn’t have anything left to say on the matter. But that now the atmosphere was just as tense as before. “But the next time you’re down here, you should ask my grandmother about her garden. I told you she likes to garden right?”

“Yeah, but…” Eren shrugged. “I’m not very good at gardening.”

“She can teach you if you want. And if not she has plenty more stories to tell regarding her garden.” Levi paused for a subtle dramatic effect so he could let those words sink in. “Even one or two about that tree you’ve taken a liking too.”

Eren bit his lip. “Really?”

“Really, really.” Eren couldn’t help the smile sneaking onto his face. Levi always knew some way to make him feel better.

“Well… that’s the last of it… You’ll…” Eren swallowed nervously. “You’ll still text me right?”

“Of course,” Levi smiled, as if it was obvious.

“And… you should try coming over to my house once in a while. We still have to marathon those movies you know.”

“Good, I’ll be sure to avoid you at any cost.”

“You can’t run from this Levi!” Eren laughed, feeling much better. “We’re going to get married
and then we’ll see how long you can avoid me then.”

“I can try…’’ Levi silently begged. “Now let’s get you out of here. I’m sure your family misses you.”
Of Loneliness and Dilemmas

Chapter Notes

Pretty sure nothing interesting happens in this chapter... Probably all just filler. You all can probably just skip this... Even the end. Especially the end. I'm sure it holds nothing of importance relating to the plot or relationship developments. Yup.

On a side note, have fun with this chapter :D

The ride back home was… surreal? No, not surreal per say… It was just… not what Eren had expected it would be.

When Eren had first imagined the ride home from that mansion, back when he’d first arrived, he’d imagined that he’d be happier. Practically bouncing in his seat at the idea of finally being free from his own personal Alcatraz. He'd be dashing out of the car before it even pulled up in front of his house. It wouldn’t have mattered to him either way. He’d have run home the entire way if he could stand the distance. And once he got home… he’d throw himself on his nice, soft, inviting bed in a house that didn’t try to suffocate him.

Or maybe, the ride would be more like the ride up to the cottage. All his fears and strangling thoughts flying away with the wind as he rolled down all the windows. Sticking his hand out to feel the breeze of freedom himself. He’d relax into the seat and Levi, who’d be there with him making sure he got back alright, would strike up some random conversation. Their mindless chatter would fill the air, and once Eren got back, maybe he’d invite Levi in for dinner. Maybe force him to watch a movie or play a game on a real console.

But…

Now, Eren couldn’t tell what he was feeling.

The entire ride back he was quiet, still. He stared out the window without really seeing anything. And he was alone. Levi had his own dinner to get to, and his stupid old man of a grandfather had made sure to remind him of that.

So all Eren could do was stare out the window. He wanted to think of something… anything relevant… but nothing came up. Melancholy surrounded him on all sides and left him too tired to even think. Not even seeing his house as they pulled up really made a difference.

Mikasa sat on the porch waiting for Eren. He’d made sure to text her and his mom when he left so it was no surprise to find her already waiting. As soon as she saw the car, she opened the front door and yelled inside, probably telling his mom that he’d returned.

When the car parked in front of the house, both Mikasa and Carla were outside.

He didn’t run to them this time.

They both hugged him once he was within reach. He knows that they said something too, most likely something along the lines of “welcome home” or something, but he couldn’t remember what it was. Still, he was comforted by their presence. Comforted by his loving family.
Carla headed for the car to start unloading, but Mikasa lingered for a moment longer. This time he heard what she had to say.

“Doing okay?” She knew. She always knew when something was bothering him. And as of right now, that wasn’t really a bad thing.

“Are you two ungrateful children really going to stand around doing nothing while you let your poor mother take care of all the hard labor around here?” Carla suddenly asked dramatically.

Eren rolled his eyes and smiled at Mikasa. “Yeah.” They could talk about it later.

Three suitcases and a backpack later, the chauffer waved Eren goodbye and pulled away.

That was it. He was home.

Back to his world of video games and movies and hanging out with his friends and all-nighters that weren’t caused by mansions and impending marital doom.

So…

Why was he so…?

“Eren?” His mother wrapped an arm around his shoulders, in her other hand was one of Eren’s suitcases. “Shall we? I was just about to finish up dinner.”

“And after that I can kick your ass at Smash Bros,” Mikasa added, nudging him with her elbow. She also had one of his suitcases.

A half smile found its way onto his face. “Yeah, you wish,” Eren scoffed, grabbing the last suitcase and slinging his backpack over his shoulder.

“Oh, I wish? Who is it that’s never beaten me?”

“Literally everyone in the whole world.”

“I’m not that good.”

“Yes you are.”

“Now, now kids. Stop bickering or I’ll have to beat you black and blue.”

Eren and Mikasa laughed at her idle threat. She always said things like that, but the minute she actually acted upon then was the day she willingly returned to shopping at Walmart. Meaning never.

“Eren.”

They all froze.

Grisha stood in the doorway. Awkward and worn out. His hands in his pockets, he shuffled his feet a bit.

“Welcome back.”

Mikasa’s and Carla’s first instinct was to turn their attention towards Eren. Unsure of where their relationship stood after that long ordeal, they could only assume the worst.
For a moment, Eren didn’t move. So when he abruptly dropped his bags and nearly ran up the porch, everyone else jumped in shock.

But none more than Grisha, who Eren had thrown his arms around.

“I missed you,” he mumbled into his dad’s shirt.

It took a few seconds for Grisha’s brain to really understand what was happening (his son, who he thought had hated him, was now hugging him after forcing him to spend nearly a month with his arranged fiancé), but once he did, he smiled and gingerly returned the hug. Their first hug in years.

“I missed you too.”

Maybe it was because he'd decided to stop thinking about the marriage. Maybe it was because seeing Francis Voclain made his realize that he could've had much worse in the family department. Or maybe it was because Levi hadn't been as bad as he thought he'd be.

But whatever the reason may be, Eren didn't feel so mad at his father anymore.

"Now come on." Grisha patted Eren on the back. "Let's get these bags up to your room. Your mom is almost finished with dinner." Eren nodded and let go as Carla handed him his stuff. When he passed through the front door the familiar scent of his home wafted passed him.

He was home.

Back in his not unnecessarily oversized home. And despite his melancholy, he was happy to be back.

Before he could stop himself, Eren found himself wondering if Levi would mind living in a smaller house like this. Maybe they could make up for the size of the house by getting a big yard? Or maybe-

Startled by his own thoughts, Eren shook them out of his head.

What was he doing thinking things like that? For one, they weren't even engaged yet. It was useless thinking about his future house with Levi.

And why was he even thinking about Levi to begin with?

It's not like he was even here...

___

Dinner was simple: spaghetti with a meat sauce, garlic bread, and a salad. A simple, common, but delicious home cooked meal. No fancy chefs with their lamb and bruschetta and paninis…

Conversation, on the other hand… wasn’t as fun for Eren.

“Eren,” his mother started sternly. “You have to tell me every detail about what went on while you were at the Voclain’s. And no “it was fine, mom” like you’ve given me every time I’ve asked before.”

Eren groaned. “It’s not that big of a deal.”

“Says the child who made it a big deal his whole life,” Grisha commented. Carla smacked her
husband lightly. The comment was more teasing than anything, but Carla didn’t want Grisha to mess up his and his son’s newly reformed relationship with a careless statement.

But Eren just brushed it off. “Well, I thought it was going to be a big deal but then it wasn’t a big deal so it’s not a big deal…” Although the fact that he’d just said “big deal” three times in one sentence is kind of a big deal.

“Well then tell us about Levi? What’s he like?” Carla urged. She didn’t care how long it took she would get details out of her son. Hell, the kid spent a month with his fiancé-to-be and she was expected to believe that nothing happened? Nope, she was calling BS on that.

“He’s… fine.”

“That’s not what you told our friends.”

Eren turned a murderous glare on his sister. “You traitor…”

Carla squeaked in delight. “What did you tell them?”

“Mom…” Eren whined, slumping down in his chair as he poked his food. “He’s…” He took a deep breath. “He’s… exactly what you guys said he’d be… Okay? He’s caring but awkward. Considerate. He’s funny in his own way but doesn’t know how to talk to people very well…”

“So just like you then?” Grisha teased. Eren glared lightly but said nothing in return.

“So did you two do anything? Maybe go to the movies… take you out to a nice restaurant…?”

“Mom!”

“I’m just asking. You haven’t told me anything so I can only assume.”

“He… took me up to a cottage once. One of their cottages in the woods. It’s right near a lake…” Carla let out a small “aww!” leaving Eren to continue hastily, “But that’s really the most exciting thing that happened! Everything else is kind of boring.”

“Even the part where he was always helping you with your homework?”

“Mikasa, I swear to god…”

“So that’s why your grades have been improving! I was wondering why you were doing so well.”

“Mom! Excuse me! I do fine in school!”

“Steady C’s and B’s is not fine.”

“Yes it is! A’s are great, B’s are good, C’s are okay, so that means B’s and C’s are fine!”

“Eren,” Grisha interrupted their banter on Eren’s school logic. “Were you and Levi doing anything else…?”

Eren narrowed his eyes suspiciously, not liking where this was going. “What do you mean ‘anything else’?”

“I… received a call earlier today from Carlton…” Eren definitely didn’t like where this was going. “About you and Levi supposedly sharing a bed.”
A surprised gasp came from Carla and Mikasa stared wide eyed at Eren. She knew he’d been having sleeping troubles, which is more than Eren’s parents could say, but even she didn’t know about that. Eren slammed his hands on the table. Not enough to do any real damage but just enough to rattle the plates a bit and get everyone’s attention.

“Okay, first of all, don’t you dare blow this out of proportion like everyone else has! It’s not a big deal and if you all would just listen you’d understand that! And before you say anything I have already been chewed out by them and I don’t intend to be chewed out again!” His outburst might have been a bit unnecessary, but Eren wasn’t taking chances. “I was having trouble sleeping being in that mansion and being near Levi helped, that’s it! I knew telling you guys wasn’t going to work so I went with Levi’s plan! Nothing else happened, he was only trying to help!”

Grisha sighed, leaning back in his chair. “Alright. I believe you.”

“And I mean it’s not li… what?”

“I believe you. I’m not overly fond of your method, but you’re right. I wouldn’t have believed you if you told me before.”

“Oh…” Eren wasn’t used to his father trusting him like that… weird. “Carlton told you the story already, didn’t he?”

“I’m glad to see you’re telling the truth Eren.”

Eren rolled his eyes, taking a sip of his drink. “Whatever…”

“You’ve changed though,” Grisha commented curiously, squinting eyes looking Eren over.

“Huh?”

“Yes, yes,” Carla agreed, nodding as she did the same. “Something is different…”

“You’re so much more… mature now.” Did Mikasa really have to sound so surprised? Eren could be mature! Sometimes…

“I… I am?” Eren was shocked. He’d never been called mature before… At least not by people who knew him. What a strangely uplifting feeling…

“Levi must be a good influence on him.”

“Shut up…” Stop being right…

They ate in silence for another few minutes before a different subject was brought up…

“… So is Levi a really good pillow or…”?

“Mom,” Eren whined loudly, mortification painting his cheeks.

“What?” Carla drawled, shrugging her shoulders. “I have to know these things! Is he a cuddler?”

The other way around actually. “Have you guys started kissing yet?”

“Mom!”

“Eren don’t act like you didn’t see this coming. I have to know when my little baby boy starts doing a little more-”
“That’s it! I’m leaving!” Eren grabbed his plate and made for the kitchen. He was not about to listen to his own mother talk to him about sex! Especially with Levi! His whole face was probably dark red by now. Sex… with Levi? No, no, no, no, no. He couldn’t even think about it now even if he wanted to. It was too embarrassing…

“First one up has to put away dinner!” Mikasa called after him.

“Last one up does dishes!” Eren retorted back. It was a bit of a rule in their house to ensure that the food would never be left out for too long and that all the dishes from dinner would be able to get cleaned at the same time. He could still hear them laughing, but since they had a separate kitchen and dining room, once the door shut he couldn’t hear them anymore. Still, the peace and quiet was welcomed.

Now… to clean up dinner…

Eren groaned as he tried to force his lazy muscles to move. He was gonna have to start going chores again. He’d forgotten about that. After all, the most he’d had to do while at Levi’s was clean up that mud. And even then he didn’t actually have to. Everything else was left to the maids. Levi was lucky he never had to do chores.

Well, at least it was only putting dinner away. And spaghetti was really good reheated. Oh. What would it taste like cold? He’d never had cold leftover spaghetti before. He’s have to try that tomorrow or as a late night snack. Oh! Had Levi ever had leftover spaghetti before? Has he even ever had homemade spaghetti? Maybe Eren could bring some over and-

Eren nearly dropped the food.

Why did he keep doing that? How weird.

Eren mulled about in his room later that night, mindlessly unpacking his bags one article of clothing at a time.

Back in his room again. Messy, walls covered in posters of movies and video games. It was everything Eren was and stood for. His own little haven, and he was beyond happy to be back. Comforted by being back in his own element.

But it was still there! That weird melancholy from the car ride here. Granted it was much less noticeable now, and really Eren was more annoyed at the fact that he couldn’t figure out what that weird feeling was doing here. He was home, he was comfortable, he was happy, there was no darkness or suffocation here. Why?

Eren smiled thinly as something caught his eye. There was his lamp. Thrown on the floor, partially hidden under the bed. He remembered throwing that the night before he left. He’d been so mad back then… so angry at everything… He almost wished that he could go back in time to talk some sense into himself, to let him know that Levi was actually really cool. Socially inept and kind of a workaholic, but really cool.

But he knew it would be useless anyway. Eren was so hardheaded that even if a future version of himself could go back to talk some sense into him, he wouldn’t have listened. God, how had his parents dealt with him? He really was a brat.

Knock, knock.
“Eren?” It was his dad.

Eren, with only half a suitcase unpacked, scrambled to make it seem like he had actually gotten somewhere in unpacking. “Uh, come in!”

Grisha cracked the door open a bit, just to make sure it was safe (it only took one mistake three years ago…), then swung the door open fully. Eren sat on his knees amongst his suitcases, staring curiously up at his dad. “You, uh, doing okay?” Grisha asked awkwardly.

Eren nodded slowly, confused. “Uh… yeah. I’m fine.” Grisha nodded, unsure of what to say next. Eren sighed as Grisha stalled. “Can we maybe skip the awkward conversation? Or was that the only reason why you came in here?”

Grisha leaned against the doorframe. “You really have changed…” he commented, fascinated. Usually Eren would have just kept the awkward conversation in favor of serious talk.

“Well, yeah, I’ve changed, whatever,” Eren rolled his eyes, exasperated. Whoopdeedo. He changed. Was he going to hear that all night? “Is there something that you wanted?” He was busy not unpacking.

Grisha chuckled, shaking his head. “But still the Eren we all know and love.”

“Dad…”

The laughter stopped, and Eren could feel the air in the room sober greatly. “Eren…” Grisha began softly. “This is a long time overdue but… I’m sorry.”

Eren was nearly speechless. The only thing he could utter was a helpless, “Dad?”

“I’m sorry I forced you into this arranged marriage. I’ve regretted it ever since the day you were born. And I’m sorry I was so hard on you for it. I know apologizing now won’t change anything that’s happened, but I just needed you to know that. And I hope that one day you’ll be able to forgive me.”

Eren openly gaped at his father. All his life he’d never gotten an apology for the marriage. Never a hint of remorse. Why now? Why was he saying this now? Was it because he’d supposedly changed? Even so… to know that his father had been harboring those feelings for so long… It was nice knowing that he cared.

“I already have,” Eren managed, still stunned by Grisha’s words.

And now Grisha was stunned by Eren’s. “You have?”

Eren nodded, leaning back against his bed. “While I was with Levi… I realized that I was tired of hating everything. I was so tired of always getting pissed off about the marriage. I was so tired of thinking about the marriage in general, and Levi helped me see that. He actually suggested that I shouldn’t think about it at all, and that would help me. And so far it has.”

Grisha was speechless. When had his son become so grown up?

“I just…” Eren trailed off. “I just wish I could have met him sooner, you know?”

Grisha smiled.

Eren would be fine.
“But, um…” Eren shifted slightly. “Does this mean you’re okay with the idea of me going to college for writing?”

“What? No.” Well, it was worth a shot. “How does this even tie into our previous conversation?”

“Oh… because…” How was he going to put this? “I’ve already decided to…”

“Eren!”

It was such a relief to finally sleep in his own bed. Sheets worn and well broken in, rarely washed too. The lumpy, used, flat pillows at the bottom of the pile with the squishier pillows on top. That nice navy blue comforter he’d had for years, also worn and only a little lumpy in places. And the mattress itself with its bounciness and padded top for extra comfort, molded almost perfectly to his shape.

Such a relief but… He couldn’t get to sleep?

At least not very well. It was like he needed to do something and his whole body knew it. But he couldn’t for the life of him remember what he had to do. If he even had to do anything.

It was… weird.

Eren nearly screamed out his frustration. Nothing tonight was making sense! Why was he so fucking melancholy? What did he need to do?

Eren flopped on his back, glaring at the ceiling when Mikasa sneeked it. She crawled into his bed and he made room for her automatically. Just like they used to do when they were kids, usually because Mikasa needed comfort. But now Eren needed it, didn’t he?

“What do you want to know?” he whispered, turning his head to see her eyes trained straight towards him. They were so piercing, willing Eren to tell her everything.

“What’s wrong?” Straight to the point, but worry still showed through clearly. “You’ve been acting strange since you got back.”

Eren turned on his side, facing Mikasa and getting comfortable. “I don’t know. I know there’s something but… I just can’t put my finger on it…”

“Did you… have fun with Levi?”

He shrugged. “For the most part. The first couple of days were horrible though…”

“Yeah, we know,” Mikasa deadpanned. “You made sure to tell us all just how horrible it was.”

“It really was though,” Eren laughed lightly. “Oh, we made each other so mad! I could’ve sworn he was gonna kick me out right then and there!” His laughter died down but the smile stayed. “But… we made up, and he ended up being a pretty okay guy… More than okay, really. I wouldn’t have survived there without him…”

“And sleeping in his bed really helped you?”

“He was the one thing in that house that helped me. I still don’t really know why, and I can’t explain it…”
“You like him.” It wasn’t a question, but it still had Eren burning up.

“I… I think I do…” It was whispered carefully, barely audible to either of them for fear that saying it out loud would only make it truer than it already was. And suddenly, it all came together. Everything he’d been feeling and thinking: the melancholy, the need, Levi this, Levi that. “I miss him.”

And Mikasa, not one for a lot of words, said nothing more. Rather, she scooched closer, stepping in for Levi. They didn’t hug the same way due to the fact that they were family and the fact that Mikasa had a much larger chest than Levi (they were squishy and comfy, yes, but it was weird all the same). She was a good stand it, but not as good as the real thing.

Eren’s phone vibrated on the nightstand. Too curious to leave it until morning, Eren leaned over Mikasa to grab it. Eren was really grateful the he wasn’t the girl here, otherwise this would have been really awkward.

He had a text message.

**Levi:** I’m going to assume since you haven’t texted me like you were supposed to and yet I haven’t received a gleeful message from Grandfather about needing a new fiancé that you made it home okay and just forgot.

Eren couldn’t help but laugh. Oops. He was supposed to text Levi that he got home safe wasn’t he?

“If you’re going to respond, at least lie back down while you do it,” Mikasa said, pushing at his chest playfully. “I’d rather not feel claustrophobic while trying to sleep.”

Eren muttered an apology and rolled back over with his phone, quickly texting a response.

**Eren:** Sry I forgot.

**Levi:** Whatever. Just hurry up and get some sleep, alright? You have school in the morning.

**Eren:** Fine but I still expect u to visit me soon. So many movies so little time.

**Levi:** Sleep.

Eren chuckled to himself, but managed to sleep a lot easier after that.

There were only very few things that could possibly be exciting while sitting in math class on a Monday. Your teacher calls in sick… That test you had was cancelled… Or your fiancé was coming over on Friday to stay for the weekend and you just couldn’t wait for it.

Eren had already been home for a week, and it was about time Levi came over. The sneaky guy had managed to elude his fate last weekend by throwing the business excuse, but not this weekend. Eren would have that Disney marathon whether Levi liked it or not! That uncultured fiend…

In fact, he was busy planning just which movies they were going to watch and the order too, when he felt his phone vibrate in his pocket. Making sure his teacher still had his back turned towards the whiteboard, Eren tried his hardest to discreetly check his phone. He’d gotten a text. And… from Levi?
Levi: *You’re coming straight to the mansion after school. The chauffer will pick you up at the front. Don’t forget.*

What? Why was he getting picked up at school? The chauffer never picked him up at school! And why was he getting picked up to begin with? Why did he need to go to the mansion again?

Levi: *And stop reading texts in class before you get in trouble.*

“Oh no… please tell him that wasn’t his teacher standing over him.

Eren glanced up meekly.

It was.

There was his teacher, staring down at him, very much less than pleased. “Would you like to share with the class, or would you rather like to put your phone away before I take it from you?”

“I-I…” Excuses, excuses… if he had a good reason surely his teacher wouldn’t be mad, right? But nothing came to mind quickly enough, and his teacher’s stare was really unnerving. “I’ll just put it away…”

“Good choice.”

The class giggled as Eren pocketed his phone again. But being scolded by a teacher and getting laughed at was much better than the alternative of having them find out that Levi Voclain had been texting him. He couldn’t pull a lie good enough if something like that had happened. And just thinking about the consequences of exposing the engagement before the planned date made him extremely grateful for the light scolding and giggles.

Eren spent the rest of the day constantly worrying about the text Levi had sent. Eren replied several times asking about it, but never got a response. At the end of the day, the car was waiting out at the front of the school just like Levi said it would be. Other students openly stared, whispering back and forth between each other about the fancy black car, but Eren tried not to pay attention to that. With his nerves quaking, Eren climbed in, trying to endure the ride back to the mansion.

What on Earth was going on?

Once the car pulled up to its destination, Eren leapt out of the car. His mind had created so many worrisome scenarios on the way there that Eren was trying not to panic.

There, standing on the porch, was Genevieve. She’d been waiting for him, worry clear on her face too.

“Wha… What’s going…” Eren tried to ask, but Genevieve had latched onto him, immediately pulling him inside. Wordlessly, she escorted him to Francis’s study. She wasn’t pulling as hard once they were inside, but her grip didn’t lighten up. Was… Was Eren at fault for something? Did he do something to call the marriage off?

His heart pounded loudly in his chest through the silence. When they finally made it to the study, everything was exactly as Eren had remembered. They were all even in the same spot as last time.
As soon as he entered the room, Levi was on him. He held Eren by his upper arms. If Eren had thought Genevieve was worried, he extremely unnerved by how worried Levi was.

“Eren, are you alright?” he asked quickly.

“Um… Yeah, I’m–”

Levi cut him off, speaking just as quickly. “Did anyone you didn’t know try to talk to you before you got here?”

“What? No. Levi–” But Eren was cut off yet again, this time by Levi hugging him. Now he was really confused. “Levi?”

“Eren.” Francis’s commanding voice interrupted them. “Sit.” He was just as eternally pissed off as usual, but luckily it didn’t look like he was pissed off at Eren. At least… Eren hoped Francis wasn’t pissed off at him…

Levi guided him over to the same seat he’d had before. Maybe now he’d get some answers.

“Eren. Who did you tell about the marriage?” Or… he’d just get more questions.

“I… just my friends?” He kind of didn’t want to tell Francis that… but with Carlton there, he’d just get yelled at for lying. And then he’d still have to tell Francis.

“It’s not his fault, Grandfather,” Levi said. Eren didn’t know what wasn’t his fault, but Levi was sticking up for him, so it really wasn’t his fault was it? Whatever it was… “The only one who would possibly know about her would be Christa Lenz and we both know she wouldn’t tell anyone.”

“Are you sure?” Francis pressed, dead set on pinning the blame on Eren apparently.

“She’s one of Eren’s closest friends! She wouldn’t betray him or us like that.”

“How else would she know?”

“She’s cunning. She probably has a million different ways to figure it out. You can’t just blame it on Eren!” Wait… She as in Christa? Or someone else?

“It doesn’t matter how she found out,” Genevieve spoke up, breaking up their argument. “The problem now is that she knows and we have to find out what our next move is going to be.”

“What’s going on?” Eren nearly yelled. He tried to keep his cool, but it was difficult when he was so confused.

“You remember how I told you about my mother, right?” Levi’s mother… she’d filed for divorce after learning she wouldn’t get a penny of the fortune… But what did she have to do with this? Francis had the answer.

“She’s found out about the arranged marriage between you and Levi. Everything. Including who you are, what you are to inherit, where you go to school, who your friends are. And now she is threatening to release the information if we don’t transfer Levi and the fortune he inherits over to her.”

“What? But… she can’t do that!” Eren shot up from his seat. “You’re one of the most powerful people in the business world. Can’t you have her arrested? Sued? Slapped in the face?
Something?!” Hell, he had billions upon billions of dollars. Surely he could use that for something?

Francis sighed, losing his patience. “While what you said is true, and if I wanted to I could accomplish all of what you listed, but by the time I’ve assembled enough evidence and a large enough group of lawyers, she’ll have already released the information. Surely you’re feeble mind can comprehend the consequences if that information were to be released by her?”

Eren bit his lip, looking away. To be honest, he really didn’t. Sure, he might get harassed a bit at school, but what would be the harm?

Levi, sensing Eren’s befuddlement, enlightened him. “If that kind of information was released by anyone besides us, it would create a huge scandal,” he explained. “That’s not something a company ever needs for their business. The media would grab hold of this and milk it for all its worth, creating more and more twisted stories. You saw what they wrote about Erwin and I, and we were just walking out of a coffee shop together. Imagine what they would say about you. Especially since you still haven’t graduated high school yet.”

Eren was still confused. “But… I don’t care what they say about me.”

“It wouldn’t just be you,” Francis snapped. “It would be Levi, me, my family, my company, Levi’s company, your family. Everyone you associate with would be brought up, your relationship with them analyzed and bent out of shape to fit into whatever insane story they came up with. Levi’s and my business’s reputations would plummet, stocks would fall, we’d lose money, and who knows when we’d get it back up! The last thing we’d want is for this information to be released by anyone but us.”

It was all starting to click together, and it showed on Eren’s face. “So… then the only solution would be…”

Francis was mildly impressed. Or at least as impressed as someone can be towards someone they loath with all their being. “Looks like you’re catching on quickly. That’s right. We’ll have to announce the engagement early. Tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow?!” Eren cried out, horrified. Why tomorrow? Why so soon?

“She’s given us a 24 hour response time. If we don’t send her Levi with the promise of the fortune before that 24 hour period is up, then she’ll release that information to the media.”

“So the media needs to catch wind of it from us before then,” Levi continued.

Carlton finished it off. “After that, any information she has will be useless.”

It had been decided. But Eren was still unsure about the idea. He remembered the reaction his friends had when they found out. What if everyone else at school was the same? Everyone would look at him differently, like just because he was engaged meant he was a different person. There wouldn’t even be enough time for everything to blow over before he went back to school. No weekend for them to talk, only for Monday to come where they’d be too tired to ask. Hell, today was Monday!

Eren fidgeted with his hands in his lap, too scared to say anything. It’s not like he had a better idea, after all. Levi noticed, though he wasn’t the only one.

“Is there any other option we have?” he asked, surprising everyone. Most importantly Francis. All eyes were on Levi.
“Any other option”…? Francis repeated slowly. “Levi, you know this is the only option we have.”

“But he’s still in high school! Most of the students he goes to school with would kill to know me.” Wow, conceited much? Though he was right… “They won’t leave him alone! Not to mention the media would have a field day knowing I’m engaged to a barely legal high schooler.”

“We don’t have a choice!” Francis was raising his voice. “This isn’t going to be easy for anyone involved so we have to take the lesser of the two evils! You know that!” This wasn’t good. Sure, going back to school was going to be tough for Eren but…

“Levi,” Eren got Levi’s attention. “I’ll be fine. I only have, like, three more weeks left anyways… Two of those weeks everyone is going to be too busy with finals and graduation to care… And most of the people in my class know not to mess with me anyway. And do you really think my friends are going to let any of them hurt me? I’ll be fine. Really.”

For long moments, no one moved, no one spoke. Finally, Levi responded. “Fine. Leave it to me. I’ll make sure the media gets wind of the engagement, and once they do we can schedule an interview with our main publicist for the day after tomorrow. Get ready for your first interview, Eren.”

Eren groaned. “Oh great…”

“Good. Now that that’s settled, Eren, you’re free to go.” Francis waved his hand in dismissal. “And be sure to tell your father the change of plans when you get back.”

“Wait…” Suddenly, Eren realized, “Why wasn’t he here? Wouldn’t he be affected by this too?”

Francis furrowed his brow, as if it was preposterous that Eren even had to ask. “I didn’t even want you here.”

Genevieve rushed to Eren’s side, nudging him in the direction of the door before he could properly respond. “Come on, Eren. Let’s get you home.”

“What does he mean?” Eren asked once they were out of earshot, only a little furious.

Genevieve rubbed his shoulder as they walked, trying to calm him down. “The only reason you were brought here for the meeting was because Levi demanded it. He said you had the right to know.”

Speak of the devil, Levi jogged after them, causing them to halt to a stop in the foyer. He gently held one of Eren’s hands in both of his.

“Eren,” he said firmly. “Don’t worry, I’m going to take care of this, okay?”

God, was he always such a worry wart? He wasn’t going to say it out loud, but it was kind of adorable. “Levi,” Eren smiled reassuringly. “I already told you, I’ll be fine! You don’t have to worry so much about me, I can handle it.”

Levi still didn’t look very convinced, but he didn’t push it. “Just… be careful, alright? You don’t know what my mother is capable of…”

Eren kept smiling. “I will.” And he would be. If Levi was there to help him, he’d be just fine.

Levi studied Eren carefully, trying to find any trace that might indicate that Eren was lying and
shaking his head when he found none. “You’re strangely okay with this…”

Eren could feel a blush coming up. “W-Well… We don’t have much of another choice… Unless we wanted to hand you over. And…” He bit his lip, the blush getting darker. “I know you’re not going to let anything happen to me so…”

It was faint, almost unnoticeable, but it was definitely there. Levi leaned forward a bit, closer to Eren’s face. Obvious worry and confliction etched into his own. A small spark pricked Eren within his chest. Excitement? Nervousness? But Levi stilled and resorted to patting Eren’s hand soothingly but kind of awkwardly. Then, without another word, passed by them and up the stairs.

That was strange… it was almost as if Levi was going to k… ki-

“Eren.” Genevieve’s voice broke up his thoughts. She gently tugged on his shoulder. “I’m sure your parents are worried about you.”

“Yeah…” Eren touched his tingling lips subconsciously. “Yeah, I’m sure they are…”
I’m dedicating this chapter to one of my readers who’s been having a hard time recently. It’s not much but I hope this chapter helps you feel a little better!

To all of my other readers… :3 Good luck with this chapter!

Okay, forget everything he said yesterday.

Eren was not ready for this.

Sure, he had Levi and his friends to protect him and keep the brunt of the reaction at bay, but the fact of the matter was that there was indeed going to be a reaction. A very big reaction. For who knows how long, all of the attention would be on Eren. They were going to know who he was, that he was engaged to Levi, everything! Just remembering all of the things that happened to Christa over the years only made it that much worse.

How was he going to do this?! He’d never dealt with the public before. He’d never had to do anything that Christa or Levi had to do. And suddenly, he was going to need that set of skills. What if he did something wrong? What if he said something he shouldn’t have? What would they do to him?

Damn Levi’s mother! Whatever her name may be… Damn her! If she hadn’t been so money hungry they would’ve just waited until summer like planned and Eren would have had ample amount of time to be taught those kinds of things. God fucking damn it!

“Levi has a lot of female fans right? Do you think they’ll send you death threats?”

“Oh my god…”

“Armin, you’re not helping.”

Eren was currently tucked away in an isolated part of the school before class started for the day. Students rarely noticed that it was even there which made it perfect for hiding. Not that Eren was “hiding” per say… just… avoiding morning traffic… yeah…

Okay, no. He was definitely hiding. Was he proud to admit it? Not really, but there was no denying that he was in fact hiding.

But how could anyone blame him? By the end of the day, every single student, faculty, and whoever else in that school would know that he was engaged to the single most wealthiest, famous, young bachelor (not that he was ever available to begin with) of their generation! And he couldn’t even see it coming. When Levi said he’d take care of it, that clearly meant that no one else was supposed to know.

Hell, he was so nervous, Eren was certain he’d end up just giving it away after getting startled.

Every single glance in his direction automatically had him chanting “they know, they know, they
know" inside his head. Clearly they didn’t know, no one had said anything yet, but that couldn’t stop it from occupying all of his thoughts.

Well… there was one recurring topic that showed up that wasn’t his paranoia, but it wasn’t much better.

Was… was Levi really going to kiss him last night? With the way he leaned forward like that, if only slightly, it seemed obvious. But… did it really happen, or was it just a figment of Eren’s imagination? Or had Levi never even leaned forward to begin with and that was just a figment of Eren’s imagination? Because… Levi didn’t really like Eren enough to want to kiss him right? Like actually kiss him?

But… if Levi hadn’t been trying to kiss him, then why would Eren think he was? Did he secretly want Levi to kiss him? The thought was appealing… because Eren was starting to like Levi so being able to kiss Levi was a nice thought… But wouldn’t that just complicate everything? If Levi didn’t like him that way and Eren was only imagining it because he liked Levi then that would only make their relationship more strained and awkward and painful because that would mean that Levi didn’t like him and would turn him down.

On the other hand… if Levi really did try to kiss him, then what? Did that mean that Levi liked him? Or was it just a reflex? Did Levi really want to kiss him? Did Levi really like Eren? Because if he did, then would Eren’s reaction change? Would he still want to kiss Levi if Levi wanted to kiss him? Or would he just shy away because he wasn’t expecting that? But what if they both wanted to kiss each other and did that? Would… would that just be the best case scenario? It would certainly make their relationship easier…

And to top it all off, Eren knew that he was just completely over thinking this!

If this was what it meant to like someone, then Eren didn’t like it. Couldn’t they just skip this whole he said she said nonsense and just become lovers and make this all easier?

Mikasa and Armin could only watch as their poor childhood friend curled up in a corner.

“You can’t hide from this forever you know…” Armin offered cautiously.

“I can try,” Eren said hollowly, not even lifting his head so they could hear him properly.

He could just imagine Mikasa rolling her eyes like she probably was right now, thought. “Hiding will only make you that much more suspicious.”

“Whatever… You two would do the same.”

They spent another minute like that, trying to urge Eren out of his corner until the bell rang. Eren tensed when he heard it, and Mikasa and Armin merely sighed.

“Come on, let’s get you to class.”

“Are you sure you can do this?” It was definitely not the first time Hanji had legitimately been worried about her friend, but it was also definitely not very often that it happened.

Because her friend, Levi, was currently in his chair, leaning on his desk, face buried in his hands, and no work done. He’d even locked himself in his personal office, something he rarely did despite
his aversion to interacting with others. Usually he was out in the buzz of the office hopping from desk to desk to oversee everything personally. Even early in the morning he was more energetic than this.

Levi could feel some kind of emotion, nervousness perhaps, swelling up uncomfortably inside. “I have to. Whether I can or cannot is not relevant. I don’t have another option.”

“But… to announce it so soon… surely you know what that will do to Er-”

“I know what the repercussions are!” Levi snapped harshly, sending a fierce glare to Hanji. “You think I haven’t worried about that for the past twelve, fifteen hours? You think my mind hasn’t created every possible article the media will write simply to tear him apart? He’s in high school, Hanji. They will eat that shit up. He’s never even had to deal with the media before. He has no idea the shit storm aimed directly for him. And I can do nothing to prepare him for it.”

Levi needed reassurance and he needed it now. “He’s…” Hanji started, but took a deep breath to calm herself, preparing herself to deal with an out of character Levi. They didn’t need two emotionally charged wrecks in here. “He’s a strong kid. He’ll be able to hold his own.”

“He shouldn’t have to hold his own. He should be able to learn about this without the sudden hands on project. They’ll… they’ll swarm the school… they’ll swarm his house… they’ll… attack his friends, attack every part of him he holds dear I…” Levi trailed off. The thought of what Eren would have to go through was too unfair.

“You?” Hanji asked. “You think you can protect him from this? You’re Levi Voclain. Famous, billionaire genius. Conveniently drop dead gorgeous.” Levi couldn’t help rolling his eyes. “He’ll have to deal with this his whole life…”

“Then he deserves those last few weeks of freedom. He deserves…” The next few words evaded him. They seemed to like doing that recently.

Hanji dropped herself onto the arm of Levi’s chair, exhaling as she descended. “No… No he doesn’t deserve any of this. But very few people deserve the bad things that happen to them. But what can you do? Bad things happen! Focus less on what’s happening and more on the fact that Eren can get through this, and you know that! For fuck’s sake, he managed to somehow like you!”

Levi furrowed his brow, shaking his head disbelievingly at Hanji. “That’s… not helping.”

“Well, regardless, Eren will be fine! And even if he has trouble dealing with the media, he has you. And you and I both know that you’d do anything in your power to take care of him.”

Levi leaned back in his chair, letting his head fall back. “It won’t be enough…” Not for someone who has as little experience as Eren.

“What are you talking about? You have more than enough power.” But Levi wouldn’t respond, nor was his mood improving. Hanji had to change it up. Lighten things up. “Not to mention you’re basically in love with the kid,” she laughed convincingly. “My bet is that you’re gonna end up spoiling him.”

Spoiling him… “I…” He shouldn’t say it. “I almost kissed him last night…”

He really shouldn’t have said it, but it was exactly what Hanji needed. “What? What? What are you doing skimping on that kind of information! Details! Details!” she urged, shaking him slightly.

“There’s not much to say besides that,” Levi said, plucking Hanji’s hands from him.
“Yes there is! Why did you want to kiss him? Why didn’t you kiss him?”

“I just…” He wanted to taste those soft lips, feel them move against his own. He wanted to thread his fingers through Eren’s smooth locks, pressing him closer and closer. He… “I was worried and I let my emotions get the better of me for a moment.”

“And why didn’t you follow through?”

“Because that’s not how it works.” Lovers kissed. Family kissed. Forced fiancés that only recently started to become actual friends did not kiss. Eren didn’t even like him that way to begin with! Kissing him would only complicate their relationship. A relationship they’d have to keep for the rest of their lives…

Hanji was going to smack Levi. “What do you mean that’s not how it works? “Oh, I like someone and want to kiss them but if I kiss them than I’m doing it wrong!” Really?”

“It’s only been a little over a month.”

“People get married after three weeks.”

“And I doubt he even likes me the same.”

“You won’t know if you don’t kiss him.”

“Hanji.”

“Levi.”

Levi let out a deep breath, collecting his thoughts and turning the conversation back to the real problem at hand. “Regardless, I have more important things to worry about than kissing. Like, oh, I don’t know… prematurely exposing a controversial relationship so the entire world can judge and ridicule Eren before he’s ready.”

Was there really nothing she could do right now? Hanji didn’t know how to help her poor friend like this… “I don’t envy you… But… If you’re going to say anything, just say it from your heart. If you can’t talk to the world, talk to Eren.” With the situation as it was, that was the best she had to offer. So with nothing else to say, Hanji stood from her stop next to Levi and headed back to work, throwing back one last good luck.

Levi mulled over Hanji’s words. If he couldn’t talk to the world… talk to Eren…

He glanced over to the computer, eying the video recording program and webcam.

“Here goes nothing…”

First period was torture.

Every whisper, every glance, every giggle. Eren couldn’t help but feel as if they were meant for him. If he actually gave it more thought, though, he’d realize that no one actually cared or knew yet.

Second period was terrifying.
His teacher called him out and Eren nearly gave it all away in fear. He’d managed to hold off, but he wasn’t sure how much more he could take of this.

By third period though, he was starting to forget.

In his third class of the day, they were working on their projects. He, Marco, and one other student, Thomas, worked diligently on it throughout the whole period, sufficiently distracting Eren from his fears.

By lunchtime, he’d completely forgotten.

Students whispered, glanced, and giggled, but Eren hardly noticed. It was as if this morning and last night hadn’t happened. His friends, thankfully, said nothing all throughout lunch too, leaving Eren blissfully ignorant of anything that might be going on around him. It didn’t even occur to Eren that anyone could be talking about him at this point.

But… by his study hall, with only a couple more classes to go…

Eren stretched, allowing the stiff muscles of his back a bit of relief from carrying his heavy backpack. With his locker right next to his study hall, he was able to drop all anything he didn’t need beforehand. Generally he just grabbed a notebook to write in. Naps were also good, but only when he knew he’d wake up in time.

He was stopped right before he walked in.

“Eren!” Mina Carolina was her name he believed. They’d had some classes together throughout the years, but were never anything more than friends. She was obviously nervous, but mostly curious. “Is it true?”

“Is what…” It was at this moment that Eren remembered that he should probably be more concerned about those kinds of questions. Swallowing thickly, he tried again. “Is what true?”

“Mina,” the girl hidden behind Mina, Hannah, said. “He probably doesn’t want to be bothered!”

She was nervous and tried to keep her voice down, but Eren heard her loud and clear.

Better just get this over with. But act as ignorant as possible too… Maybe it was something else…?

“I don’t know what you two are talking about.”

The two shared a look, and Eren braced himself. Here it came…

“You mean you haven’t seen the video?”

Wait, what? “Video?”

Hannah stepped out from behind her friend. “You haven’t seen it?!”

Before he knew it, Eren was ushered into the classroom, straight up to the teacher’s desk.

“Come on! You have to see it! Mrs. Channey! Can we use your computer?”

Their teacher, Mrs. Channey, a slightly overweight and moderately strict study hall teacher, glared minutely as they approached. “Whatever for?”
“There’s a video that Eren needs to see.”

“Like needs to see.”

“Absolutely not,” she scoffed. “You’re supposed to be in study hall to study, not watch cats in YouTube videos.”

“It’s not about cats!”

“It’s really, really important!”

“So important that it can’t wait until after school?”

“No!” both girls cried in terrifying unison.

“How can a video possibly be that important?” Mina let out an overdramatic and exasperated sigh, sagging her shoulders, before leaning over to whisper something to Mrs. Channey. Eren tried scooting a little closer to catch what she was saying, but before he could hear anything, Mina had stepped away. Mrs. Channey shook her head, not exactly pleased, but pushed her chair away from the computer. “Just this once,” she warned.

The two girls squealed their delight and yanked Eren around the desk so he could see. He cautiously watched as the two set up the video, and knew he wouldn’t be able to slow his racing heart when they pulled up the Recon website.

This was it, wasn’t it? His end… This video was going to expose all of those secrets… Everything he’d had to keep hidden…

Oh god he was gonna throw up…

Play…

It was Levi. Suit and tie business attire that made him look far too good. What Eren assumed was his office was the background. It was only a little comforting that Levi looked exactly as Eren felt. Levi was much better at hiding it than Eren, though. Still, seeing him like that filled Eren with the sudden urge to comfort him.

A shaky sigh, and it began.

“As many of you know, there have been rumors flying around about my colleague and I being engaged.” There was anger in his voice. Eren nearly laughed to himself at it. So he was trying to hide his nervousness by acting angry? Smart. Very convincing too, but Eren knew. “I originally wasn’t going to say anything about it, but these stories are getting out of hand. Tell me, how exactly can you decipher “engaged” from two co-workers walking out of a coffee shop? And then how can you possibly stretch that one tidbit of information so far for so long?”

Eren found himself focusing everything on Levi. His voice calmed him down. Keeping his eyes trained onto Levi helped him ignore the rest of the filling classroom.

Another sigh. “This ends now.” Levi’s voice was strong, unwavering. “I am engaged. But, not to Erwin Smith.” Eren could hear the silent “thank god” he knew Levi would have said had the world not been listening. But he could hardly find it in him to smile knowing what was coming next.

Levi now was distracted, furiously flipping through what Eren assumed to be pictures on his phone. When he’d found a decent one a few moments later, that’s what filled the screen.
“I am engaged to a young man named Eren Jaeger.”

Embarrassment flooded his whole being. Eren had remembered the day they took that photo. It was one of the days that they’d spent outside under his tree. Eren had snatched Levi’s phone out of curiosity (Levi had damn near ripped his hand off trying to get it back after Eren threatened to call Hanji), and ended up taking several pictures with it.

The picture Levi had chosen was the selfie Eren had taken of himself and Levi. Eren was grinning miles wide while Levi, leaning against Eren and reading a book, had merely cast a slightly confused and curious look at Eren from the corner of his eye, one eyebrow delicately raised. One could tell just how sunny it was outside, but the leaves created a perfect balance of shadows cascading across them. Even though he wasn’t ready for it, Levi still managed to pull it off.

Oh, but why did he have to choose that one?! Eren looked like a total dork with his stupid goofy grin! He wanted to hide so badly… Covering his face with his hands didn’t help as much as he thought either.

“Several years ago, our families, The Vociain Corporation and The Jaeger Medical Company, made a deal involving an arranged marriage between Eren and I.” Levi pulled his phone away, taking a moment to carefully study the picture himself. Softer this time, he continued, “And I couldn’t be happier that it’s him.”

At that, Eren let his fingers fall just enough so he could see the screen again. But not too much, he didn’t want that blush of his to actually be seen.

“He’s… such an amazing person and so different from the people I tend to interact with and it’s so refreshing and…” Levi paused, taking a moment to gather his thoughts, like none of the words he had could really describe how he felt. “I’m so lucky to have him, and… I’m not sure he quite understands how unfair this all is to him.”

When Levi stared back into the lens, Eren couldn’t help but feel as if he was right there, like Eren was in the office with him. Like Levi was talking right at him and not the camera.

“Eren… I know I’m not the best when it comes to talking to you or… expressing my feelings or even interacting with you without coming off as arrogant or sarcastic or insulting… And you could do so much better and be much happier with someone else… and I know it’s horribly selfish of me… but you can’t begin to understand how happy it makes me that I have you…”

Those… those weren’t tears in Eren’s eyes… not at all… nope… He wasn’t finding difficulty breathing either. How was it that even though Levi was, as he said, terrible at talking to others, that he still managed to set off little sparks in Eren, warming him up to the core despite the AC. He wanted to run to Levi’s side and squeeze every last bit of him, telling him over and over again that Eren was just as happy…

“So go ahead,” Levi’s angry façade was back. “Write all about my engagement. Just get my fiancé right this time.”

This time, a small, almost unnoticeable chuckled leaked out of Eren. How could he be blessed with such a dork?

“Oh, and Eren? Because I know you’ll probably see this at some point during school, no doubt thanks to one of your friends, I’m letting you know now that I’ll be picking you up from school today.” And the video ended.
What?

“What?!” Eren about screamed, throwing his hands from his face. “What do you mean you’re picking me up? You couldn’t have just texted me that?”

The large cumulative gasp was what reminded Eren that he was not, in fact, in the office with Levi, but in a classroom in which the entire class had formed a crowd around the computer. Eren, refusing to look away from the computer and up into the faces of those who were most definitely watching him, could hear their excited whispers and wanted so desperately to fall to the floor and hide behind the desk.

“Mrs. Channey…” he barely managed out, his voice softer than he thought he could get it. “…I’d like to go home now, please…”

Mrs. Channey rolled her eyes, but stood from her chair. “Alright you kids, show and tell is over.” She ushered them away from her desk, and they scrambled, rushing back to their seats. Eren, who was too much in a state of shock and embarrassment, was grateful for the gentle, guiding hand that nudged him towards the direction of his own desk, much different shooing hand motions she’d made to the other students.

Eren enjoyed having his seat in the back of this class because it meant that no one could look over his shoulder as he wrote. But now, it was a curse. Anywhere he looked besides the floor were whispering eyes as he pushed through the sea of desks to sit down. Whispers. So many whispers. So loud.

“And,” Mrs. Channey announced, “If I hear even the tiniest bit of chatter, I’ll be writing detention slips.”

The whispers stopped. But even so, the eyes never left. So Eren spent the rest of the period with his head down, words from a familiar voice filling his mind.

If Eren was to compare how he’d felt in the beginning of school to how he felt now, at the end during his last period, he’d have to say that he now felt worse.

What had been speculation in the morning was now all too true. Whispers and glances were all geared towards him whenever he entered a room or walked past. It must have been impossible to keep something like that from spreading to all corners of the school, especially considering the news was centered on one of their own students. If everyone in the school didn’t know about it by now, then social media had fallen apart within the last five or so hours and the world was ending.

Still, as of right now it was only whispers and glances. For whatever reason, no one dared approach him. They might still be skeptical about the information.

After all, were they really going to believe that Eren, stubborn, suicidal, unheard of, and definitely not super rich and classy Eren, was engaged to Levi Voclain? Levi, who was practically oozing money, fame, and class? How would they even have met had it not been arranged?

In simpler terms, Levi was a prince and Eren was the farmer’s bastard son. At least in their eyes…

Eren couldn’t help but watch the clock, too.

It was his last period of the day, and for once he wished time would slow. The slower the clock
went, the more time he would have until the inevitable moment where everyone’s question would be answered.

The moment where Levi picked him up from school.

Eren didn’t have the slightest idea of what would happen exactly, but he was terrified by what it would be. So the later it happened, the better.

But every time Eren shot another glance at the clock, more time had passed than he wanted. It was all he could focus on, lecture be damned. Hell, he didn’t even know what his teacher was supposed to be talking about. All he could focus on was the ticking of the clock. It wouldn’t stop. Why couldn’t time just stop? He wasn’t ready for this. He wasn’t ready for this!

Riiiiing~!

Mikasa, who shared his last class, was at his side in an instant. “Do you want me to walk you to the front?”

Eren shook his head, wondering when she’d seen the video. Probably way before him, but she, and he assumed the rest of his friends, were too caring to let Eren know after he’d finally stopped worrying about it around lunch. He wasn’t sure whether to be grateful or not… But one glance towards all of their staring classmates left him reconsidering his decision. “On second thought… yes.”

He latched onto her hand, pulling her alongside him as they slide through the throngs of students. Despite how much it bothered him usually, he knew that no one would bother them if Mikasa was around. They were all too scared. At least… those who knew about what happened to the last guy who tried roughing Eren up when she was near were…

“You know we won’t let anyone hassle you, right?” Mikasa asked as they walked, talking about their group of friends. “You know you won’t be able to hide from this forever, so just know that we’ll be there for you.”

“Oh course I know,” Eren replied, but didn’t slow his pace. The sooner this was over now, the better.

“And Levi will be too.”

That’s what made Eren stop all together. Moving off to the side so they were as out of the way as possible, Eren faced his sister. “What? What do you mean?” He wasn’t going to lie, hearing Mikasa talk about Levi like that was kind of weird. He never really associated Levi with his group of friends so hearing them talk about each other freaked him out a bit.

“Do you really think Levi’s going to back out on you? Dangle you and leave you for the wolves?”

“Oh course not! But… how would you know that?” They hadn’t exactly spent a lot of time together after all…

“I’ve seen the video, Eren. I saw how he talked about you. He cares about you. A lot. So promise me that if something happens, and for some reason none of us can help you, that’s you’ll trust Levi?”

He supposed that sharing a bed with Levi to solve his sleeping problems wasn’t enough proof that he’d trust Levi for Mikasa, but then again, she only knew so much about their relationship, didn’t she? “I promise.” And he would. Confusing feelings and needs to kiss aside, Levi was someone
Eren knew he could confide in.

They continued their journey, and thankfully, the front of the school wasn’t too much farther away. Just a turn down that hallway… right through the student center and…

People with cameras. Large cameras. Right outside the doors. Waiting to pounce like lions. The few security guards the school had held them back as they waited, trying to keep them from interfering with students who were leaving. Through the mass of students, a familiar black car with windows tinted to the point where they almost blended into the black sleek of the rest of the vehicle waited right outside the doors.

Eren gulped and pulled Mikasa around the corner so the paparazzi couldn’t see them.

“I’ll be fine from here,” he told her, holding her in front of him so she wouldn’t walk right into their line of sight.

“Are you sure? There’s paparazzi out there and a lot of students—”

“I’m sure.”

“Maybe I should walk you to the car, so that I know Levi—”

“I’ll be fine!” he stressed, begging her. “Please, I don’t want you going out there with those guys there. Levi told me that the media loved making up twisted stories and that they’d target my friends and family too. People already mistake us for lovers anyway, can you imagine what the media would think? Just because I’ve been thrust into this doesn’t mean I have to take you with me.”

“I need to know that you’ll be okay.”

“I’ll… I’ll text you when I’m in the car. Okay?”

She wasn’t happy about it, but Mikasa nodded anyway. “I’ll trust you Eren.” She pulled him in for a hug. “I’ll see you later, okay? Don’t forget to text me.”

Eren hugged her back, not wanting to let go. He wasn’t ready to face this yet. “I won’t”

With one last squeeze, Eren pushed Mikasa further around the corner and made a beeline straight for the black car.

The moment he was outside, Eren couldn’t see. He couldn’t hear. Flashes of light and shouts hurt his eyes and ears. He couldn’t even make out what the shouts were supposed to be saying. The flashes didn’t die down, but when Eren had gotten slightly used to them, the first thing he saw was Levi headed his way. Eren hurried over, meeting him halfway as the security guards pushed back harder on the flashing crowd.

Eren had only a moment to register the words “Hug me,” before feeling Levi’s arms encircle him in embrace. Eren had barely hugged him back when Levi pulled away, but only just enough to be able to guide Eren to the car, one comforting hand on the small of his back, right under his backpack.

More shouting. More flashes. Eren couldn’t distinguish between anything anymore. He could vaguely decipher the fact that he was bending down, but it didn’t occur to him as to why until the car door slammed shut.

Everything was muffled now.
Eren took deep breaths as he collected his thoughts, all of which seemed to scatter in the frenzy. He was in the car now. Safe from the storm outside. His gaze drifted towards the window. Now that he wasn’t in the middle of everything, and now that the noise and flashing had been dulled, Eren could see the mass clearly now.

Reporters were everywhere.

There were so many reporters, Eren couldn’t tell who was a student and who was paparazzi. But the security guards, though few in number, had done a great job of keeping them contained. There was still a wide gap from the school front to the car. So much so, that Eren could see Mikasa still standing inside, making sure he was okay. The thought comforted him.

Not a moment later, Levi had opened the door to his side of the car, getting in himself. One his door was shut, he ordered the chauffer to drive. As they pulled away, mindful of the students walking about, Eren sent a quick text to Mikasa like he said that he would.

“Are you alright?”

Concerned grey met startled green.

Eren nodded, tucking his phone away. “Yeah… just… God…”

Levi nodded back, this time in understanding. “The first time is always the worst. You get used to it after a while, but nothing can prepare you for that initial shock.”

“No kidding…”

“Really, they shouldn’t have been there in the first place,” Levi seethed. “I’m sure there’s some rule against paparazzi on school grounds, but when has the media ever cared about rules and privacy? I’m taking you back to the mansion, by the way.”

“Oh…” Hold on. “Wait… now? As in spending the night? But I don’t have any clothes or-”

Levi waved him off. “It’ll be fine. You left an outfit or two over there last time, and I made sure they were cleaned. And I’m sure we can find you a spare toothbrush to use. But I’m not dropping you off at your house which will no doubt be riddled with even more paparazzi.”

Still, Eren wasn’t satisfied. “But… my sister… my parents…”

“They’ll be fine,” Levi reassured. “It’s you they’re after. Once they know you aren’t there, they won’t try as hard. Your father has already had experience with the press before, so handling them should be fine so long as they know you’re not there.”

“Oh…” Eren relaxed a bit. “Is that why you picked me up today?” Kind of an obvious question, but he still asked.

Levi shrugged, leaning back in his seat and letting his head rest on his hand. “Partially. In order for the plan to really work, we need as much exposure of us as possible. Plus, they would need proof that we actually knew each other.”

“Is that also why you hugged me?” Eren asked sheepishly.

Clearing his throat, Levi didn’t answer. “I… also wanted to make sure that you were okay… in person. The paparazzi can get crazy and sometimes goes overboard so I just wanted to make sure that you didn’t get hurt leaving the school. I mean, the paparazzi weren’t even supposed to be that
close to the school to begin with, and we’re lucky that they security guards could handle it. I mean… they could have trampled you, hit you with the microphones by accident, and there’s really no excuse they can use for hurting you and I swear that if even one of them had done anything to you, I would have—"


Levi paused, his mouth still hanging open for a second before he promptly shut it. Eren could tell he was tense, nervous, maybe even more so than in his video. “Yes… well… they just piss me off is all.”

Eren laughed. That wasn’t it at all. Levi was just too easy to read once he got to know him. He was just embarrassed and nervous. But… from his question about the hug? Does that mean that it wasn’t part of the publicity thing? There were only a couple reasons Eren could think of to explain Levi’s behavior and Eren hoped he knew why… And if he was right, then that would mean that Levi…

Eren bit his lip, wondering if he should… “I… liked your video, by the way,” he finally confessed.

“You… did?”

Eren nodded, letting one of his hands rub the back of his neck. “And I’m happy to have you too.” And it was true. Eren might have been saying this in hopes of proving himself right, but it was all true. He wouldn’t be able to lie to Levi about something like that. He was a terrible liar anyway.

That had Levi sitting up. “You are?”

“Yeah. I do like you, you know.” Levi’s reaction to Eren’s next statement would be the most important. Eren just had to pay close attention. “You’re a great friend.”

Levi was pained. He shook his head. “Eren… That’s not…” A deep but shaky breath. “I like you too… but not in the way that you’re thinking. It’s more of an… “I want to kiss you” like…”

Elation. Joy. Giddiness. And oh god did Eren just want to laugh. But he didn’t have the breath to. Out of all the hints Eren thought he was going to receive, he never thought he’d get a confession. Never thought he’d get the confession that he wanted. He’d never been so happy to be proven right.

Levi liked him.

Levi liked him.

Levi wanted to kiss him.

Levi… looked like he was about to throw up or cry or both, oh god…

Eren took a couple of breaths, because he knew that if he tried to talk now, he’d only end up laughing. But he didn’t want Levi to mistake his joy for teasing.

“Levi…” God he could almost sob from happiness. “I like you too. I “I want to kiss you” like you too.”

Okay, now Levi just looked like he was going to faint. “You do?”

Eren nodded again, now half sobbing and half laughing. “Yes! Oh God… do you know how much I have thought about this today? Oh, I was freaking out this morning because it… it looked like
you were going to kiss me last night and I’ve just… I just spent so much time thinking about it because… I like you and I wasn’t sure if you liked me back and… I was so confused but now…” He laughed, wiping away the tears that were forming. “I like you, Levi. I really, really like you. From your shitty jokes to your stupid rants… I like you.”

And he could say that with all honesty. He liked Levi. Levi, who he always felt so safe and comfortable around. Who he could confide in and trust with anything. Who showed more than once that he really genuinely cared about Eren. Any doubt or fear he may have had that morning was forgotten, useless. Eren knew what he wanted, and he was happy with his choice.

Levi smiled then. “So then…” He leaned forward, letting one of his hands rest on the side of Eren’s face. “Is it okay… if I kiss you now?”

Eren half sobbed once more, leaning forward himself. “Yes…” he breathed, and slowly, slowly so as not to miss, they closed the gap.

It was his first kiss, he had no idea what he was doing, but by God did it feel fantastic. The kiss itself was chaste and sweet, but his raging emotions just amplified everything. He was suddenly so sensitive to touch. Levi’s hand sliding back to tangle itself in Eren hair, pressing them closer, his breath on Eren’s cheek, his lips moving against Eren’s.

It was too much, and then not enough. Eren wanted more.

He brought his own hand up to mimic Levi’s, moving his whole body to they could be even closer than they already were. The seatbelt pulled at him, demanding he sit up straight again so it could do its job properly, but Eren couldn’t care. Instead, he began moving his lips as well, tilting his head and kissing Levi back with as much passion as an inexperienced kisser could give.

Too soon, too soon they broke apart, both gasping for breath.

When had it happened?

When had they fallen for each other? So far and so fast? Neither of them knew. How, in a matter of weeks, not even two full months, had they gone from rock bottom enemies to confessing to each other?

Was… that wrong?

Levi leaned forward again, looking for another kiss, but Eren held him back.

“Levi…” he whimpered.

“What?” Levi asked, his voice full of concern. Had Eren changed his mind?

“This… what we’re doing… is it even okay?” Eren’s voice was barely a whisper, fearing that speaking any louder would cause everything to come crashing down.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, we’ve only known each other for so long and I hated you when we first met and… this can’t be right. Is this what’s supposed to happen? Are we supposed to go this fast?”

“Do you want to slow down? We don’t have to kiss if you don’t want to.” Levi found himself backing away. If that was what Eren wanted, then so be it. He didn’t want to push Eren past his already shattered boundaries.
“No!” Eren yelled, pulling him back. “I want to kiss. I want to kiss you. I want to hold hands with you and hug you and hold you close and never let you go! But… is that normal this early on? Don’t people usually wait for those things? Are we doing this right?”

“You know…” Levi started, messing with the smooth and soft locks of Eren’s hair. “I’m finding that I’m caring less and less about what’s supposed to be right. This is our world, and we can do whatever we want.”

Eren grinned. “Okay.” And he leaned back in for another kiss.

The chauffer spared a couple glances at the new lovers, happy for them, but unsure how to break it to them that they were home…
Blushes, Gems, and Bets

Chapter Notes

Just so you all know, I have predicted that this story will end around the 27-28 chapter mark… more or less. SO START COUNTIN’ DOWN!!! >:D

PS. In about… 1-2 chapters I’ll be taking a short break from updating. I’m running low on prewritten chapters, and my schedule is filling up quickly with my job and school and possibly a second job. So writing is becoming a tad difficult for me to do. I WON’T BE ABANDONING THIS STORY. THIS STORY WILL NOT END IN 1-2 CHAPTERS. I just need about… maybe a month or two to get everything situated again so I can keep up with the weekly updates. And don’t worry, I won’t leave it on a cliffhanger either XD

In the mean time... I hope you guys enjoy this chapter!

“You went too far.”

Levi had to stop himself from rolling his eyes at his grandfather, who was currently lecturing him over his choice of public exposure.

“I didn’t have much other choice. I needed to-”

“You needed to expose the engagement,” Francis stressed. “Not profess your love over the internet!”

“For my plan to work, I needed to do that! I needed something shocking and powerful enough that would get the media going! Simply saying I was engaged might not have been enough. You can’t overdo something like this.”

Francis leaned back slowly. “So then, this was all merely part of the plan? To pretend to love the boy so the video would spread?”

“Who said anything about pretend?” Levi nearly spat. “Everything I said in that video was the truth.”

Francis’s face hardened. “And how did Eren take it? When, or if, he found out about your feelings?”

Levi stood tall. “He returns them.”

“Peachy…” Although anyone paying attention could clearly tell Francis didn’t think it was peachy at all. “Don’t lose your head around him now, Levi. I don’t care if you two are soul mates, you have work to do and that always comes first. Eren will always be there, but companies are fragile. Understand?”

“Understood.”

Francis really must not like Eren. That was what Levi had concluded when he was called to his
grandfather’s office shortly before dinner. If one had heard the conversation out of context, they might have thought that Levi had married a stripper in Vegas for how badly Francis had taken it. Levi knew that the two were at odds, but this was ridiculous.

Still, what more could be expected from his grandfather? The batty old loon.

He was right, though, about work. With running Recon and helping Grandfather with the family business to prepare him for when he’d eventually take over, Eren would have to take a seat. Both companies were fragile and needed plenty of attention just to keep them running. Levi wouldn’t have a problem fitting Eren in between work, but if the choice came down to it, he’d have to put work first.

When Levi made it back to his room, he found Eren face down on his bed (could it be considered “their” bed now? Or was it too soon?).

“What’s all this about?” he laughed, nudging the boneless Eren. “What are you doing?”

Eren moaned. “Dreading the moment I have to check my phone…”

The sound of buzzing finally caught Levi’s attention. Eren’s phone, face down as well on the nightstand. Picking it up, Levi’s eyes bulged at the number of notifications. How did Eren have that many friends to generate that many missed calls and (mostly) texts? And the number was still growing. “Holy shit…”

“I don’t normally talk to a lot of those people and I don’t even recognize most of those numbers…” It’s gonna be such a pain to go through all of those…” Eren still hadn’t moved his head from the pillow, so his voice was still heavily muffled. Still, Levi got the gist of it.

After setting the noise volume to silent, Levi set the phone back down and took a seat on the edge of the bed. He let his hand rub soothing circles into Eren’s back. “Is there anything you need me to do?”

Eren turned his head to the side, catching Levi’s gaze. “Stop being rich and famous.”

“I mean something that I can actually do.”

Eren gave a hefty sigh. “It’s no use. I’m going to be hearing about that video for weeks…”

“If it makes you feel any better, I didn’t get much slack about it.”

“Oh really?”

“Yeah, my office just about had a fit. “Who is that adorable boy on your phone?” was the constant question I got asked today.”

“Which reminds me.” Eren propped himself up on his elbows, facing Levi. “Why did you have to use that picture? It was so embarrassing!”

“What are you talking about? I adore that picture.”

“I look like such a dork though!”

“But that’s what makes you so adorable.”

Eren’s response was to knee Levi in the back. After a satisfying “ow”, Eren smirked. Levi, not one to be shown up, flicked Eren on the back of his ear. Now it was Eren’s turn to cry out.
“Hey! No fair!” Eren cradled his poor ear in his hand. “Is that any way to treat your fiancé?” Says the guy who just kneed his in the back.

“Oh!” A thought suddenly occurred to Levi. “That’s right! Now that we’re technically officially engaged…” Levi stood, travelling around the bed to his nightstand. Eren sat up properly, curious as to what Levi was doing. After rummaging for a bit, Levi came back and reclaimed his spot, this time with a small, now open box. “… you’re going to need an engagement ring.”

The first thing Eren noticed was the large centerpiece diamond (at least he assumed it was a diamond), emerald cut and glittering with smaller pure green stones surrounding it. The yellow gold band it had been set on was almost as tall at the rock with a single band of silver running across the middle. Even smaller diamonds studded the rest of the band all the way around.

Eren gasped, his jaw falling open as Levi slipped the magnificent ring on his finger.

“Do…” Eren swallowed down the knot in his throat. “Do I want to know how much this is?”

“Probably not, no. The main diamond itself is four karats, maybe five. One of those two… Every other stone is a diamond as well. Yes, including the green ones. The band is 24 karat gold and recently was refurbished with a strip of platinum. Not to mention-”

Eren didn’t give him time to finish. “I can’t take this,” he decided forcefully, trying to rip the ring off but failing. “It’s too much!”

“Eren!” Levi gently but quickly pulled Eren’s hands apart. “Calm down.”

“How can I calm down? This ring must be a couple million dollars! I can’t let you spend that kind of money on me!”

“Well… technically it’s worth a lot more than just a couple million because of its age… almost… 150 years… give or take?”


Levi’s mouth formed a hard line. “Right. Wrong thing to say. My bad. But there’s not much of a choice here.”

“What do you mean?”

“This ring was my great grandmother’s,” Levi explained. “When my great grandparents died, they left their rings to the next person in the family to get married and their intended. My father had already married before that, so naturally, the rings went to me. That ring belongs to whoever is my intended, which just so happens to be you.”

“Still… It’s just…” Eren stared down at the ring on his finger, troubled.

Levi let out a sigh. “I know it’s a lot, especially for you…”

“I bet yours is really simple too…” Levi’s lack of response sounded like a yes to Eren, so he continued on. “Why did I have to get stuck with this one?”

“Because it doesn’t fit me. Trust me, I already tried. Strangely enough…” Levi held up Eren’s hand, fiddling with the ring a bit. “It fits you perfectly. And I don’t just mean in size, I mean it’s practically like the ring was made especially for you.”
“Are we even looking at the same ring…?” Eren moaned, slumping his shoulders.

“I know it’s not much consolation, but I happen to think it looks lovely on you. It brings out your eyes in the most exquisite way.” Levi smiled, and it sent flutters through Eren’s chest.

Eren pouted, turning his head away. “You’re not allowed to say words like that…”

“And why not?” Levi half laughed.

“Because it… sounds weird.” What a blatant lie.

“You’re just embarrassed aren’t you?” Eren didn’t respond, but his obvious blush gave Levi the answer he needed. Levi smirked, leaning closer to whisper in Eren’s ear. “Do you get embarrassed hearing about how amazing you are? About how extraordinarily beautiful you are? Because I could sit here all day simply showering you in lavish compliments.”

“Levi!” Eren suddenly rushed, turning around and holding Levi at bay. His face was a bright scarlet. “Can… can you not?” he whimpered.

Guilt washed over Levi. “Eren…”

“I-I do get embarrassed when you say things like that,” Eren admitted, face bright red. “I… I’m just not used to them… Not that they aren’t appreciated, of course! But… just… not all at once…?” Eren looked up at Levi shyly through his eyelashes, horribly concerned about Levi’s response.

Levi let his hand brush along the side of Eren’s face, gently, soothingly. “Whatever you wish.”

Dinner was… an ordeal to say the least.

It was the first dinner where everyone was accounted for. Francis sat at the head of the table with Genevieve on his right and Levi on his left, where he usually sat. Carlton took the seat next to his mother, which left Eren taking the seat next to Levi. Not that he minded. It was the farthest he could sit away from Francis without looking weird and the closest to Levi.

Ironically enough, the last time they’d sat like this was Eren’s first night here. Eren smiled to himself in remembrance. How far they’d come…

“What are you grinning about?” Levi leaned in close, dropping his voice so their conversation was as private as could be while sitting at the dining table.

“My first dinner here,” Eren answered truthfully.

“Ah, yes,” Levi nodded in agreement. “You were much more of a brat back then.”

“Hey! With good reason!” Levi raised an eyebrow. “Okay, most of the time. But don’t act all innocent. You were an asshole too.”

“It’s one of my perfected arts.”

“No kidding,” Eren laughed.

Food started coming out then, and Eren remembered just how much he liked the food here. It was practically restaurant quality every single time.
Levi leaned back towards Eren again. “Do you want me to tell you what the dishes are, or are you going to yell at me again?” Eren glared playfully, rolling his eyes when Levi sat upright in his seat again.

“So,” Francis started, his deep voice commanding attention. “Eren, I see Levi has given you the ring already.”

Eren bit back the much harsher retort he had dangling off the tip of his tongue, opting instead for subtle sarcasm. “Well, it does seem like a good idea considering we are engaged, after all.”

“Yes, but it’s not as if it’s official.”

“Official? How much more official does it need to get? Levi already confessed it to the world, what else needs to happen?”

“How about an official interview rather than some homemade video? Or can your puny mind not comprehend that?”

Eren bristled, tensing up and clenching his fist as a wild need to punch something tore through him. Levi placed his hand calmingly on Eren’s leg, right out of sight. A subtle and simple gesture, yet it had Eren relaxing, if only a bit by a bit.

“Honestly, it’s a wonder how you’ve managed to make it this far in your schooling.”

“Yeah, how amazing I’ve managed to succeed without taking the “How to be an Arrogant Asshole 101” class.”

“You call this succeeding?”

“How about,” Levi interrupted loudly, “we all just eat dinner without throwing insults?”

Tension still sparked through the air for a moment before Eren and Francis slowly simmered down, focusing on their food. But Francis would be damned if he didn’t get the last word in.

“Just remember, Eren,” Francis said smoothly, his voice like acid. “You only get that ring if you are a part of this family. So if you want to hold on to it, you’d better work hard.”

Eren’s jaw clenched, grinding his teeth, and his hand gripped his fork in a vice like grip until his hands shook from the effort. The only thing keeping Eren from flying off the handle was Levi’s soothing hand still gently running his leg in calming strokes. That and the idea that Francis would terminate the marriage, ruin his family, and forbid Eren from ever seeing Levi again.

So he bit the bullet and kept quiet… for now.

Levi had to lean over once more, whispering something in Eren’s ear that left him biting on his lip to keep from smiling too wide. Didn’t Levi know he was trying to be angry over here?

Francis considered the two carefully, another conversation from his first meeting with Eren ringing loudly in his ears…

This time, Genevieve did laugh.

“Oh, on the contrary… He’s already winning.”

Francis furrowed his brow, knowing he shouldn’t bite. “What are you suggesting?”
“I’m thinking a bet,” Genevieve shrugged.

Francis shook his head. The idea of one of his wife’s bets… He didn’t need another incident like that… “I don’t have time for your games.”

“You’ll want to make time.” Genevieve’s face hardened, cold and enticing. Francis considered the options he had.

On the one hand, he could ignore Genevieve, letting her mope about until she got over it. Thus, he could avoid unnecessary drama and wasted time.

But…

There was always something about those bets…

What could she possibly have in mind…?

“Conditions?”

Genevieve smirked victoriously. “If you win, Eren leaves. He’ll never be allowed to step foot in this mansion again, and you’ll get to pick Levi’s next bride.”

Francis raised his brow in approval. It was a nice prize. “Tempting, but there’s always a catch. What if he, by some strange miracle, wins?” Some strange, strange pure miracle, because there was no way Eren had the ability to beat him like that.

“When Eren wins,” Genevieve emphasized, “he obviously then gets to stay, much to my pleasure. And you have to keep your mouth shut about it.”

Francis scrunched his face up. “That can’t be it,” he declared. “I know you, Genevieve, I have for 60 years. There’s more to this, more to be won on this wager. What is it?”

Genevieve chuckled. “Yes, there is another prize, but why should I tell you? It’s not part of our bet. This prize is between you and Eren, and I already told you I wasn’t going to give you an advantage.”

Francis let the information seep in. “So whoever wins this power struggle of ours gets this other prize?”

Genevieve nodded. “And whoever wins the bet on who’ll win gets to decide Eren’s fate here.”

“How will we know who’s won?” How will Francis know when to kick Eren out?

Genevieve smiled, responding innocently, “The prize will decide.”

Francis felt his shoulders drop in annoyance. “How very cryptic of you.”

Genevieve began heading for the door. “I’ll tell you if you’ve won or not, but I have a feeling you’ll figure it out for yourself when the time comes.”

As of right now, Francis didn’t know what the prize would be for winning their so called power struggle, but he refused to lose to Eren. The brat could stay until a winner was found, but once Francis won…

Eren would be gone.
“Oh my god! Would you look at that rock!” Connie cried the next day, shoving Eren’s hand up close to his face in order to get a good look.

“Oh my god! Would you shut up?!” Eren mocked, yanking his hand back.

“How can we?” Now it was Jean’s turn to inspect the ring. “That thing is huge! How big is it?”

“Levi said it was around four or five karats.” Jean and Connie both whistled lowly. “Now would you guys please keep it down?” Eren hissed pleadingly. It was still early in the morning, so students were still trickling in slowly for their first class, but that only meant sound would travel better without all those bodies in the way. He didn’t need to of his friends drawing attention to him so early in the morning.

“Why?” Connie shrugged. “It’s not like you need to keep it a secret anymore.”

“Yeah, but that doesn’t mean I need everyone knowing my business let alone how extravagant my engagement ring is!”

“Dude,” Jean deadpanned, finding Eren’s paranoia ridiculous. “They can see it on your finger. Not to mention it’s now well known that you’re engaged to Levi fucking Voclain. What are they gonna think it is? Plastic?!?”

“By the way,” Connie started slyly, leaning on Eren’s desk. “Are you and Levi officially a thing now? Like, lovey-dovey, kissy-kissy thing? You know, after his confession and what not?”

Well… he could just answer the question… but what kind of Eren would he be if he did that? “How would you know if he was confessing love?” Eren asked, leaning back in his chair. “Maybe he’s just really happy that we’re friends?”

Jean and Connie shared a look before gushing in overly dramatic girly voices:

“He’s such an amazing person!”

“So refreshing!”

“You could do so much better than me!”

“I’m so happy to have you!”

Eren kicked them both harshly in the shins (the only place he could actually reach sitting down while the other two stood), relishing in the cries of pain that they made and the sight of his two horrible friends nursing their wounds. Strangely enough, he was more upset that they were mocking Levi rather than them being too loud. Then again… if he really thought about it, it wasn’t that strange at all.

“Oh, by the way,” Jean cringed out, not giving up yet. “Nice picture of you two cuddling under a tree. Do you do that often?”

“So you guys really want to know our relationship status?” Eren asked slowly, letting his head rest on his hands on the desk.

“Yes!” his two friends exclaimed, exasperated.

“And I swear to God, Jaeger, if you throw out some shit like “Oh! He proposed to me!” then I will
Eren pouted, miffed that Jean had caught on to such a great joke before he could even make it.

“Seriously, we know something happened. Tell us!”

Eren fidgeted in his seat, biting his lip. He didn’t really want to admit it since he knew what they’d reaction would be… “I… may have made out with him on the way back…” A fuzzy feeling managed to squeeze into his chest at the memory.

Jean and Connie cheered. “Get it!”

“Look at little Eren growing up!”

“Whatever…” Eren couldn’t meet their eyes. He was usually uncomfortable with attention in general, but for some reason that fuzzy feeling wouldn’t go away.

He twirled the ring on his finger, letting the two have their moment.

Turns out that while everyone was curious about Levi and their relationship, there weren’t very many problems. At the very least, not as many as Eren had thought there’d be. No one crowded him, they didn’t swarm and trample him for answers. They tended to keep their distance and only asked simple questions. The only common issue was the occasional squealing from someone who thought the whole idea was just “so romantic” or whatever they thought.

Eren found out that his reputation as suicidal preceded him. Most people were too scared to ask him anything or even approach him because of it. Not that Eren was complaining, of course.

That, and his friends, namely Mikasa, Ymir, Reiner, and surprisingly Christa, scared off the bulk of the annoying questioners. And he was grateful for that. The extra protection he had really made it an uneventful day.

Well… there was one thing, but it really wasn’t that big. Just a little thing…

It must have been right after study hall, the one class he didn’t share with any of his friends. Really, it was the perfect time for someone to catch him off guard.

“Hey faggot!” Eren heard someone call out. He ignored it and kept walking. Even if they were talking to him there was no way he’d respond to a derogatory name like that. Assholes. But a sharp tug on his backpack had him forcefully reconsidering his decision as he was brought face to face with the guy who’d called out. Someone only a couple of inches taller than him. Probably a junior by the looks of it. Recent transfer too if they were deciding that calling him a faggot was a good idea. “Hey, fag,” the lughead grinned sickeningly. “I was talking to you.”

Eren glared, trying to keep his temper under control. It would do no good to start a fight now. “Do I know you?” he replied coldly, the air around him just as icy and brittle enough to crack.

But Lughead, unfortunately, didn’t seem to notice. “I just gotta ask,” he started smugly. What he had to be smug about, Eren didn’t know. “How does it feel to get fucked up the ass?” The rest of his groupies laughed save for one. The one that knew they chose the wrong guy to mess with.

Eren only had a thin thread keeping a reign on his temper for situations like this (not that it was
much better any other time) and it was dangerously close to snapping. “Leave me alone,” Eren retorted lamely, as he risked too much getting into a fight now. He turned to leave despite his anger demanding retribution.

Lughead spun him back around. Laughing, he said, “Where ya going? We’re just curious! Come on!”

“I suggest you leave me alone or else I won’t be responsible for anything that happens to you. Including me knocking you unconscious.” Eren ripped his bag out of the guy’s grasp, turning around once more. If he didn’t leave now…

“Hey!” Lughead was getting pissy. He lunged for Eren’s arm this time, nails digging and grasp crushing. “I’m not finished with you!”

In a split second after, not even giving himself time to think, Eren swung his fist, leaving a satisfying crack as it hit Lughead’s face dead center. The stupid guy fell back to the floor, his hold on Eren released.

“Now you are,” Eren seethed, his fists shaking, begging to hit the poor bastard some more. His burning glare turned on the groupies that now surrounded their leader’s body, daring them to try anything more. The group glared back, albeit much weaker than his, but the cheering from the small crowd and Eren’s fiery stare deterred them from acting.

Eren caught sight of Mrs. Channey then, the only teacher around who’d witnessed the commotion. She nodded at him, silently proud of how he’d stood up for himself. Then, she motioned for him to leave. Other teachers who would be less than pleased about his actions would start passing through soon. So with one last chance at the pathetically moaning boy on the ground, Eren high tailed it out of there.

No one ever bothered him about his engagement again.

“You punched someone in the face?!” Levi exclaimed later that night. They were currently in Levi’s bathroom getting ready for their interview. Okay, Levi was helping Eren attempt to get ready.

“They were asking for it! The dumb bastard called me a fag! I gave him a warning so that was all his fault,” Eren explained, not sorry at all. He also heard that Jean, Reiner, and Ymir had finished the job after school, but Levi didn’t need to know that part.

“And you didn’t get in trouble?”

“Nope.” That was the part that Eren was really proud of. “The only teacher who saw was too proud of me to say anything and the other guys were too scared shitless to report me. Nice to know I can still instill fear in others.”

“It’s pretty satisfying,” Levi agreed. “But now I’ve got to add something else to the list of thing to teach you.”

“Oh really? What?” Was there some dignified way of beating the crap out of someone?

“How to ruin someone’s life without even touching them.”
Eren grinned. So he’d be able to do the same thing that Levi had done to his bastard of an ex-boyfriend and what Francis always threatened him with? “Nice! Do I just take names and give them to you?”

“You’ll have a bit more power than that.” Levi furrowed his brow, frowning. “Oh for fucks… Would you stop fidgeting?” he commanded, slapping Eren’s hands away as he worked.

“I will if you stop fussing over me!” Eren retorted, ducking away from the comb in Levi’s grasp again. They’d been doing this for at least ten minutes, where Levi would attempt to comb Eren’s hair into something manageable, but Eren would keep jerking away before he could finish.

“This is an important interview, and while it’s not going to be on live TV, you need to look presentable. There will be pictures, after all. Besides, this is your first interview. Why wouldn’t I fuss over you?”

Eren ducked once more. “Because I look fine! You’ve got me in a button down and slacks, shouldn’t that be enough? And dear god if you comb my hair anymore I’m going to look like some preppy rich white boy missing his sweater vest!” He held up his arms in defense, hand slowly reaching for the closest thing he could reach for on the counter. Which… wasn’t much really.

Levi sighed, tossing the comb on the counter in final defeat. “Are you saying you’re not a rich white boy?”

“I am not preppy!” Eren yelled, jabbing a finger at Levi.

Levi snorted, muttering out a “you most certainly are not”, and Eren ran his fingers through his hair, lightly tousling the over combed locks. Once it was an acceptable level of disarray, he faced Levi.

“Well?” he asked expectantly. “Am I presentable?”

Levi smiled softly, eyes locked onto Eren’s face. Stepping forward, he gently grasped Eren’s chin, bringing their lips together for a quick yet firm kiss. “You look fantastic,” he breathed. Eren’s face lit up bright red, and he bit his lip. They’d only been official for about a day, and every kiss and compliment sent flutters of excitement through him, but he’d be lying if he said that they didn’t fluster him incredibly. Getting used to the attention would take some time. “Now come on. The journalist should be here any minute.”

Since there was really no time for any last minute television interviews, and since Eren didn’t have much experience with interviews in general let alone television interviews, they arranged for their most trusted publicist to send one of their journalists down for a private interview at the mansion. It would be held in the front living room, and Levi would be answering most of the questions. Eren, unbeknownst to the journalist, would mostly just be paying attention to what Levi did and take notes.

And that’s what Eren did… for the most part.

The journalist would ask a question, to which Levi would answer truthfully. Or as truthfully as possible.

“So,” the journalist began their next question, “What prompted you to make that video as early as you did? Would it not have been better to wait until Eren was out of high school?”

Eren tried to keep a poker face, but Levi’s was almost beyond perfect. Seamlessly, he responded, “In regards to the media’s reaction, waiting until Eren had graduated might have been a better plan,
However, as I stated, the coverage over the “engagement” of my coworker Erwin and I had begun to get out of control.” It really had been a stroke of luck on their part that the media had kept going with that rumor up until his video.

“I see. And what were you thinking when you saw the video?”

It took Eren a moment to figure out that the journalist was talking to him. “Me? W-Well, I... I...” Shit, shit, shit! “I suppose... I was thinking about just how lucky I was to have Levi in return.” Eren smiled awkwardly and could tell the journalist wasn’t really buying it. Sighing, Eren dropped the smile. “In all actuality... when I saw the video, I couldn’t tell what I was thinking. There were so many emotions just flying through me that I...” He trailed off, not sure how to explain it. “All I know, is that after I saw it, the only thing I wanted to do, was run straight into Levi’s arms.”

They all stared at him.

Eren felt his cheeks heat up, and averted his gaze to some inanimate object that wouldn’t judge him. He should have just left it at the awkward smile.

The journalist went back to asking Levi questions, but Eren could hear the smile in their voice, even if he couldn’t see it. And after a few minutes, Eren was back to listening and taking mental notes. Though, a lot of good they did him when he actually needed it.

“So since you two are engaged, why don’t you tell me a little more about the wedding?” Eren’s ears perked up at that. He’d heard plenty about the engagement, but not much about the actual wedding.

“Well, the wedding would signify the two companies merging together. I’m afraid we don’t have very many plans regarding the wedding itself, however.”

“That’s unfortunate. I’m sure everyone would love to hear more about it. Do you have an idea of when?”

“Summer,” Eren suddenly blurted. Everyone was looking at him again. “I-It would be sometime during the next couple of summers... depending on how long planning takes and whatnot...”

The journalist smiled. “Then we’ll definitely be looking forward to that.”

A couple more questions were asked before they wrapped the whole interview up. They all said their goodbyes, but Eren didn’t relax until he’d heard the front door shut. Once it had, he let out the breath he’d be holding in, his whole body slumping as he exhaled.

“What a disaster...” he moaned.

“Don’t say that,” Levi reprimanded when he returned, reclaiming his spot next to Eren on the couch. “You were fine.”

“No, no,” Francis said. “Eren was right, he did a horribly.” Eren pouted slightly, knowing Francis was right, but didn’t like the fact that he’d said it.

“Oh hush,” Genevieve scowled. “He did perfectly fine for his first interview.”

“He was supposed to just sit and listen.”

“And he ended up doing better than we thought.”
Levi rolled his eyes at his two bickering grandparents, deciding instead to focus his attention to Eren. “You did just fine,” he reassured. “Though… I do have to ask… is that really what you thought? After seeing the video?”

Eren turned to Levi, noting once again how dorky Levi got when he was like this. He couldn’t help the smile that slipped out. “Yes… Yes, it is.” Eren slipped his hand under Levi’s, threading their fingers together.

Levi returned the smile, giving Eren’s hand a light squeeze. “By the way… a summer wedding?” The smile twisted into something more mischievous.

But instead of bashfully turning away, Eren only mimicked Levi’s smile. “Yes,” he said with booming confidence. “I want a summer wedding.”

“And why is that?”

“Because summer is just a great season.” Warm too. “And it means I won’t have to worry about school either.”

“Both statements are true.”

“And…” Eren glanced over to the three adults also occupying the room. They were in conversation of their own, paying no attention to the two on the couch. “If we ended up closer than we are now by that time… then… we could have a longer honeymoon…”

Levi shook his head, snickering. “Day two of our relationship and you’re already thinking about honeymoons… perverted child.” He flicked Eren on the nose, grinning.

“Hey!” Eren rubbed his now sore nose. “It’s a very important thing to think about!”

“What is?” Carlton asked suddenly. Eren gasped, not realizing he’d been that loud.

“Um… nothing! Nothing at all!” Levi began outright laughing then, and the three adults looked on in confusion as Eren threw a couch pillow at him, obviously embarrassed.

But Levi shocked Eren with a quick kiss. Lips still mere centimeters away, Levi breathed, “A summer wedding it is, then.”

Fuck…

If Levi kept this up, then Eren would have a permanently red face.
Chapter Notes

These next two chapters are going to be mostly fluff, just so you know. After that and my break, the plot heavy chapters will pick back up again.

UNTIL THEN ENJOY!!!!!

And I apologize to anyone I planned on replying to but didn't! Life has been hellish busy for me recently... So if I don't reply it's not because I hate you!!

Eren couldn’t stop from sulking that Friday. That was supposed to be when Levi would come over for the weekend, but because of the whole engagement fiasco the plans had to be scrapped. There were still too many reporters lingering around his house for Levi to spend too much time over there. And a weekend visit would certainly get them talking. So until the reporters grew tired of that story, Levi couldn’t come over.

It was all Francis’s idea, and while it made sense, Eren couldn’t help but be bitter about it.

“Cheer up,” his friends tried to tell him. “There will always be next time!”

But he didn’t care about next time. The fact of the matter was that it hadn’t worked out this time.

All he wanted was to let Levi into his world like he’d been let into his…

“Hey, Eren,” Armin called, grabbing Eren’s attention. “We should totally go to the movies after class.”

Eren bit his lip. Movies sounded like a great plan, but they reminded him of his failed movie plans with Levi… He shrugged it off. “Yeah, let’s do it. Is everyone gonna go?”

“Jean, Marco, Christa, and Ymir were all thinking about tagging along as a sort of… double date… ish… thing…”

“You wanna invite Annie then? So it can be a triple date-ish thing?” Eren winked, grinning at his friend. Armin fidgeted, looking around. Anywhere but Eren.

“Well…” he started, unsure. “She sort of has plans already…”

Something was up. Eren could tell. Something had happened with Annie, but Armin was too uncomfortable to talk about it now. At least not with so many of their friends, including Annie, around. When he had the chance, he’d have to talk to Armin about this. Worst case scenario, he’d have to ask Mikasa because no doubt she already got him to spill.

But for now there were movies to watch. Talking to Armin could wait until it was just them or until they could text.

When they arrived at the movies, they chose a pretty family friendly one. Not really one Eren had been dying to see, but one that would definitely be good. And though he usually liked sitting in the
middle so he never had to worry about dealing with annoying strangers taking up the armrest, this time, he’d somehow been forced to the edge of their little entourage. Maybe no one would bother him since the theater was fairly empty?

The previews hadn’t even started yet, and some douche had decided that he wanted to sit right next to Eren.

Oh, fuck this.

Eren huffed, turning to the unwanted body next to him. “Do you mind?” he glared. “You’ve got a hundred seats to choose from, you don’t have to sit next to me.”

The guy next to him lifted his hooded head, grey eyes lit up with amusement. “But what if I want to sit next to you?” Levi asked smoothly.

Eren gasped quietly, mouth hanging open. “Levi!” he whispered. “What are you doing here?”

Levi shrugged, removing the hood completely as the lights started dimming. “I decided that ditching our plans was kind of a dick move, so I’m making up for it.”

“All dealt with. This weekend is for us to hang out and do whatever you want.”

Eren couldn’t believe it. “Are you serious?”

“If I wasn’t, then I wouldn’t be here,” Levi said lowly, his smile twisting into a smirk. “Now shut up and enjoy your movie, you little shit.”

Eren’s heart fluttered. A whole weekend with Levi! And to do whatever he wanted? That movie marathon was definitely happening now!

Eren adjusted himself in his seat, letting himself lie against Levi’s side, though his head was still a little too high to rest on Levi’s shoulder. “Are you sure you’re going to enjoy this one? It’s no horror movie, you know,” he teased.

“Yeah, but it’s no fucking action movie either.” Levi nudged Eren aside for a moment as he raised the arm rest obstrucing their path to a comfortable cuddling position. With that out of the way, Eren found it much easier to slide down enough to let his head rest where he wanted it to. Levi’s arm found its way wrapping around Eren’s shoulders.

“Oh! Hey, guys-” Eren started, but soon found that there was no one to talk to. All the seats next to him were now empty… Where… where had his friends gone? Only a moment later did Eren realized that they’d all just moved up a row while Eren and Levi had talked. Once they’d realized Eren had noticed their change of seats they all gave him encouraging thumbs up, wide grins on most of their faces. “You guys knew about this?”

“Knew about it? We planned it!”

“We weren’t about to spend a weekend with a mopey Eren.”

“I was not-!”

“Stop talking to us and enjoy the company of your date already.”

Eren bit his lip, wanting to say more, but soon complied. He did end up flipping them off though,
as he snuggled back into Levi’s side.

“Don’t fall asleep on me now, you hear?” Levi whispered, letting his head rest atop Eren’s.

“I’m not making any promises.”

Keeping true to his word, Eren managed to stay awake the whole movie. It helped that now he was actually getting a good night’s sleep every night. Or… at least better than before. Video games don’t play themselves, after all. Although, while Eren managed to stay awake, he couldn’t quite say the same for Levi.

The ending credits started rolling, and Eren squinted as the lights came on. His joints ached from the lack of movement, seeing as how neither Eren nor Levi had changed positions through the whole movie. But even if his joints hadn’t hurt, he still wouldn’t have wanted to move… Levi was warm and cuddly and… not moving.


“Stop that,” grumbled Levi.

“You fell asleep didn’t you?” Eren grinned, the irony not lost on him.

“I did not. I just don’t want to move.”

“Yeah, sure,” Eren giggled sarcastically. “You fell asleep.”

“Hey, lovebirds! The movie is over! You can get up now!” Ymir’s voice pierced through their illusion of solitude, reminding them that they were in fact in public and would actually have to move soon.

Reluctantly, very reluctantly, Eren forced his achy joints to work as he pushed himself out of Levi’s grasp and twisted his body around towards Ymir. Glaring, he countered with, “Like you can talk. I bet you spent most of your time making out with Christa. Do you even know what this movie was about?”

“At least I know the appropriate times for my PDA,” Ymir countered, throwing her arm around a blushing Christa.

Armin stretched, the first of the group to stand. “Well, we’re going to all head out now,” he informed Eren.

Jean was next, followed by Marco. “Yeah, triple dating really only works at the movies where we don’t all have to interact.”

“Thank God,” Eren snorted and nodded to Jean. “Who’d want to stare at your ugly face all night?” Jean made a sharp, offended whine, but was cut off before he could retort.

“It’s uniquely attractive,” Marco corrected delicately.

“Marco!”

As the two bickered, and as Levi started getting ready to leave, Mikasa leaned over the seats.
“Have fun, I’ll see you tonight?”

Eren nodded. “Yeah.” He didn’t know when he’d get the chance, but he would need at least a change of clothes before he spent the night at Levi’s.


“We’ll be back after dinner.” Wait a minute… “You probably won’t see us much though, that is, if Eren really is going for a movie marathon. We’ll be down for breakfast though.” Mikasa seemed to accept his answer, but Eren was suddenly very confused and possibly excited. He twisted his body back around to face Levi.

“Wait, wait, wait! We’re going to… my house?” he asked tentatively, not wanting to get his hopes up too high just yet.

“I do believe that was the plan,” Levi answered, matter-of-factly.

Eren still had a hard time believing it. “Really?”

“You said movie marathon sleepover, so I can only assume that I would have to sleep over for that.”

“But I didn’t ask my parents-”

“Taken care of. Now come on,” Levi helped a still stunned Eren to his feet. “I’ve got dinner reservations for tonight somewhere special.”

“Oh really? Where?” Dinner sounded nice, but it was the reservation and special part of it that left Eren holding back.

“It’s a surprise, but I will tell you that we’ll have our own private room.”

He groaned. “It’s going to be really, really fancy isn’t it?” But Levi said nothing in response.

When Levi had said that the reservations included their own private room, Eren wasn’t really expecting what he got.

“My room?” Eren asked, incredulous, sitting on the floor with his back against his bed, Levi sitting next to him, his computer up in front and elevated by some books, and in between them was a pizza box. “This special, private room is my own room?”

“I didn’t really want to go somewhere really public, but any place I looked into that had private rooms was either expensive or over the top expensive.” Neither of which sounded like very good options.

“So you decided on pizza and movies in my room.” It wasn’t a question, but that didn’t stop Levi from answering it.

“I thought you’d appreciate it a little more.” Levi let the corners of his mouth lift into one of those heart melting smiles of his, doing its job well in melting Eren’s heart. But there was no time for that!

“Well, in that case…” Eren trailed off, jumping over to the bookshelf that held all his movies. He
pulled out all the Disney ones he had, and once his arms were full of his childhood memories, he crawled back over, plopping the movies somewhere nearby. “I hope you know what you’ve gotten yourself into.”

“I’ve prepared myself for this,” Levi admitted, bracing himself mentally as Eren popped in the first movie.

“Let’s hope so…” Eren grinned, pressing play.

It wasn’t long before the pizza had been demolished (mostly by Eren) and they’d started cuddling. But after sore rears and uncomfortable seating, they decided to move it to the bed where they could cuddle, watch movies, and not have to worry about unnecessary pain from the hard floor. Eren even set up a couple extra pillows on the side for extra comfort, but hopefully neither of them would need to move too much, otherwise the pillow structure would collapse.

“I don’t know why you didn’t go into engineering or architecture,” Levi commented as they settled in. “Your pillow creations are masterfully put together.”

“Why thank you, sir,” Eren laughed, snuggling up against Levi and tucking his head under Levi’s chin. “But my skill is really only for pillows. I spent too much time building pillow forts with Armin and Mikasa as a child. I bet if I tried using anything else, it would just collapse. Besides, I like writing.”

“I can tell. You’re always writing.” Levi kissed Eren’s head once they were situation. He couldn’t resist. “And you’ve even filled up that notebook of yours already.”

“That’s only because I had so much free time when I got it.” They certainly didn’t need a reminder as to why he’d had so much free time. “But at least now I actually have something to write about.”

“How is that story coming along, by the way? Erwin and Hanji are pretty excited about it. For different reasons, but still.”

“Okay,” Eren shrugged, a little disappointed. “I keep writing the scenes with different characters because I haven’t quite grasped who I want to include…”

“Any ideas so far?” Levi prompted, genuinely curious. He hadn’t gotten the chance to really sit down and talk to Eren recently, so he wanted to know how everything was.

“There are a couple who keep showing up in those scenes,” Eren explained. A tone of excitement started seeping into his voice. If Levi prodded a little more, he’d probably have Eren explaining even the minutest details to him. “So I’ll probably start with them and just keep developing them.”

“Are you going to be one of those authors who puts their friends into their stories?”

“Is that your way of asking to be included in the story?” Eren asked slyly. Not that he would mind putting Levi in the story. That didn’t fall under some rule like conflict of interest, did it?

“You can do whatever you want, I was just curious.” Levi tried ending that conversation there, but the gears in Eren’s head had started turning. There was no going back now.

“Who would you want to be? Hmm? I bet you’d be a noble in that world.”
“Sounds boring and lazy.”
“The king?”
“Too many people to deal with.”
“A soldier?”
“Hmm… maybe?” Still sounded like work, and not the kind Levi was used to.
“Humanity’s strongest soldier.”
“Sounds overbearing and prestigious.”
Eren barked out a laugh. “Says humanity’s richest, most handsome man alive!”
“That is a biased opinion.”
“… Okay, one of humanity’s richest, most handsome man alive.”
Levi pretended to consider the title. “… I’ll accept that.”
“You’re ridiculous.”
“But who would you be?”
“Me?” Eren scoffed, shocked. “You want me to write myself into the story?”
“Well, where is humanity’s strongest soldier going to get his hope for life from if not from his amazing lover?”
Eren was glad they hadn’t changed positions yet, otherwise Levi would have seen his blush. Though he was pretty sure Levi knew anyway. “You want me to be your hope?”
“Not just my hope, humanity’s hope.”
Eren rolled his eyes. “Hmm… sounds overbearing and prestigious,” he mocked.
Levi flicked Eren on the ear, smirking playfully. “You’re such a little shit.”
“You’re the one saying I should put us in the story and have us be the most important characters to humanity’s survival,” Eren cried, rubbing his abused ear.
“It was just a little brainstorming.”
“Yeah, well your brainstorming is stalling us from watching this damn movie!”
“Sorry,” Levi muttered, kissing the top of Eren’s head again, this time in apology.
Eren rolled his eyes and leaned forward to play the movie again. “Honestly…”
“Although,” Levi started, causing Eren to pause in his actions before the movie could begin. “Has your father accepted your decision attend college for writing?”
Eren hesitated in speaking, unsure what to say. “He’s… tolerating it.” Tolerating was a good word to use. “Started tolerating it a little more after I told him you guys were going to hire me to write a story for you guys based off the game. Why?”
“Because I’m curious about what happens in your life, and I want to make sure that you’re happy.” Eren shook his head, smiling at Levi. But Levi wasn’t smiling back. “Is he tolerating it enough to help pay now?”

Eren’s smile fell, knowing where this conversation was about to head. “Levi…” He gave a warning. Warning him to stop talking.

“Because if you need any help paying for college—”

“Levi!” Well, he was warned and didn’t heed it. Eren broke away, facing Levi in order to talk to him properly. Though talk might have been too docile a word… “I already told you, I don’t want you paying for my college!” And here started their first recurring argument, and most likely not their last.

“Why not?” Levi demanded, though trying to keep his voice and aggression down. “My family has more money than they know what to do with. Hell, I have more money than I know what to do with! A million dollars means nothing to me, why shouldn’t I at least use that million dollars to get you an education?”

There hadn’t been many things Eren and Levi fought over since that first week that had been recurring. Most of the time, they’d managed to find some sort of solution or compromise to fix whatever fight had happened. But this fight… This one they’d been having for the last couple of weeks, ever since Eren had explained to Grisha about going to college for writing. Basically, after telling Levi that his dad was less than willing to pay very much towards college unless he went for something else, Levi had been offering to take care of any possible college expenses.

Eren wasn’t having it though. And he had his reasons…

“I don’t want to become dependent on your money! I don’t want to become used to the idea of always having money to burn! What if you end up losing that money somehow?”

But Levi also had his reasons too, and counter arguments.

“I’m not saying that couldn’t happen, but it’s very unlikely.”

“And besides, it’s your money! You earned it! I wouldn’t feel right just taking it from you like that…”

“It’s not going to be my money for long.”

That got Eren to pause in the formation of his rebuttal. “What do you mean?” His head tilted to the side slightly, confusion scrunched up on his face.

“We’re getting married,” Levi explained. “That’s what I mean. Anything the family owns will belong to you too, including the money. Our bank accounts will merge, or… if you don’t have a bank account yet, then your name will be put under my account as well. Meaning at any point in time, you could access the account and take out however much you need or want. Meaning it would be your money too.”

Eren felt himself bristle, and his next words came out a little harsher than he might have actually intended. “I’m sorry, are we married now? No. We’re engaged. There’s a very big difference. That means it’s still your money.”

Levi easily matched his tone, though. “That’s right. Which means I can do whatever I please with it.”
“You wouldn’t!” Eren gasped, and they glared at each other, neither letting up, for a good minute. Finally, Levi gritted out, “Is your father helping you pay for college?”

“Yes,” Eren answered, no hesitation.


Eren let his eyes drop to the side. “Half…”

“Half?” Levi might have sounded calm on the outside, but only because his mind was too busy finding ways to convince Eren to let him pay the rest. “Eren, how are you going to make up the rest?”

“I can get loans!” Eren cried out, making eye contact again. “I’ve been approved for some already! And I’ve got scholarships as well! Those cut down the cost! And then I can get a job too! Maybe at a coffee shop near campus-”

“No,” Levi cut off, leaving no room for argument.

Eren faltered, but only for a moment. “No? What, you don’t want me to earn any money of my own? Do you want me to always be dependent on you or something?” he sneered out.

“No!” Levi yelled quickly, throwing his hands up. “God no! I want you to be able to make your own money and be independent, and I love how you’ve actually thought about this, but I don’t want you getting a job like that.”

“What? Like a coffee shop? What’s wrong with a coffee shop?”

“It’s too dangerous.”

“Dangerous?! Getting a little burned on hot coffee isn’t exactly what I would consider too dangerous-”

“It’s not that!” Levi cut off. He really hoped no one could hear them yelling at each other right now. “Eren, my family is very wealthy and very famous and because of that we have a lot of rivals and enemies. Enemies that wouldn’t dismiss the idea of kidnapping you for ransom. I’ve been the victim of attempted kidnapping at least 5 different times in my life. Being in a public place like that where anyone can come in…”

Eren almost rolled his eyes, but with slight concern, he asked, “Do you really think I’d get kidnapped while at work?”

“Before, after, while you’re on break.”

“Couldn’t they do the same thing while I’m in class?”

“You’re more protected while on campus. There are security guards there, gates that get locked, doors that can only be opened with a school ID.”

Eren shook his head, letting his eyes drop again, mouth forming a twisted frown. “I just want to have a little bit of ownership in my life… something I can call my own. Where I can say, “Look! I did that!”… Why is that such a bad thing?”

“It’s not,” Levi said gently. He brought a hand to Eren’s chin, lifting it up so he could look Eren in
the eye. “I want you to have something like that. And I love that you want that for yourself. I just
don’t want you getting hurt at a job where you could easily get hurt, where you’re exposing
yourself to the public like that. But also… I want you to be able to enjoy college. To have plenty of
time to study and spend time with your friends and enjoy the freedom that you get in being young
and unburdened by worries like money when you really shouldn’t even be burdened with them to
begin with. I want you to have fun in college. You know that…”

But even so… “We’re at another stalemate, aren’t we?” Eren asked.

Levi shook his head, pulling his hand back. “No matter how many times we talk about this…”

“Argue, is more like it.”

“Just think about what I’ve said. Just don’t force yourself to go along with something you don’t
want.”

“Trust me, I won’t.” Tension still left static in the air, but now Levi was determined to get the
evening back on course. He really shouldn’t have even brought it up, not while they were supposed
to be having fun. So Levi let his fingers sneak over to Eren’s sides while he wasn’t paying
attention. Once those fingers started moving, however, Eren had his full attention on Levi,
unwillingly laughing at the sensation. “Stop! That tickles! No!” he giggled, swatting at the hands.
“I’m trying to be mad at you!”

Levi’s finger’s still, but his hands slid around Eren’s waste, pulling him back close to him. “I
ruined the date,” he said once Eren had calmed down.

Eren only shrugged. “Yeah, but only part of it.”

Levi rested his forehead against Eren’s. “Is the rest of it still salvageable?”

A smile, a real smile, finally worked its way onto Eren’s face. “I think we can work that out.”

Sometime near the end, right before what was probably going to be the climax of the movie, Eren
suddenly blurted, “You have to wait until we’re married.”

Levi sent a questioning look towards Eren, utterly confused. “What?” What did any part of that
sentence have anything to do with the movie?

Eren leaned up, letting his weight rest on his elbow as he hovered over Levi, determination
painting his features. “Once we’re married, like officially married, rings, certificate, and all, you
can pay for as much as you want for my college. Books, tuition, loans, room and board… anything.
But you have to wait until we’re married and our bank accounts are merged or… whatever you
said. Until then, you have to let me handle this on my own. Understood?”

“Understood. Although, you have to let me find you a job.”

“What?!”

“Hear me out, because you might like what I’m thinking. Recon will officially hire you as a
freelance writer to create the story for Attack on Titan. This won’t be any charity shit either. You’ll
get paid by Recon, not me, for each chapter. So every time you give us a chapter, you get a check.
But only when you give us a new chapter.”
Whoa… Hold on there. “Are… are you serious?” He’d be getting paid for something he already did?!

“It’s a job we were going to give to you anyway. It was a decision we made a couple days after Hanji came bursting through my door with the whole idea. And I don’t see why now isn’t as good a time as any to give it to you.”

“So… you’ll wait until we’re married to help me financially…” Levi nodded, holding out his hand.

“And you’ll take the job at Recon to help you until then?” Eren nodded too, taking the offered hand in his own. “Then it’s a deal.”

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Two movies down, and Eren could feel an itch nagging at the back of his mind. Something that would just occasionally poke at him if it thought he hadn’t been thinking about it for too long.

Armin had been acting weird for quite a while, and Eren had some idea as to why. Even though Eren was usually really bad at reading people, he’d been around Armin enough to know what Armin was usually feeling.

And when something had happened but he was avoiding the subject.

“Hey… Levi?” Eren asked slowly.

“Hmm?”

“If I were to… I dunno… use my cellular device during this movie date of ours…”

“I don’t care so long as you find a movie that won’t make me want to simultaneously vomit happy rainbows and pass out.”

“You have no taste in movies,” Eren deadpanned, despite being happy that he could go ahead and text Armin. “In fact, your taste in movies is about as refined as your ability to make decent jokes.”

“So… more refined than you?”

Eren opened his mouth, only to realize he couldn’t think of anything to say. Snapping it shut, Eren grabbed an armful of movies, throwing them onto Levi’s lap. “You pick then,” he grumbled, rolling his eyes as he leaned over for his phone. “You’re not allowed to complain about it though!”

With the go ahead from Levi, Eren typed up a message to Armin.

**Eren:** Hey u busy?

**Armin:** Umm… no. But shouldn’t you be??

**Eren:** Levi understands. U ok?

**Armin:** Eren you shouldn’t ignore your date! It’s rude!

**Eren:** And u shouldn’t ignore my question! It’s rude.

Eren let his phone sit on his lap, waiting for a buzz to signal another message, but after a good half hour, he growled in frustration.
“Do you not like this movie?” Levi teased.

“No,” Eren moaned, not playing along. He actually really liked that movie, but he couldn’t focus on it right now anyway. “Armin’s ignoring me because he thinks I shouldn’t be ignoring you…”

“Is everything okay?”

“I don’t know! He won’t tell me! Something happened, I know it did, but he hasn’t had a chance to tell me yet, and if this date is really going on for the whole weekend, then I won’t get a chance until it could be too late to be there for him! That is, unless we text but that involves two people!”

“Try texting him again, if he still ignores you, then call him.”

“And it won’t… ruin the date…?”

“If I got to hound you about college, you can certainly spend time to make sure your best friend is okay.”

“Thanks…” He could always count on Levi for something like that. An eye for an eye, you know.

**Eren:** Armin, I’m serious. Don’t ignore me here! Something happened I know it did!

**Armin:** There’s not much to tell. You have a date. Enjoy it.

**Eren:** I have a weekend long date w Levi. Do u rlly think I can’t take an hour at least 2 talk 2 u when I know u need it?

**Eren:** Ps, if u ignore me again then Levi’s given me the go ahead to just call you until you answer me.

**Armin:** Why can’t you be this observant any other time?

**Eren:** Cuz very few things are worth my attention. NOW TELL ME. What happened?

**Armin:** Annie and I broke up.

Oh…

**Eren:** And… r u doing ok?

**Armin:** I mean… I guess. We both knew it was going to happen sooner or later.

**Eren:** Why? How did u guys know that? And if u knew why did u get together in the first place?

**Armin:** We liked each other, but after a while we realized there was nothing more there.

**Armin:** And she’s going out of state for college, remember?

**Eren:** Oh yeah… Long distance is pretty hard 2 pull off… And r u sure u’ll be ok?

**Armin:** Yeah, I should be fine.

**Eren:** Should be?

**Armin:** It’ll take a little bit of getting used to, but I should be fine.
Eren: 2am tacos?

Eren: *Levi doesn’t stay up that late anyway so it shouldn’t be a problem.*

Armin: … tonight?

Eren: *Yes tonight!*

Armin: … okay

“Judging by the grin on your face, I’d say everything is good?”

Eren jumped, forgetting momentarily that Levi had been there the whole time. Brushing it off, he answered, “Yeah… By the way, I’m going to stop by Taco Bell sometime around 2am, did you want anything?”

Levi made a face. “Taco Bell at 2am?”

“They won’t be serving breakfast or anything…” Eren informed slowly, not forgetting their first fast food encounter.

“Clearly not, but… why Taco Bell at 2am?”

“Oh! It’s a… ah… a thing that me and Armin used to do a lot when we really just wanted to talk.” And Eren was really hoping Levi wouldn’t delve too deep with this one. He wasn’t feeling up to an emotional free for all at the moment. He needed to save his reserves for Armin.

“And I’m guessing that’s why you love early morning fast food?” Levi questioned, but didn’t go farther than that.

“That… may have something to do with it.” And that was the end of that.

“Did you need a ride?”

“Nah, I can just take my dad’s car. I don’t want you to lose your precious sleep.”

“Shouldn’t I be saying that?”

Levi’s teasing tone didn’t soothe Eren though. “Is… Is that okay? I mean, I’ll just be leaving you here…”

“If your friends need your help, I’m not going to keep you here. Especially if I’ll be asleep. Just stay safe, alright?”

Eren sat up, facing Levi. He took a moment to look into Levi’s eyes, wondering just how he’d managed to have the incredible luck of getting stuck with such an incredible person. Levi cocked a brow, wondering just what Eren was up to. Eren bit the inside of his cheek, adding “unbelievably attractive” to the list of words necessary to describe Levi. Him and that fucking eyebrow of his, what the hell…

Pushing Levi down and letting his body press Levi’s into the bed beneath them, Eren laid on top of him, trapping Levi there with his arms with his mouth pressed against Levi’s in a passionate kiss.

One kiss turned into two. Two turned to three. Three turned to many, and Eren could feel warm hands trail up his back and sides. Briefly, he’d heard a small, urging whisper, begging for that hand
to trail a little lower. Following Levi’s example, Eren let his hands trace along the silhouette of Levi’s upper body until they reached the sides of his face. Taking advantage of this new position, Eren deepened the kiss farther than he thought he could.

Eventually, they pulled apart. Lips mere centimeters from each other’s, their pants mingling together.

Breathlessly, Eren gasped out, “Did I ever mention how happy I am that I have you?”

“I don’t think you need to,” and after that, there were no more centimeters between them.

There was nothing quite like the crunch of shit quality tacos at 2 in the morning. Eren’s stomach was already rumbling its disapproval, but the aftermath would so be worth it. Armin sat next to him, only nibbling on the food they ordered while Eren scarfed down his portion.

“So…” Armin spoke up, inspecting a piece of lettuce. “You’re sure Levi’s okay with this?”

“Of course!” Eren reassured through a pile of food. “He even offered to drop me off.”

“But you guys are supposed to be spending time together-”

Eren was going to pinch Armin or something. “I’ve already told you! I can take an hour away from him to spend time with you. I’m marrying the poor bastard, remember?” It seems like a lot of people kept forgetting that. “I have to spend my whole life with him. Besides, he passed out sometime around one so it’s not like he’ll even notice I’m gone.”

“If you’re sure…”

“I am. If Levi didn’t want me to go, he would have told me.”

“How do you know?” A slight bite in Armin’s voice caught Eren off guard. “A lot of people don’t actually mean what they say… especially early in the relationship. He could have just been saying that to avoid a fight…”

“Avoid a fight? Levi has never lied to me before, especially not to avoid a fight. If anything, he rises to the occasion when we fight…” Memories of only hours earlier came to mind…

“You guys fight a lot?”

“Yeah, but most of them are about how I climbed through the ventilation to avoid his friends or how I don’t want him to pay for my college or his terrible taste in movies.”

“What?! You did what?!! Climbed through the ventilation?!”

“Oh, right! You didn’t hear about that! Well, Levi’s friends ambushed him at his house so they could meet me, but Levi didn’t want us to meet yet so he tried hiding me in his closet. So instead of letting myself get found out, I climbed through the vents, managed to avoid being seen, and then made sure to introduce myself to them as if I hadn’t been shoved into a closet. Honestly, he was more upset that I’d still introduced myself to them than the fact that I’d climbed through the vents.”

Armin might as well have lost his faith in humanity with his sigh. “… You guys fight about the weirdest things…”
Huh… Eren had never thought about that before. “Yeah… Haha! I suppose we do!”

“So… you guys have never kept anything from each other?”

“Of course we have! In the beginning, though. After a few mishaps with that,” including Eren’s week of sleepless hell and briefly when Levi had, though not with bad intentions, kept important information about Eren’s living arrangements from him, “we just sort of decided to stop beating around the bush with what we meant. And we’re both already so horrible at subtlety around each other, it just made more sense. If he says something is true, I have no reason to believe otherwise.”

“Really?” Armin still seemed a bit doubtful. “It takes most couples years or even decades to reach that level of trust with each other…”

“Most couples aren’t forced into a marriage like we were. We’re in this together, and keeping things from each other, hating each other… it won’t solve anything.”

Armin was silent for a long time. He was working up the courage to say something, of that Eren was sure, so he waited patiently until Armin finally confessed, “Annie never told me she was going out of state for college… She’s already been accepted and had decided to go when we started dating… but she never told me for sure until recently.”

Annie… did what? Half of Eren wanted to head over to her house right now and punch her in the face, but the other half still couldn’t believe Annie would just lie to Armin like that… “Wh… what? Why wouldn’t she tell you?”

“She knew I wasn’t going to go for a long distance relationship and that I probably wouldn’t date her if I’d known… I understand her reasoning and all but…” But that dejected sigh left Eren wanting to punch something.

“She still shouldn’t have kept that from you!” Eren defended, his fists balling up. “That’s not fair to you!”

Armin just shrugged. “Like I said… It takes most couples a long time to get where you and Levi are at now…”

Armin’s lack of enthusiasm left Eren unsure of what to do. Although, he knew that punching something wouldn’t work. “You know what?” he decided after a minute. “I’m going to make sure your next girlfriend, or boyfriend, is going to treat you right. And I’ll be able to back it up too! Levi said he’s going to teach me how to ruin lives with the power I’m going to get when we marry.” That wasn’t bragging at all. Just… comforting reassuring… yeah…

“You’d ruin someone’s life for me?” Armin smiled, touched by the notion.

“I’d ruin the world for you! Never forget that!”

“You’re such an idiot…”

“Yeah, but I’m your idiot, and I get you tacos at two in the morning.”

That certainly couldn’t be denied.
Given everything he’d heard, given every movie he’d seen, given all the hype around such an extraordinary event, Eren hadn’t really anticipated graduation to be so… anticlimactic.

Sure! He was graduating and all, you know, starting a new chapter of his life, saying goodbye to old friends and teachers and shedding tears at motivational farewell speeches by staff and valedictorians he’d mostly never met. But… it was really hard to keep that mood for a mind numbing, boredom inducing hour and a half of sitting down watching people race across the stage to get their diploma in an assembly line fashion like toys.

High school graduates. *Some assembly required.

But in order to pass the time before and after his own assembly (which consisted of his diploma, several sweaty handshakes, and a couple hasty pictures), Eren found himself scanning the crowds in the bleachers, looking for one person in particular.

Every student graduating was given six tickets to give to whomever they wanted to attend the ceremony. There was only so much seating available after all. And since everyone in Eren’s family was either dead or had lost contact with his parents, that left Eren four extra tickets. So he invited Levi, Genevieve, Carlton, and, reluctantly, Francis.

It had mostly been out of politeness since he’d invited everyone else, but, like Eren had expected, Francis wanted no part in it.

“Why would I want to waste my precious time watching a bunch of kids I don’t care about walk across a stage just to see one that I don’t even like?” had been the response. Which was perfectly fine with Eren, since he didn’t even want Francis to be there to begin with.

Eren briefly considered giving the last one to Chef Hannes, but decided that it would probably be a little too weird to invite the family chef along with the family… Besides, Connie had needed an
extra one for his siblings as his family was so large. A trait Eren was not envious of.

But even after meticulously checking each face that he could, there was no Levi to be found. Genevieve and Carlton chatted happily with his parents, but there wasn’t even an empty seat nearby that would suggest Levi had momentarily left.

Eren had to swallow down the feelings of bitter disappointment, reminding himself that Levi did have work to do and that a graduation ceremony didn’t sound too appealing either. Eren probably wouldn’t have gone either if he hadn’t been a part of it. And it’s not like it was really all that important. It was only high school. If he managed to graduate college, then maybe he could get Levi to come too.

As it was, Levi wasn’t here, so Eren started flipping through the pamphlet he’d been given at the beginning of the event. Reading name after name, mentally pointing out who he knew, and picking through the rest of the information on the short packet. Anything to pass the time in the never ending graduation factory of anticlimactic disappointment.

His, and every other students, prayers had been answered soon enough, though.

Their principal stood up to the podium for one last attempted inspirational speech, before allowing them to throw up their glow sticks in the air (another anticlimactic difference from the movies, something about no one losing the one size fits all identical hats that they’d never wear again). And in the midst of all the cheering and merry applause, they were allowed to stand and leave.

Finally!

Finally! He never had to waste time at a stupid high school again!

Finally! He could ditch this stupid ceremony and those gaudy plastic robes and he and his friends could celebrate on their own! Now he just had to find them…

But upon exiting, something caught his eye. A familiar dark blue sweatshirt, hood up. Relief. Excitement. A grin that Eren was trying so hard to keep down so he didn’t look like any more of an idiot.

“You know,” he said when he was close enough, “people are gonna start recognizing you if you keep wearing the same hoodie out.”

Levi half smiled. “The point is not so that they don’t recognize me, but that they can’t photograph me. No money can be made if it all looks like the same day.” But all joking was set aside. The half-smile found it’s other half. “Congratulations.”

“Thanks…” Eren let out a short burst of laughter and threw his arms around Levi, hands grasping on to the back of his sweatshirt tightly. “…I thought you didn’t make it,” he admitted lowly, burying his face in Levi’s shoulder.

Levi pulled off Eren’s pointy graduation cap, hugging him back. “Of course I made it. I wasn’t about to miss your graduation.”

Eren lifted his head as they pulled apart. “I just… I didn’t see you and I thought… maybe you still had work or… You know what? It doesn’t matter. You’re here now.”

“And there’s nowhere else I’d rather be,” Levi said, finishing it off with a kiss.

“Eren!” called several voices.
They parted, looking over in the direction of the said voices. Eren’s family and a couple of his friends who weren’t with their families had formed a small group off to the side. Carla held up a camera, pointing at it impatiently. His friends waved him over excitedly. Great… Group pictures.

“Hey Levi,” Eren started, pulling Levi’s attention from the group. “My friends and I were all gonna celebrate later after all the pictures. Did you want to come with?” he asked uncertainly. “I’m sure they wouldn’t mind. They’re always complaining that they never get to see you anyway.”

Levi smiled ruefully. “Sounds like fun, but I’m afraid I have too much work to finish before this weekend.” Eren nodded, only a little upset that he couldn’t spend more time with him. “But don’t worry. I’ll get plenty of time to hang out with you and your friends plenty at the party.”

Oh right! They were throwing a graduation slash engagement party for their friends this weekend! At least, they’d throw it after a more formal one for business partners and other unimportant people Eren didn’t care about. But he’d finally get to see the ballroom in action. Now he just needed to remember not to take his shoes off…

“Oh, duh!” Eren rolled his eyes at himself. “I totally forgot. But you have to at least stay for the pictures!” he demanded, pulling Levi over to the impatient group. “I need proof that you were here!”

“All right, alright,” Levi agreed. Not like he had much of a choice. “Just stop pulling already. You’ll stretch my arm.”

Armin was a best friend. With that position came a lot of responsibility. It meant standing up for Eren when no one else would. It meant guiding Eren in the right direction away from stupid ideas (which he had a lot of). It meant comforting Eren through the late hours of the night. It meant being there for him when Eren told him he was in an arranged marriage, but he didn’t know with who. And perhaps most importantly, it meant helping Eren try and pick out an outfit for the engagement party his fiancé was throwing.

“Eren, you are making this far more difficult than it needs to be,” Armin sighed, lounging on Eren’s bed as Eren turned in front of the mirror. Making sure his outfit was presentable.

“I know, I know!” Eren groaned. “But I want to look semi presentable!”

“For what? It’s not like you have to impress Levi. You’ve never cared this much before.”

“Well it would be nice to show him that I can actually dress myself, but it’s more than that.” When Armin didn’t respond, opting instead to tilt his head in confusion, Eren continued. “I mean, people from his work are going to be there, important coworkers. What if they think I’m a total idiot?”

“Well, you are an idiot-” Eren let out a huff of annoyance at that, “-but if you’ve already gotten the approval from the two that matter and Levi himself, then there’s not much his coworkers can do. Just don’t start any fights and you’ll be fine.”

“We’ll see…” Eren said uncertainly. Armin was right, of course, he always was. Even if they didn’t like him, Erwin and Hanji did, and they were the ones that really mattered. Just like it didn’t matter how much the rest of his friends didn’t like Levi, so long as he got the approval from Armin and Mikasa, everything would be fine. They were the important ones since they were his closest friends. And hey, as long as Jean, Reiner, and Ymir kept their mouths shut, Eren would have no problem keeping out of a fight.
“I’m still mad at you though,” Armin announced suddenly, but it didn’t take Eren long to figure out why. “I can’t believe you got to meet Erwin Smith! That is so not fair!”

“You jelly bro?” Eren wiggled his eyebrows and smirked playfully.

“Yes!” Armin flopped back letting his back hit the bed, exasperated. “And you’re sure he can’t make it…?”

“I already told you, Levi told me he had a business meeting out of town that weekend. Otherwise, he would have made it.” Of course, the one weekend where Armin would finally get to meet his idol is when his idol would be gone. Just his luck.

“And you don’t even know where?”

Eren didn’t even face away from the mirror as he tried yet another outfit. “Why would I? I’m not you.” That one wasn’t too bad… But it was missing something…

“Oh shut up, I am not a stalker…” Armin tossed Eren a jacket. “Here.”

Using only the mirror to look, Eren caught the jacket, testing it out. “Thanks.” Perfect. “Besides, you’ll have plenty of time to meet him later. It’s not like I’m marrying his best friend or anything.”

“And…” Armin quieted significantly. “You’re sure he’ll like me? He won’t see me as some stalker fanboy?”

“Armin,” Eren turned around, face deathly serious. “Trust me. You’re fine.”

“If you say so…” It took a moment for Armin to work out the words he was going to say next. “…Annie says I should go for it.” Despite how things had ended, Annie and Armin had remained on decent terms. Their mutual understanding of the situation made it easier.

“You should!” Eren exclaimed, heading over to his sock drawer. “When you finally get to meet him, you better get that.”

“You’re making it sound like I should hook up with him!” Honestly, every time Erwin was brought up, Eren just had to mention getting together with him! Although… Armin had kind of started it this time…

“Don’t tell me you don’t want to,” Eren goaded, a filthy smirk on his face.

“I just… admire him…” Which was the truth.

“Armin, we’ve gone over this before. You like him.”

“I don’t know him.”

“When you know him, it will only confirm that you like him.”

“Besides…” Even if it was true, aka if Armin admitted it was true… “I’m not ready to date just yet.”

“Who said anything about dating?” Eren recovered quickly. “Just get to know him. You know you want to…”

“So speaking of businessmen,” Armin interrupted loudly. “How was that formal engagement party the other day, Eren?” He mostly asked to get revenge on Eren, but curiosity might have also been a
part of it.

Eren curled in on himself, face distorted by horror and disgust. “Don’t…” he whimpered. “Don’t remind me… please…”

Armin’s eyes flew open. He had not been expecting that reaction. “Was it really that bad?”

“Close enough,” Eren scoffed, returning to normal. He angrily slipped some socks on, using exaggerated motions as he told his story. “I can’t tell you how fucking boring it was! I swear I couldn’t understand a damn thing anyone was saying in that room. And it’s not because they used words I didn’t understand! They just strung them together in a way that didn’t make sense! Stocks and bonds and… I don’t even remember! I had to tune them out before my brain exploded from the sheer nonsense of it all! Then, of course, by Francis’s royal decree, I had to meet everyone in the fucking room, and after the introductions, they all ignored me!”

“Just think, if they talked to you, your brain might’ve exploded.” A tiny comfort.

“Levi, thank god for him, did most of the talking and stayed next to me the whole night. I don’t know what I would have done without him…”

“Crashed, burned, and made a horrible fool out of yourself.”

“Thanks, but I did enough of that even while he was with me.”

“What happened?” Armin asked, prompting Eren to slouch down beside him on the bed.

“At first, everyone was so interested in meeting me. “Oh! Levi Voclain’s fiancé!” or “Oh! It’s the secret heir to the Jaeger Medical Corporation!” Yeah, that lasted all about…” Eren pretended to look at his nonexistent watch, “…five minutes into each conversation. After they realized I had no experience in the field and no intention of going into the field, they stopped talking to me. They’d just turn the conversation to Levi, and I’d be left standing there like an idiot. Which is what they probably thought I was! I bet the only reason they kept being polite to me was so that they didn’t piss off Levi.”

“Yikes…”

“And that’s not all! I swear to god at least half of the daughters that were there spent the whole night glaring at me!”

“Levi’s fanbase I take it?”

“I was half expecting one of them to come at me with a fork and a smashed bottle of wine.”

“At least you’d die by expensive wine.”

“Of course, none of them would talk to me, or kill me, since Levi was with me practically the whole time. And the one time when he did have to leave me for an extended period of time, I had Christa there to protect me, fucking bless her soul. She’s the only one of us who’ll get into heaven, I just know it.”

“I can’t remember… does her father actually know that she’s dating Ymir, or does he still believe she’s straight?”

“If he doesn’t, he’ll find out soon enough. I’m going to enjoy seeing Ymir try to mingle with upper-class businessmen.” That would be a sight to behold, indeed.
“With you and her combined, I almost feel sorry for them. Now get your shoes on so we can go already! Mikasa’s probably already sitting in the car waiting for us.”

“Alright, alright!” Eren cried, shooting up from the bed to slip his shoes on. “I’m going!”

It was not the first time Armin had been to the Voclain mansion, but it was the first time he’d seen the ballroom so decorated. Tables, chairs, and couches had been set up around the room. Eren had even explained that Levi’s PlayStation and Eren’s Xbox had been set up in each living room if they wanted to play. Even some non-video games, like Cards Against Humanity, had been set out. Music played in the background too, from a stereo in the corner.

Oh, and there was a table piled with amazing looking food that made his mouth water.

But once Eren had spotted Levi next to that delectable spread, he ditched Armin, leaving him alone since Mikasa had been distracted by one of the games going on as they walked in. Armin rolled his eyes at his eager friend, but couldn’t be bothered with feeling resentful. If anything, Armin was beyond happy that Eren had found someone he liked enough to spend so much time with. Even better considering it was his fiancé.

Armin felt a small smile spread across his face as he watched Eren launch himself at Levi. They kissed a couple times (looks like Eren was quickly overcoming his embarrassment) and, while Armin knew he and Annie wouldn’t have worked out if they stayed together, he kind of wished she was here right now…

A hand brushed against Armin’s shoulder, and he yelped in surprise, spinning around before stuttering out apologies. “I—I’m so sorry! You just startled me… is… all…”

Armin’s jaw dropped. Words became difficult to form.

Tall, blonde, and handsome stood before him in the form of Erwin Smith. His dazzling smile sent not entirely unpleasant shivers to run up and down Armin’s spine. It was impossible to focus on anything than the god before him. So much so, that when the majestic being did speak, Armin almost didn’t realize it.

“W-What…?” he squeaked meekly, mentally cursing himself for that pathetic display.

Erwin the God laughed, the chuckle deep and throaty and it was going to make Armin melt if he didn’t stop. “I was introducing myself. I’m Erwin, Levi’s friend.” He held out his hand to Armin, blinding him with that smile again.

Armin, as if on autopilot, raised his hand to shake hands with Erwin. That warm hand wrapped around his and it might have been the best handshake of his life. “Armin… I’m Armin… Eren’s friend.” The gears in Armin’s head started moving again, but one gear just wasn’t quite fitting in… “But wait! Eren said you wouldn’t make it! He said you were on a business trip!”


Pieces started falling into place, and then it was all so clear.

Armin whipped his head around until he caught sight of Eren. His face was a lovely shade of embarrassment.
“Eren!” he cried. “You dirty rotten liar! You horrible friend! How could you?!”

Eren, upon hearing the distressed tone in which his name had been spoken, twisted around only to jolt with laughter. A hand flew to poorly cover his wicked grin and his other arm wrapped around his soon to be aching sides.

“You’ll thank me later!” the demon friend called back.

Armin huffed. “You told me he wasn’t going to be here!”

“If you’re so upset then why haven’t you let go of his hand yet?”

Armin’s embarrassment escalated to mortification. Spinning back around, he realized that Eren was indeed right in that Armin had yet to let go. Although… Erwin hadn’t let go either…

Ripping his hand away, Armin stuttered out apologies. “I-I’m so… so sorry. I don’t know what… I’m sorry…”

“It’s quite alright. You have very soft hands.”

And awkward giggle spouted out from Armin. “Um… Thanks… You too…” God! What was he supposed to say? His idol was here! What was he supposed to say without sounding creepy? ‘Well, I’d ask you a question, but I know pretty much everything about you because despite how much I deny it I really am kind of a stalker. Hahaha! Funny right?’

“You just recently graduated, right? Do you know where you’re going to college?”

College… that was a safe topic… Thank god Erwin knew what he was doing. “Oh, I was just thinking about Trost University. Most of my friends are going there. Where are you going? I-I mean! Where did you go?” Stupid mistake! Stupid mistake!

But Erwin thankfully didn’t seem to notice. “I went to Maria Academy. Same as Levi and Hanji. What are you going to be studying there?”

“Oh! Well… oh… it’s stupid. I’ll probably just end up changing my mind anyway…”

“Stupid? If you really like it, how could it be stupid?” Well… when he said it like that…

“Well… I’ve always wanted to learn more about the world, so… I was going to go into biology and… maybe teach to elementary students…? Maybe inspire them to learn more about the world we live in so they can realize how amazing the world we live in is…” Realizing what had tumbled out of his mouth, Armin blushed furiously, barely able to maintain eye contact. Erwin was probably going to laugh at him!

But Erwin didn’t even chuckle. Instead, he shook his head, sighing heavily, pure admiration in those deep blue eyes of his. “And here I was hoping to convince you to join Recon, but after that speech… I’d be ruining the lives of every single one of your future students.”

Could… could he have heard what he thought he heard…? “Wait… Me? You wanted me to join Recon? Why?”

“Eren told me about how you’d found the… what was it? Easter egg level is what he said you called it? Where all of the monsters had been replaced by teacups.”

“Oh! Oh yeah! I remember that! It took a while to find too. But… what about it?” And what why
did Eren tell him that? It wasn’t really important…

“You weren’t supposed to find it,” Erwin stated bluntly. “That level was supposed to stay between
Levi, Hanji, and I. No one else should have been able to find it.”

Armin’s jaw fell. Oh no. Oh no… He did something wrong. He’d pissed off Erwin. He’d hardly
even been able to hold a proper conversation and now he was already telling Armin that he hated
him… “I-I-I… I-I’m sorry… I-I never meant…”

Erwin, upon realizing what Armin was thinking, intervened on his thoughts. “Oh no! Don’t
apologize! It’s quite alright! The fact that you were able to find that, to us, means that you’re quite
the genius. Or at least as smart as us. Which is why I had planned to recruit you. You’re a
remarkable young man, Armin.”

Words… how did words work again? “I… Will you ex-excuse me? I’m just… gonna get some
punch… I’ll be back…” Numbly, Armin turned away from an amused and mildly concerned
Erwin, headed for the food table where Eren and Levi still were.

Levi, noticing Armin’s approaching presence, patted Eren on the shoulder. “How about a trade?
You take Armin, and I’ll go keep Erwin company before he decides to eavesdrop on your
conversation.”

Eren nodded a confirmation, his eyes trained on Armin. Levi left Eren’s side, Armin taking up
Eren’s other side as he walked away. He said nothing as Armin picked up a glass but didn’t move
past that first step. For a long moment, Armin could only stare through the punch, trying to process
what had just happened.

“I’m never going to forgive you,” he finally said. If his brain had been working properly, it might
have sounded a little more joking than it did.

“Of course you will!” Eren laughed, anticipating Armin’s reaction. “Probably some time when
you’re texting him in the middle of the night, building off of whatever crazy idea one of you had
come up with only moments ago. One of many, obviously.”

“Eren!” Armin whined, snapping out of it a bit more. “He is my idol! Why didn’t you tell me he
was going to be here?”

“Because if I had then you would have spent every single moment leading up to the party worrying
and fretting about what you’d wear, what you’d say, whether he’d like you or not, that you would
just decide not to go or you’d avoid him the whole time so you’d never get to meet him! Don’t you
dare say I’m wrong! You know I’m right!”

“I…” Armin let his face scrunch up, letting out a groan. He was right…

“That’s what I thought.”

“But still, I made such a fool out of myself…” Armin let his hands cover his face, and the
embarrassed blush adorning it. “Oh he probably thinks I’m a total idiot!”

“Aft...
“Wh… Whatever! Oh… what do I do…?”

“Talk to him.” It couldn’t be as simple as that could it? “I know he wants to talk to you.”

Armin lifted his head fully. “Really…?”

“Levi told me that for the past week Erwin’s been asking him if I had anything else to share with about you. How you’ve been, what he’d like doing, what was he thinking about doing for the future?” As Eren spoke, Armin snuck a glance back at Erwin, just as Erwin was sneaking a glance at him. That dazzling smile, a small wave, and Armin found himself mimicking the movements. Eren didn’t notice. “He’s actually almost as much of a stalker as you are. Which probably means you two are perfect for each other.”

“Eren!” Armin gasped. “You’re not thinking about-”

“What? No! No, no, no! Oh god, you really think I’d try and set you up after Annie just broke up with you? Have a little faith! I got you tacos for fucks sake!”

“I know, I know… I just… He’s so incredible… But… there’s too much going on right now and… I’m not ready for this.”

“Armin. Your idol is over there, in the flesh, and he wants to talk to you. He’s interested in you, and you feel the same way. You want to ask him questions, you want to know more about him, even if it never comes to anything more. But you’ll never find the answers over here with me.”

“You’re right… I… I should talk to him. You know, you’ve had a lot of good ideas recently, and you’ve been… well… a little smarter than usual. Levi’s a good influence on you.”

“W-Whatever! Shut up and go talk to your stupid idol already!”

“I won’t forgive you, you know.”

Erwin flinched at the surprise voice from behind him, later that night. Spinning around, he found Eren standing behind him. “Excuse me?”

Eren, glaring at the much larger man, stood his ground. “If you hurt him. I’ll never forgive you.”

“Why would I hurt him?” Erwin asked, still thoroughly confused.

Eren didn’t answer. “Tell him the truth. Take care of him. Go slow. If I find out you’ve hurt him in some way, I don’t care if you are Levi’s closest friend. I will not forgive you. Ever. And I’ll make sure you get what’s coming to you. Understand?” In a much lower, softer voice, he added, “He’s my best friend. He has been my whole life. I’d do anything to make sure he was okay.”

Erwin understood more and more as Eren spoke. And when he was finished, Erwin bowed his head. “You have my word. I couldn’t bear to hurt him, even if I tried.”

“Threatening people already?” Levi questioned as he joined the conversation. “We haven’t even started your training yet.”

“No one messes with my friends,” Eren explained, crossing his arms across his chest.

Erwin breathed out a small laugh. “You’re a good friend.”
“Don’t you have some young boy that you stalked to talk to?” Levi dismissed, shooing Erwin with a wave of his hand.

“I did not stalk him.”

“Yeah, and I didn’t cover your weights in baby oil back in college every chance I got.”

Eren’s eyes widened. “You did what? Oh. Oh, I gotta hear about this.”

“Just go,” Levi stressed, rubbing his forehead. After they’d made sure Erwin had made it back to an eager Armin’s side, Levi slipped his arm around Eren’s waist. “Erwin’s a good man, you know. Soulless, manipulative, and a stalker, but a good man. He’ll take care of Armin.”

“Even if he says no?” Eren about whispered, eyes never leaving the two.

“He’s a soulless, manipulative stalker. Not a fuckboy.” Eren snorted out a strange sort of cackle, definitely not expecting Levi to say the word fuckboy, but the weird noise that he’d created left him gasping for breaths in between laughs. Levi rolled his eyes, trying hard to not laugh along. “Hey,” he interrupted as Eren quieted down. “I’ve got some people who’d like to meet you.”

That got Eren’s attention real quick. Straightening out, Eren made out four figures. A petite woman with light amber hair, a blonde man with a bit of scruff, a tall dark haired man, and another man who looked like he was in his forties and who was bleeding from his mouth. A little worrying…

“Oh! He’s just as adorable as his picture!” The squeal had come from the woman.

“Eren, these are my coworkers. They’re the best at what they do, and they’ve been a part of my personal team for quite a while. This is Petra, Erd, Gunter, and Auruo.”

“It’s nice to meet you all.” Victory! He didn’t stammer like an idiot in front of them! If Eren kept it up, they might even think he was smart…

“Oh, he’s so sweet!” Petra squealed again. “You guys must have hit it off really well when you met.”

Now there was no stopping Levi from laughing with Eren, much to his coworker’s bewilderment.

Sometime around three in the morning, the mixture of Eren and Levi’s friends began simmering down, chatter and laughter replaced by contagious yawns and dim conversation. The food had been demolished long ago, even after the several pizzas that had been made came out, chairs and furniture had been rearranged, and at least two fights happened that night. Mostly because of video games.

Eren found himself sitting off to the side, on the marble floor with his back against the wall, just watching his friends have fun as they slowly passed out, one by one. He really hoped Francis wouldn’t yell at him if he found all these people knocked out in his house. Even so, Eren couldn’t find himself to care at the moment. The pure content he felt was too great.

“What are you doing all the way over here?” Eren heard Levi ask. Levi, a plate of food in his hand, sat down next to Eren.

“Enjoying life.”
Levi scoffed, making himself comfortable as he set the food down between them. “I’m pretty sure this is just you being too lazy to find an actual seat.”

“What is this?” Eren laughed, referring to the plate of food. “I didn’t realize there was anything left at that pillaged table.”

“Leftovers. Food I managed to snag before it had been scarfed down and then stored for later.” Levi popped a couple chips in his mouth, enjoying the late night snack.

Eren snagged one of the two pieces of pizza that had somehow fit on there with the rest of the food. “Can they really be considered leftovers if they were out only a couple hours ago?”

“I put it in tupperware.”

“Ah! The mark of the true leftover. Tupperware.”

“Hey, leftovers are fucking delicious.”

Eren gasped. A strange sense of déjà vu washing over him. The feeling left him silent as he tried to place exactly where he’d felt this before. It had been a long time ago.

Levi noticed quickly. “Alright, what is it.”

Eren sighed, his tone sobering. “I’m just thinking back to what Petra said. About us.”

Levi half smiled. “We’ll never live down that week will we?”

“I’m sure you won’t mind so long as there’s no more mud.” Eren smiled earnestly. The scene around him so similar yet so different. “We’ve come a long way haven’t we?”

Levi’s hand slid up Eren’s arm before pulling him close. “We still have a long way to go.”

Eren’s smile only grew, kissing Levi on the cheek. His friend, his confidant, his mentor, his boyfriend. His fiancé. “I’m willing to make that journey with you.”
Pitch black. It was pitch black outside. Not even the stars twinkled. They’d run in fear as the low rumbled of thunder vibrated the ground below. The trees bent and swayed at the dominating wind, howling as it ripped through the leaves. Lightning electrified the skies, the only form of light outside.

And inside, Eren was roughly shaken awake from his comfortable slumber.

“Eren?”

The boy stirred. “Mmm… what is it, Levi?” he mumbled groggily, but quickly waking up. “I thought you wanted me to get sleep.”

“I do, but there’s something I want to show you.”

Eren was taken aback. “Show me?” He glanced at the clock and shot up. “It’s 3 in the morning! What could you possibly want to show me at 3 in the morning?!”

A well placed growl of thunder rumbled from a distance. Levi, seizing his moment, gestured to the window.

Eren, getting the point, was unimpressed. He flopped disappointingly back onto his pillow, glaring at Levi. “A thunderstorm? You do realize I’ve seen those before right?” Don’t get him wrong, he did love thunderstorms (something about how chaotic they were and how nice it was to just stay in and sip hot cocoa or even fall asleep to the sounds of one), but he didn’t need to be woken up at three in the morning for one.

“You’ve spent some time in the backyard right?” Levi inquired delicately, like he was just waiting to drop a bomb.

Eren’s mouth hung open. “You’re kidding right?” He knew it was a rhetorical question, and that he shouldn’t have answered, but after hearing such a stupid question after just having been woken
up… he couldn’t not respond.

“And, you know the gazebo out in the back?” Eren nodded, still not sure what Levi was getting at.

Levi only smirked. Here came the bomb.

“It has a glass ceiling.”

It hadn’t started raining yet, making it easier to transfer their stuff to the glass gazebo, but the lack of rain left the backyard with a sense of impending doom. Although, by the time they were transporting the last of their stuff, the lightest of sprinkles had started.

While they set up, the rain only grew.

They’d brought as many pillows, blankets, and towels (upon Eren’s request) as well as a little portable heater. It was still spring after all. Eren arranged the blankets to make a makeshift yet comfortable bed while Levi set up the heater. It was pouring now.

“Man…” Eren whistled lowly. “It’s really coming down… We probably won’t be able to get this stuff back inside for hours… Do we really want to leave it out here all night?”

“Leave it out here? Who says we’ll be going back inside?” Levi scoffed.

“You mean we’re sleeping out here?” Levi nodded, and Eren grinned. “Sounds like an adventure.” Sleeping outside during a thunderstorm. Nice. “But are you sure we’ll be warm enough?”

“This little heater may not look like much–” That was for sure “–but it’s got enough power to last continuously for days. Plus we have all those blankets and towels. We’ll be fine.”

“Sounds like it. Now get your ass over here! You’re the one who wanted us to see this!” Eren laughed, pulling Levi onto the pile once the heater had been set up.

They’d laid all but two of the pillows (one for Levi and one for Eren even though he was probably just going to use Levi like usual) down in the middle of the gazebo with the towels wrapped around them to keep them in place. The blankets then went on top in several layers and the two leftover pillows. It wasn’t the comfiest as the pillows kept moving around since the towels weren’t the best thing to keep them in place (fitted sheets, like Eren used on his pillow fort, would have been better), which left it lumpy, but it was still pretty okay.

Eren sure couldn’t find a much more of a reason to complain either. He would curled up against Levi’s side, using his shoulder as a pillow (as predicted) and Levi’s arm was wrapped around his shoulders, keeping him there.

“This is really nice…” Eren commented quietly. “I’ve never seen a thunderstorm this way before…”

And it really was nice, not just because he was cuddling with Levi. Sure it was dark out, but the frequent lightning illuminated the outside world in bright flashes. The dark clouds looming above, the trees thrashing in the wind as rain pelted the still new leaves off of them, that same rain pattering against the glass above them. He could see all around him the chaos that couldn’t affect him. It was a strange kind of power.
“It’s really great during the day when you can really see everything, but I wanted to show you this too. Who knows when we’ll get another storm like this?”

“I think it’s cooler at night, what with the lightning and all. It adds a lot more effects, I think.”

“Well, the next time it storms during the day, we can see who’s right.”

“It’s a deal,” Eren agreed sleepily.

Conversation stopped after that. They simply relaxed, letting the steady beat of rain lull them off to sleep. Eren more so than Levi. Outside, snuggling against Levi, the therapeutic rhythm of the storm. Warm and protected.

A particularly harsh strike of thunder startled Eren, making his whole body jump. The loud, deafening crack shook the glass.

His heart beat faster while Levi rubbed slow, small circles on his shoulder. “Getting a bit scared of the thunder?”

Eren shook his head, leaning back into Levi. “Not really. It’s just getting really intense, is all.”

Levi tightened his hold on Eren. “It’s okay… I’m here…” he whispered soothingly.

Eren fell asleep to those words, and despite the raging storm outside, held off only by a single layer of glass, it was the most peaceful sleep he’d had in a while.

Of course, that didn’t stop Carlton from freaking out when he couldn’t find them in Levi’s room the next morning. Nor did it stop Francis from yelling at Eren for keeping Levi out all night and then letting him sleep in when he had work to do.

Totally worth it though.
Gods… it’s just been too long since I’ve seen you guys! I actually almost forgot to update today since my perspective on time has completely degenerated considering I no longer have a need to remember what day it is… Huh… BUT I WON’T FORGET!!! It… just means my updates will probably be later in the day…

I hope you all enjoy the return of this story!

And what better way to celebrate my return… than with a party?

“Eren, hold still,” Levi commanded, attempting to tie the tie around Eren’s neck. It would have worked too, had Eren not tried to duck away from the tie every time.

“This is ridiculous, Levi!” Eren cried, backing away from Levi. He only had very few reasons to actually wear a tie, and this wasn’t one of them.

“No,” Levi drawled. “What’s ridiculous is the idea that you’ve managed to avoid every single party that we’ve been invited to save for our engagement party. It’s been over a year since then and I think it’s high time that I get to introduce you to everyone as my fiancé. And don’t even think about using college as an excuse! You’re a sophomore now, you should know how this works.” He began inching toward Eren, tie at the ready.

Eren countered by inching back more. “That doesn’t mean I can just skip off whenever I want to party when I have work.” Not to mention he was getting real close to finishing that next chapter… Sure he’d had writer’s block for the last couple weeks, but he’d much rather deal with measly writer’s block than be forced into what was going to be an obvious disaster.

“Yes, but making sure your professors keep you busy on those nights when you can’t think of anything else is just low,” Levi accused. “Which is why I specifically contacted each of your professors personally to make sure that you were free tonight.” One of them might have gotten a little star struck, but as long as they weren’t going to assign Eren anything important that night, he didn’t care.

Eren’s face scrunched up. “I know. Stop rubbing it in my face.”

“Look,” Levi dropped his advancing stance, “it’s just a social gathering. We won’t even have to worry about dinner.”

“Dinner? You mean these people actually throw dinner parties? And I’m going to have to attend one?!” Great job calming him down.

But in Eren’s panic, Levi threw the tie around Eren’s neck. Eren jumped, but it was too late to do anything as Levi was already tying it up. “Not for a while, you still have time. Just mingle with the crowd, make small talk, and you’ll be fine.”

Eren’s shoulder’s slumped, the battle lost. “Levi, you know I don’t mix well with your crowd. I never have! Why do you think I’ve avoided it for so long?”
“Eren, it gets easier. I promise. The more you go to the easier they become. But the more you avoid them, the harder they get. It’s best to just get it over with now. Like ripping off a band aid.”

Accentuating his point, Levi tightened the tie around Eren’s neck, finishing it off.

Rubbing his neck, Eren moaned out, “This is nothing like ripping off a band aid, I just hope you know that.”

Levi took in a deep breath, looking Eren over. The suit and tie ensemble definitely made Eren quite the handsome man, but seeing such formal attire on Eren was almost surreal. “And I do actually want to take you to these things,” he admitted. “They’re a necessary evil that I want you to enjoy. I want to be with you, show you off. I want to shove it in their faces that you’re mine and that there’s nothing they can do about it.” A hand raised itself, gently caressing the side of Eren’s face.

Eren pouted, trying to avert his eyes. “You’re not allowed to sweet talk me when I’m mad at you.”

Levi chuckled. “But then you’ll just stay mad. And we can’t have that now can we?” He kissed Eren’s cheek, as his head was still turned away from Levi.


Finally getting the answer he needed, Levi started gathering his things. “You’d have had to go anyway,” he informed, playfulness still seeping through his voice.

“But if you see me heading for the car five minutes in—”

“It’ll be fine,” Levi stressed. There was no convincing Eren, was there? Sobering for a moment, Levi caught Eren’s gaze with his own. “But if something does happen… let me know.”

Eren’s irritation from moments before faded. Sending Levi a comforting smile, he said, “You know I’ll always tell you.”

Levi smiled back. “Good. Now let’s get going before Grandfather starts bugging us about being late.”

Eren’s eye’s rolled on their own simply at the mention of Francis. “You mean bugging me.”

Just then… “Eren, if you’re done playing dress up I’d like to go now,” Francis’s booming voice called up.

Eren only raised an eyebrow at Levi. *You see?*

Without breaking eye contact, Levi called back, “I just need to get my jacket; I seem to have misplaced it!” In all actuality, he didn’t. His jacket was already on his back.

“You probably just gave it to Eren at some point and he lost it like an idiot.”

Eren felt his fists curl, his teeth grinding, his brow furrowing. Even after nearly a year and a half of dealing with Francis, it never got easier.

Levi had to stop himself from laughing, lest he upset his fiancé further. He then strode over, lacing his hand with one of Eren’s. Which forced the fist, and by extension, Eren, to relax. “We’ll be out in a moment.”

Eren slumped his shoulders, whining out, “I’m not going to enjoy tonight…”
Eren didn’t know who was throwing the party or what the party was even about. Levi had explained it probably several times to him, but he couldn’t find it in him to care long enough to actually retain the information. All he knew was that several important partners of the Voclain Corporation would be there and he had to behave himself. And even if Eren couldn’t stand conversing with the classy rich assholes that would no doubt swarm the premises, he didn’t have much of a choice but to be polite to them at the very least. Francis hadn’t gotten rid of him yet, but that didn’t mean that one wrong move couldn’t mess everything up.

And a lot of things could be counted as a wrong move.

Francis spent the whole limousine ride there (of course there would be a limousine) lecturing Eren on what to do and what not to do. Mostly what not to do. Actually, the only thing he told Eren to do was to stay quiet the whole night. He kept lecturing until they arrived at the mansion that was hosting the party. After which, Eren hopped out of the limousine as soon as his door was open. Despite where he was, Eren was still grateful to be out of that forsaken vehicle.

He’d actually never been to another mansion besides Levi’s, so the change of scenery was… eh.

The mansion was basically the same in class and fanciness, just a different format. There was even a wall and gate just like at Levi’s, only there were a lot more reporters and paparazzi stationed outside the gate here. Most likely because of the party. The lights surrounding the main building lit it up so brightly, it was like it wasn’t even nighttime.

Once the rest of the Voclains had left the limousine, they were escorted by a servant up to the front door and then led through the foyer to a magnificent ballroom. All patterned marble. Two sets of double doors led to the outside, one on either side of the room, but Eren was much more interested in the table of food off to the side.

“Francis!” Some bland, easily forgettable man leapt over to them, reminding Eren of an awkward gazelle… But, from the way he greeted them, Eren could only assume that this was the host. “Oh, how wonderful you could come! And Levi, it is so nice to see you again!”

Levi nodded politely, while Francis’s response was, “I’m happy to hear your business is doing so well.”

“Oh, thank you, thank you! And Genevieve! You get prettier every day! Honestly! Such a sight for these poor eyes of mine.”

“Now you’re just kissing ass.” And somehow, Genevieve had managed to say that with such a light and feathery tone that Eren almost hadn’t realized what she’d said.

“Yes, well…” The awkward gazelle unfortunately made eye contact with Eren, and it took everything in Eren’s power not to grimace. A smile graced the graceless gazelle’s face. “Oh? Is this…? Eren? Eren Jaeger, am I correct?”

“Yes.” Well there went his ‘stay quiet’ rule. “It’s a pleasure to meet you.” Just like he rehearsed.

“Well, Eren. It is an honor to have you in our home. Truly it is!” Genevieve was right, this guy was just kissing ass. “Tell me, do you plan to help run the Voclain Corporation with Levi once you’re married, or will you focus on one of the smaller branches?”

“He won’t be working within the Voclain Corporation at all,” Francis cut in sharply before Eren could answer. “Or any other company, for that matter. From a business career perspective.”
“I see. Well, there are plenty of other fascinating careers out there! And for you it won’t matter how much they pay, now will it?” There might have been a smile on his face, but any genuine friendliness that might have been there before was gone. Eren tried not to let the disappointment gnaw at him too much.

This was going to be just like that stupid engagement party…

But it was only after a few more comments had been thrown about regarding vague business topics and they’d said their goodbyes to the host that Eren had realized…

The man had never once acknowledged Carlton.

True to his suspicion, this party had turned out exactly like his engagement party. Conversations started out just like the first one had, and once they figured out Eren wasn’t a businessman like them, they ignored him for the rest of the night. And just like his engagement party, Eren clung to Levi the whole time. There was no way he was going to allow himself to be alone in a sea of strangers. But… of course, Levi followed Francis around the whole time, making the night even more boring than before.

That is… until…

“Francis!” the host whispered harshly, awkwardly leaping like he did as quickly as he could towards them. “Francis, I’m so sorry. She wasn’t supposed to be here. I don’t even know how she got in-”

A fairly tall woman clad in a tight, navy blue dress, the edges decorated in crystals, pushed aside the trembling man. Dark hair in large, wavy curls framed her face. Intimidating. Beautiful. Chilling. A wide grin stretched across her face.

“Francis,” her sickeningly sweet voice chimed. “It’s been so long since I’ve actually seen you.”

“What are you doing here?” Francis’s ice cold voice, though it was directed at this new woman, still rose goose bumps on Eren’s skin.

“Whatever do you mean? I happen to have been invited.” She held out her arm, showcasing the poor, terrified nobody who looked like he was about to shit his pants. Eren hadn’t even noticed him until she did that. Francis looked as if he was about to say something else, before the woman’s attention was on Eren. “Oh my! Eren Jaeger, am I correct?” Levi’s arm tightening around his waist distracted him from answering. “It is such a pleasure to meet you! My name is Edith. I’m Levi’s mother.”

Shock hit him full force.

This was Levi’s mother.

This woman had abandoned her child for a shot at money. This woman had tried to blackmail Levi and Francis using the arranged marriage for a shot at money. This woman had been nothing but trouble all for the sake of an inheritance that was never hers to begin with. And now, after everything he’d heard, this woman was standing in front of him, addressing him, shaking his hand—wait, what?

The handshake only lasted for a barely a second before Levi, using the arm already around Eren’s
waist, maneuvered Eren behind him. Levi built himself up silently in front of him, blocking Eren from her path.

“What do you want?” Francis growled out, whatever little patience he already had was nearly gone.

“What makes you think I want something?” She chuckled lightly, as if they were old friends, not mortal enemies.

Francis wasn’t going to play along. “You mean you really want me to believe that you didn’t schmooze your way here for some ulterior purpose like the slithering snake you are?”

Edith huffed. “I don’t see what’s so wrong about a mother wanting to meet her son’s fiancé.”

“Considering you broke the restraining order to do it…” Francis trailed off dangerously. Edith’s playfulness faded quickly, her face falling. “I suggest you leave, before my patience is all gone and I call the police.”

Her eyes darted around her. The groups of people surrounding them had quieted, silently watching, waiting to see what she would do next. Swallowing her pride, mouth a thin line, Edith choked out, “Fine. I’ll go.” She came prepared to lose this battle. “It was nice meeting you Eren.”

Edith turned sharply, ripping her arm from the cowering man beside her. The clacking of her tall heels pierced sharply through the quiet air around them. Only when the doors had shut behind her, did the noise in the room pick up again.

Still trying to process what happened, Eren didn’t feel it when Levi gently tugged him over to the food table, sitting him down in one of the chairs nearby. He did, however, notice when Levi kneeled in front of him, one of his hands gently caressing the side of his face, soothing nerves he didn’t know had been fired up.

“Are you okay?” Levi asked, softly.

Eren took in a deep breath before responding. “Yeah,” he replied honestly, nodding his head. “I’m fine. It’s just…” He released the deep breath he’d been holding in. “Levi, that was your mother.”

“Yes, it was. She must have known you were going to be here.”

Eren didn’t respond, still trying to make sense of what had happened. What was she doing here? Why would she continue to try and do… whatever she was trying to do? Was this some sort of plot? Was she going to try and demand the inheritance and Levi again?

Levi, knowing what was probably going through Eren’s head, stood. “I’m going to get you something to drink.” Which thankfully wasn’t too far away.

While Levi was only a couple feet away, Eren started fidgeting with his hands, and then noticed something he hadn’t before…

Something sharp and flat was in his hand, curved and crumpled from his clutched fist. Opening his closed hand carefully, palm side up, Eren found…

A business card.

With a name at the top, Edith Brown, and what he assumed to be her phone number.

How did it get there? Was she really so sneaky and stealthy to be able to slip a business card into
his hand from only a moment’s touch? That wasn’t terrifying at all.

“Levi,” Eren called, his eyes still studying the card. When Levi was close enough, Eren raised his head along with the card, holding it out for Levi.

Levi tore the card from Eren’s hand, and from the way he glared at it, Eren was honestly surprised that it didn’t spontaneously combust in his hand.

“That bitch,” Levi growled out. He wasted no time in tearing up the card, pocketing the remains to throw away later. “She’s going to come after you now. She probably sees you as the weak link now, the key she can use to get to that stupid inheritance. Eren, promise me you’ll tell me if she tries anything.”

Eren raised an eyebrow, smiling. “Levi, when was the last time I kept something important from you?”

Levi chuckled. “I know, I’m just… I don’t want you to get hurt.”

“You have nothing to worry about.”

“I’m glad to hear that. Now come on.” Levi helped Eren to his feet. “Grandfather still has several other people to talk to before he wants to go.”

“Can’t we just leave now?” Eren offered sheepishly. “Do we really need to wait for another disaster?”

“Well,” Levi said slowly, pretending to think about it. “You can just sit here for the rest of the night if you want… I mean you’re right next to the food… And just imagine all those awkward conversations you’ll be forced to have all by yourself.”

Eren made a face. “I hate you…” Was there nothing good to this party? It was a party, right? So that meant it should be fun, right?

But before they could leave, a boy, perhaps around Eren’s age, came running up to them.

“Oh! Levi! Levi Voclain!” he called out. Once he was closer, he continued his babbling with, “Hi! It’s me! Marlowe! Remember?” That kid needed to take a chill pill, and soon. The guy was practically vibrating from the excitement of seeing Levi Voclain. All in all, he seemed like a sweet kid, but the bowl cut was something Eren just couldn’t get over.

Eren must have been making a face, because Levi had to contain a couple giggles before he could calmly reply. “Ah, yes. I remember.”

Luckily, Marlowe didn’t notice. “It’s so nice to see you again!” he blathered on. “And perfect timing too! You see, my father just open up this brand new country resort only an hour outside the city. It’s gorgeous. Right on a sparkling lake. It’s perfect for a weekend getaway or longer! We’ve got cabins and everything. All sorts of activities you can do too! My father already extended an invitation to your grandfather, but I figured I could extend one to you personally too.”

Eren’s face only got worse the more Marlowe spoke, and Levi had much more difficulty in suppressing his laughter. “Sounds nice. Activities you say?” Eren was going to put a worm on Levi’s pillow sometime soon.

“Oh yeah!” Marlowe looked like he was about to piss his pants, probably not expecting Levi to actually consider it. “And uh, there’s even stuff for your fiancé to do too.” He turned to Eren, much
more serious than he was with Levi. “It was… Eren, right?”

Oh, he was going to punch this kid. “Yeah,” Eren forced out.

Levi, knowing that if he didn’t cut in soon, that they were going to have a very big problem on their hands, brought Marlowe’s attention back to him. “I’m afraid we’ll have to pass for now, but perhaps another time.”

Marlowe’s face fell, his wide smile falling limp. “O-Oh, well just let us know when you feel like coming down!” he finished lamely before heading off.

Eren shook his head. “If he wasn’t such an asshole, I would almost feel sorry for how pathetic that was.”

“He wasn’t an asshole…” Levi tried.

Eren merely crossed his arms over his chest before mimicking in a mocking voice, “And uh… there’s even stuff for your fiancé to do.” Now Levi couldn’t hold back the laughter.

“Oh, he wasn’t trying to be an asshole.”

But despite Levi’s laughter, Eren’s mood dampened. “Yeah… just like no one else here is trying to be an asshole…”

Levi sighed, taking Eren’s hand in his own. “Come on… It’s not going to get any better, so we might as well just get this over with. And just think, if you pay attention for long enough, you’ll be able to bullshit your way through a conversation with these guys all on your own.”

“Whoop-die doo…” Just what he wanted: to mingle with the crowd he hated.

But, Levi was right about one thing… It didn’t get any better. If anything, it got worse.

It was one thing, to be given attention and then pushed aside. At least they still pretended to be interested in him, if only for politeness sake. But now, they ignored him completely. They no longer addressed him in conversation. They didn’t even look at him. All their attention was on Levi. He probably could have just walked away and they wouldn’t have even noticed. Hell, he could have shot someone and all they’d see was a floating gun!

The worst part, though, was when they pulled Levi away from him.

“Go get something to eat, you won’t be interested in this,” they said. Fucturds. They were right, of course, but that didn’t mean he wanted to be left alone or told what to do!

But just as Levi was about to protest, Eren cut him off. “No, it’s fine,” he said to Levi. “I was getting a little hungry anyway.” Plus it would give his poor ears a break from all of this business talk.

Didn’t stop him from sneering at them from behind once they turned away. Assholes.

Still, food sounded too good right now. And the food table was still filled with the delicious food he’d seen earlier. Grabbing one of the dainty little plates, Eren piled it on, not caring if he got weird looks considering everyone else only had a couple pieces on their plates. But he really didn’t care. He needed something to eat. Now.

He popped the first piece into his mouth, even though he wasn’t entirely sure what it was…
“You’re going to get fat eating all of that.”

…and then choked on it.

He knew that voice.

Eren spun around so fast he nearly dropped his plate.

Christa, clad in a sparkly light yellow dress, stood before him. And oh god how he’d never been so happy to see her.

“Christa! Oh thank god!” Eren pulled her into a tight hug, something he didn’t usually do unless he wanted to get his ass handed to him by Ymir. “You have no idea how happy I am to see you! Why didn’t you tell me you were going to be here? You could have saved me from at least an hour’s worth of tear inducing boredom!”

“I didn’t know you were going to be here!” Christa laughed, pulling away until they were an arm’s length away. “Usually you’re always skipping out on these sorts of things.”

“Levi played dirty this time…” Eren grumbled.

“He called your professors didn’t he?” His lack of response was all the answer she needed. “I only just got here, by the way,” Christa continued. “I probably would have seen you if I was here earlier. I’d just have to look for the most miserable person in the room.”

Eren let go of her completely, picking his food back up and taking bites from it every now and then. “Well, I hope you don’t mind this miserable mushroom clinging onto you for the rest of the night.”

“Why? Where’s Levi?”

“Some assholes pulled him away… I would have cared more had they not constantly been talking about literally the same thing as everyone else in this godforsaken room.”

“You do know the same thing is going to happen if you stick around me, right? Everyone around here expects the same from me as they do from Levi.”

Eren groaned. Fuck, he just couldn’t win, could he? “You should bring Ymir sometime, so I won’t be considering choking myself with this food so I can get out of here…”

“If you want to try and convince her, be my guest,” Christa said, throwing her hands up.

“Just threaten her with no sex or something! She’s bound to listen then.”

“Oh no. Last time I tried that she-”

“You know what?” Eren interrupted quickly. “I really don’t want to hear about your sex life.”

“What? It’s not like I was going to say that she tied me to the bed and did me anyway.” Eren raised an eyebrow, not saying anything. Christa pursed her lips for a moment. “Okay so maybe she did and maybe that is what I was going to say, but it’s not like you’re getting anything really explicit about it. I mean, we’ve gone much farther-”

“Please do not finish that train of thought. Please can we just end this conversation right now? I’m begging you,” Eren half laughed and half honestly begged.
“But isn’t this so much better than stockholder’s equity and mergers?”

“Oh god…” The worst part was that she might just be right…

Christa’s head tilted back in laughter at her poor friend. She really should bribe Ymir into coming to one of these, if only to keep Eren company and for the entertainment of Christa and Levi. Seeing one or the other of those two at a formal event such as this is mostly saddening and slightly embarrassing, but seeing them together would just be downright hysterical.

Eren was just about to continue the most interesting conversation he’d been a part of that night, when some vague businessman swooped in, taking Christa with him back to the world of boring business. He wanted to drag her back. He didn’t care the cost. He’d listen to every explicit detail about her bedroom adventures with Ymir if only to save him from this nightmare. He… he wanted Levi back. He wanted someone familiar around him. He didn’t want to be alone in a room filled with people who didn’t even notice he was there…

“Hey,” a voice came from beside him, startling Eren out of his thoughts with a gasp.

It was a young man. Handsome, for sure, but he threw out a cocky aura. He seemed like the type of guy who would boast about being the best, get 5th place in some competition, and then explain why everyone else and the circumstances were to blame for his failure. Instantly, Eren didn’t like him. From that stupid smug smirk to the way he simply said hey.

But he was the first person besides Christa, who didn’t really count, who spoke to him as him, and not as an attachment of Levi.

“Hey,” Eren greeted back.

“Enjoying the food?”

“Well, yeah. It’s good food.” Nothing real special about it, as he’d had similar stuff in larger quantities back at Levi’s mansion, but still good food.

“No doubt. These people don’t cut corners on this sort of thing.” The guy leaned back a bit, observing the crowd in front of them.

What did he mean by that? “These people? You mean the host?”

The guy shook his head. “No, I mean the rich. And I mean, why shouldn’t we? We have the money for the best, so we should use it to get the best.”

“I… suppose…” Abort! Abort! Abort! This guy was going to end up in a very bad situation if he kept talking like that.

“I’m serious,” the guy said, almost offended. “Here, what’s something that you like? Besides food.”

Well… “Movies.”

“Why go see one in a regular theater when I could fly you down to Hollywood where you could see it before anyone else along with all the other celebrities.” The guy wiggled his eyebrows suggestively. Oh great… A show off who was legitimately inviting him to a movie premier in Hollywood.

“That’s a, um, nice offer, but I think I’ll pass.” And take his leave while he was at it. But first, he
needed more food for the road.

The guy huffed, miffed that he’d been turned down. “So whose show are you?”

Eren paused. “Show?”

“You know, shows.” When Eren didn’t respond, still completely confused, the guy continued. “See, most rich people who aren’t married or are in a… less than satisfactory marriage, often show up to parties like these with guys or gals who are only there for show. Only there to be shown off before they get taken back for a quick screw and are never seen again. Nothing but a trophy to tote around all night. A pretty trophy, but a trophy nonetheless.”

“So you’re saying I’m just a “show”? Eren’s temper was starting to show. “Just some pretty thing to look at while you discuss your fancy food and excessive richness?” Like… really show. If this guy didn’t leave right now…

“Hey, look, I didn’t mean to burst your bubble, but it’s the truth. Especially considering that your date left you all alone over here. If you want, you can ditch your negligent date and I can take you back to my place. Show you just how fun being rich can be.” The guy slid forward, trying to press himself closer to Eren.

Oh that did it.

“A show, huh?” Eren wasted no time in smashing his plate full of food right into the boasting man’s smug face, suddenly not so hungry anymore. “How’s that for a show?” he growled out. He pushed past the man, causing him to fall onto the table and smear even more food on him, and headed straight for the door.

He didn’t pause, didn’t stop to think, until he felt the cool fall air blowing on his face. Deep shuddering breaths filled the empty marble porch, as he collapsed on the steps, holding one of the beams to keep himself grounded.

He was fine. He was fine. He was fine. No trouble breathing at all. The air was just thin tonight. He was fine. Perfectly fine. Just… fine.

“Eren!”

Eren gasped. Thank god… just the person he wanted to see…

“Levi…” Eren was about to turn around to face Levi, but he was already right next to him, arm around his shoulder and hand threaded with his.

“Eren, what happened? What did he do?” Levi questioned quickly. It was nice to know that Levi automatically assumed it was the other guy’s fault.

“Eren!” And here came the person he didn’t want to see… “How dare you! Do you have any idea what you’ve just done? Do you?!” Francis bellowed, face so red, steam could have been shooting out his ears.

“I stood up to some asshole! That’s what!” Eren countered, slightly less loud.

“Don’t you know who he is?! He’s the son of an extremely important partner of ours!”

“So what? I was just supposed to sit there and let him call me a whore?”
“What?!” Now Levi was yelling.

“He called me a show!” Eren proclaimed, talking mostly to Levi. “Said the only reason I was there was to be shown off before I’m fucked and forgotten about!”

Francis wasn’t taking excuses though. “I don’t care if he said he was going to fuck you up the ass himself, you should have just politely walked away! Not thrown him onto the damn food table!”

Eren gasped indignantly. “Like hell if I’d do that!”

“You will go back in and apologize to him right this instant!” Francis ordered pointing fingers around as he yelled.

“No,” Eren refused, seething. “You couldn’t threaten me enough.”

“Francis,” Genevieve butted in, sternly. “Go back inside and deal with this yourself if it means that much to you. You’re not going to get anything from Eren while he’s like this, you know that.” She grabbed hold of Francis’s arm, encouraging him to head towards the door.

But Francis had one last thing to say. “You have embarrassed me, and you have embarrassed this family. Mark my words, you will get what’s coming to you for this.” Then he ripped his arm away from Genevieve, heading back inside.

“I’ll go back in and make sure he doesn’t mess this up further,” Levi said softly to Eren. “Just stay here and calm down. I’ll be back in a bit.” He patted Eren on the shoulder, kissing him on the cheek, and followed Francis.

Eren craned his neck, watching Levi disappear back into the mansion, Genevieve close behind. Great. He’d done it now.

“That was quite impressive,” Carlton said, taking a seat next to Eren. Eren hadn’t even realized he’d followed them out. “Not exactly how most people would have handled it, but still impressive.”

“Yeah, well. I’m not like most people, now am I?” Eren spat bitterly.

“Too true. But that’s just one of your charms.” Somehow, Eren couldn’t help but think that his uncontrollable temper was a charm. Especially when he got sent to therapy for it back in high school. Carlton leaned back, staring at the stars. “You know, I was accused of being a show once too.”


“Yes,” Carlton sighed, “but I’m not the heir. I’ve never really enjoyed these parties either. I was almost in your exact same position at one point. Back when everyone still believed that I would take over the family company when my father stepped down. And when I got married, everyone assumed that Edith would assume control, that she was actually my father’s daughter and I was marrying into the family. She had this power and influence that I never had. She could fill up a room, just by stepping through the door. She was so influential, everyone just brushed me aside. Someone asked if I was just her plaything, just because I never got the chance to speak up myself. And then… once Levi was born, my father made the announcement that Levi would take over the company when he was ready. I was just ignored, then. I was forgotten. And now, I don’t even get greeted at the doorway.”

“But… that’s ridiculous!” Eren choked out. “I can understand me, but you were born into this
world! How can they just forget about you?"

Carlton shrugged. “That’s business. It’s simple give and take. If you have nothing to give, they
won’t look for something to take. Eren, I’ve been to enough of these to know, it doesn’t get better.
But know this: you have a chance. You have the ability to stand out, make yourself known, and
force the rules to bend in your favor. You’ve just got to learn how to use it properly.”

Eren couldn’t help the small smile that snuck onto his face. “And… I’m guessing that doesn’t
include shoving a plate of food into someone’s face?”

Carlton chuckled. “You never know.”

At that moment, Genevieve appeared outside again. “Doing okay?” She asked gently.

Eren half shrugged. “I’ve been better, but I’ve also been much worse.”

“Well then… come on, it’s time for us to head home.” Genevieve gently helped Eren to his feet.

“What?” he gasped. “Did I really cause so much trouble that we have to leave?”

“Huh? Oh! No! Sweetheart, don’t think that!” Genevieve calmed quickly, a smile on her face. “I
wasn’t talking about everyone, just us three. We’re getting closer to that part of the night where the
conversation goes from boring to boredom incarnate. That’s usually when those who are smart
leave.”

“But… Levi~”

“He told me to tell you to check your phone. Now come on.” She began pulling him towards the
limousine. “We’re not needed here anymore.”

Eren glanced back at the mansion, still lit up too bright, still too expensive, and still holding Levi
captive.

But… it wasn’t holding Levi captive… now was it? Levi willingly went back in there, willingly
talked to all those people. Eren had to remind himself that this was Levi’s world. The world had no
need, and no room, for someone like Eren. Otherwise, he’d only embarrass Levi further… It really
would be best if he just left…

The three of them climbed into the limousine, and once they were situated and on their way, Eren
checked his phone.

One new text.

**Levi:** I’m sorry about how things turned out. Grandfather and I are still smoothing things over, but
I’ll take you to the movies Sunday when I can lavish you in all the attention you deserve. Okay?

Eren didn’t respond. At the moment he didn’t know how to respond.

“Can I… spend the night?” Eren tentatively asked.

“Of course,” Genevieve gushed softly, placing a comforting hand on his shoulder. “You know
you’re always welcome.”

Eren curled up in the corner. “Thanks…”
Levi didn’t return until late. Very late. And by the time he got back home, he couldn’t wait until he could climb into bed and sleep. But when he finally did reach his room, he found a sight he wasn’t expecting.

“Eren?”

Eren lifted his head from his curled up position on the bed. He was still in the full suit minus the shoes, though it looked as if Eren had struggled heavily with trying to pull the tie off only to give up. He sat up with his arms circled around his legs, which had been pulled up close to his chest. His brow was furrowed and he looked overall distressed.

Levi hurried over. “Eren, what are you doing here? Weren’t you going back home tonight?” Eren didn’t say anything, but he didn’t have to. Levi could fit the pieces together for himself. “It’s bad tonight isn’t it?” Eren still didn’t respond, only curling in on himself further. Levi sighed and, after taking his shoes off, sat down on the bed next to Eren. He then got to work in untangling Eren from himself so he could wrap his arms around Eren’s waist, pulling him in close and lying down to make it more comfortable. Eren immediately followed suit, curling his arms around Levi and clutching the back of his jacket as he buried his face in Levi’s collarbone. Levi began stroking Eren’s hair. “It’s okay… I’m here…”

After a few moments of the calming silence, Eren spoke up. “It wasn’t really that bad…” he whispered, referring to the feelings that never truly went away, but only showed up on nights like that night.

“But bad enough?”

“Mostly just at the party…” The peak of it occurring after he’d ran out of the mansion. After he got called a whore… Eren’s grip on Levi tightened. Best not to think about it too much.

“Why did you come here?” Levi asked, not trying to sound like he wasn’t happy that Eren was there but genuinely curious. “You know this place only makes it worse.”

Eren shook his head. “Not when you’re here.” And surprisingly enough, being at the mansion actually helped a little bit. Probably because the idea of Levi had become so ingrained in the walls that it was like Levi was always there. Even if he wasn’t. But having the real deal was always ten times better. “I just wanted to see you… I’ve been with you most of the night but I still feel like I haven’t gotten to spend any time with you.”

“Well, I’m here now. And I won’t be leaving any time soon.” Levi left little kisses along the top of Eren’s head, the only place he could reach at the moment.

“I never want to go to another one of those again,” Eren moaned out pathetically. “It’s not like they’ll even notice I’m there until I throw food on some other rich prick, anyways. Besides… Francis will probably just kick me out before I get the chance…” This could very well be his last night with Levi…

“He won’t kick you out,” Levi stated confidently.

Eren scoffed. “I ruined his relationship with that bastard’s father! I made a fool out of all of us! How is he not going to kick me out?” With all that talk Francis had been spewing for over a year, there was no way he wouldn’t.

“Because afterwards, that bastard straight up apologized to us. Apparently he didn’t realize you
were my fiancé. His father then apologized for his son’s behavior and thanked us for kicking his ass back in line. And not only that, but you were all anyone would talk about after that. They were all so impressed and excited that you put that dick in his place. Well… most of them were. So many people asked about you. Where you were. What you studied. What you were planning on doing. We even got invited to another party, and they insisted that you come.”

“What? Why?”

“They want to meet you. Actually meet you. They’re impressed by you and want to know more. Is that so hard to believe?”

“Yes.”

Levi rolled his eyes. “Well, I don’t think it’s that hard to believe.” Eren stayed silent, though, so Levi moved on. “So will you need a ride tomorrow? You’re still doing something with your friends tomorrow, right?”

“Yeah, but I already texted them. They’ll pick me up sometime around eight.”

“That’s early.”

“We’ve got a long day planned.”

“Then you’d better get some rest.” And they’d have to change into their pajamas too. There was no way Levi was falling asleep in that getup.

But the pajamas would have to wait…

“Hey, Levi…” Eren pulled himself away, hovering above Levi on his hands.

Levi half rolled onto his back, letting one hand trail down to the small of Eren’s back to pull him closer and the other slide up to tangle in Eren’s messy hair. “Yeah?”

A faint blush dusted Eren’s cheeks. “Make love to me? Make me forget this night. Make me forget everything except your name.”

Levi’s lips moved of their accord, not that he minded. “It would be my pleasure,” they whispered, before leaning up to capture Eren’s lips in what would be the first of their many kisses that night.
Somehow during the night, Eren had rolled onto his stomach. Arms splayed out around his head which was half buried in his pillow. Despite his head being forced as far right as it could go, it was really quite a comfortable position. Mostly because the bed underneath him was warm, the pillow had the perfect amount of fluffiness and firmness ratio, and the cold air freezing icicles on his bare back was…

Wait…

That wasn’t comfortable at all!

Eren squirmed, shivering as the cold slowly brought him back to reality. Moaning groggily, he shrugged his shoulders closer together, trying to conserve heat without moving too much. The bed beside him dipped, and a hand slid across his bare back followed by ticklish kisses along his neck.

“It’s time for you to wake up, babe.” The culprit of the pushed back blankets.

“It’s Saturday…” Eren grumbled, squirming slightly. “I can wake up anytime I want to…”

“Nope. Get up!” Levi pulled back the covers the rest of the way to smack Eren’s ass. Eren, in turn, jolted with a yelp and then tried to glare at his annoying fiancé, only to find Levi well out of retaliation range. “They won’t wait forever,” Levi smirked, and went back to getting ready himself.

Groaning, Eren shoved his face back into his pillow. Today wasn’t going to be fun…
Eren showered quickly. Turned out he had less time than he thought, but it would be enough. Only… there was something missing that he just couldn’t find as he was dressing… Levi would know, but upon entering Levi’s room again, he found that Levi was gone. Which… would mean he’s probably downstairs with the rest of his family and that meant that Eren would have to find something to put on in the meantime.

Pulling on some random shirt and pajama shorts, Eren headed straight for the dining room. No doubt Levi would be having his cup of tea and breakfast at the moment. Although… if he wasn’t then that would mean that he’d be working with Francis in his study… which would make it that much harder to get what he was looking for. So he prayed as he hopped down the stairs that Levi would be in the dining room…

And lo and behold, there he was with the rest of his family enjoying breakfast in their usual seats.

Thank god.

“Oh?” Francis commented in that snobbish I’m-Better-Than-You way. “You decided to stay over? Couldn’t get enough of your shameful activities?”

Eren’s expression hardened. So that’s how it was going to be then? Fine. He’d play along. Raising his head high, Eren sauntered over to Levi, sneaking up behind him, and letting his hands slide across his Levi’s chest in a slow, backwards hug.

“Morning, babe…” Eren moaned sultrily, planting a long, sensual kiss on Levi’s cheek. He wasn’t entirely sure what the point of that little show was, but if it pissed Francis off, then it didn’t matter.

“Good morning, Eren.” Levi could try to keep the grin off his face but it showed through in his voice.

“Say, Levi…” Eren whispered, a little more serious. “You wouldn’t happen to know where…” But Eren’s voice became too low for Levi to hear.

“What?”

“I can’t find my…”

“Your what?”

“My pants,” Eren finally exclaimed normally that time, breaking their embrace to lean against Levi’s chair. “I can’t find my pants.”

“Your-” Realization flooded Levi’s face. “Well, that explains why you’re in pajamas.”

Francis tilted his head not so innocently and curiously asked, “Why would he not be in pajamas?”

Eren retorted with, “Who said anything about not being in pajamas?”

“You don’t wear pajamas?” Genevieve.

“What do you wear then?” Carlton.

“Look!” Eren cut them off, but was unable to keep the blush away. “I just need to know where my pants are so I can get dressed.”
“They’re probably where they’re supposed to be,” Levi finally answered, taking a sip of his tea. “I know you’re not used to things being put away properly…”

“No,” Eren argued, because he knew they weren’t there, “because I looked there! I picked apart that damn closet!”

“Then-,” Levi paused, a thought coming to him. “Oh… Wait no. They were washed with the rest of your clothes. They must’ve just not made it back to the room yet. So if they’re not in the closet then they’re in the laundry room.”

“Told you.” Eren had to fight the immature need to stick his tongue out.

“Just go get your damn pants already.” Levi poked Eren in the side, and Eren headed back around the table. The quickest way to the laundry room was through the kitchen, but he really didn’t want Chef Hannes to comment on his apparel too.

Francis shrugged. “I don’t know. Maybe Eren could decide to join us for breakfast for once?”

Eren glared. That bastard. While it was true he rarely joined them for breakfast, it’s only because Francis always tried to kick him out. “Can’t,” he shot out curtly. “My friends are picking me up in a couple of minutes. I don’t have time. But hey!” Eren faked a grin. “Maybe next time!”

“Yes, and perhaps next time you could be dressed in more than your underwear.” Francis sipped his coffee, his last comment cutting off anymore conversation on the subject.

Eren rolled his eyes and left the dining room, the encounter going exactly like he thought it would. He popped his head back in though, his full attention on Francis. “Oh, and by the way, I’m not ashamed of anything I did last night. Whether it involved pajamas or not.”

Levi couldn’t hold back his grin after that.

Eren had a big day planned. He didn’t know what exactly was going to happen, but if it involved Jean, Reiner, and Ymir then it was going to be big. It wasn’t comforting when all three of them shoved him into the truck either. That usually meant they were going to do something they were almost sure he wouldn’t like.

“Alright,” Eren began, smushed into the back seat of Ymir’s truck with Jean. “You’ve all got me out here, now what do you want?”

Reiner turned around in the front seat. “You’re going to be married, right?”

“This was established a long time ago. And I mean a long time ago. You do not need to phrase that like a question.”

Ymir couldn’t turn around since she was driving, but Eren could see the feral gaze through the rearview mirror. “Which means you’re going to have a wedding, right?”

“Marriage generally includes a wedding, yes…” Eren said slowly, cautiously. What were they planning…?

Jean threw his arm around Eren’s shoulders. “And what does every marriage need?”

“Better friends,” Eren growled out.
“No!” Reiner cried out. “A bachelor party! Or two in this case since you’re both grooms.”

“Nah.” Ymir shook her head. “Eren’s the bride.”

“You’re right!” Jean laughed, shaking Eren with his bone crushing grip. “He is!”

“The hell I am!” Eren pinched Jean on his inner bicep hard, throwing it off once it loosened at Jean’s yelp. Jean nursed his poor arm and scooted away as another thought passed through his mind. The important one. “Wait… Bachelor party? You guys aren’t taking me to a bachelor party are you?!?”

“Hell no! What kind of people do you think we are?” Reiner scoffed, insulted, then his grin returned. “We’re going to help you plan it today!”

“You do realize that the wedding is in the summer, right?” Not exactly the best time to start planning one considering it had just turned into fall.

“Which means it’s less than a year away! It’s coming in quickly!”

“Like, nine months!” Eren yelled. “And aren’t these kinds of parties saved for the night before the wedding? You don’t need nine fucking months to plan a bachelor party! I don’t even think I’m supposed to know about it, let alone help plan it!”

“There’s no harm in planning ahead,” Ymir shrugged.

“Besides! We’re too excited and you guys are taking too long with this wedding shit!” Was… was Reiner bouncing in his seat? He wasn’t really that excited was he?

“Yeah!” Jean furrowed his brow in confusion. “Wasn’t it supposed to be this summer?”

Eren slouched in his seat, crossing his arms over his chest. “It should have been,” he complained, “but Francis The All-Fucking-Mighty took up too much of Levi’s time planning the merger so he had no time to help plan the wedding… meaning we kept having to push the date until it just made more sense to have it next summer.”

“Awww…” Ymir cooed. “Poor baby… We didn’t realize you actually cared about the wedding…”

Eren kicked the back of Ymir’s seat. “Oh shut up. I don’t actually care that much… I mean the merger is the more important of the two. Without that there wouldn’t even be a wedding, but it’s not just that! Levi’s grandfather is always doing this! He’s always taking up all of Levi’s time so that I can never see him, and when I do, he’s always too exhausted from working so much to actually do anything.”

“Clingy girlfriend much?” Jean teased.

“No, you don’t understand. I feel like I’m fighting for his attention. And…” Eren groaned. “Ugh… I do sound like a clingy girlfriend…”

Jean twisted in his seat, resting his back against the door. “Well, to be fair, he is in charge of one major corporation and is training to be in charge of another major corporation. He’s got a lot on his hands! The fact that you can even see him at all is probably a miracle in itself.” In order to make his current position more comfortable, Jean shoved his feet onto Eren’s lap.

“Give him a little slack,” Reiner suggested, sobering up for a moment. “He does try to make time for you. Even we know that.”
Eren threw Jean’s legs off of him. “I know but…” He sighed, and when Jean put his legs back up, he didn’t try to move them. “Yeah… yeah I guess you guys are right…”

“That or you could always kidnap him for a weekend,” Ymir offered.

The idea brought up a coarse laugh. “Shit, his grandfather would kill me.”

“Then think it over later, we have a bachelor party to plan!” Reiner hollered in the front seat, throwing his hands up in the air.

“Which reminds me, don’t bachelor parties only include guys?” Eren poked Ymir’s neck from under the headrest, his mood lightening up a bit.

Ymir made a mad dash to grab Eren’s annoying finger, but was too slow due to driving. “Fuck the system. I lick pussy just like you guys. Oh… But wait… we’re all gay here.”

“So really, if you wanted to fit in then you’d have to also lick dick.” Reiner giggled at the absurd thought.

“What ever! Fuck the system! Like hell if I’d ever lick a single inch on one of those mushroom sticks. If there’s even that much to lick…”

“You’d better use that on some guy who tries hitting on you, just so we can see his face when you say that.”

“Duly noted.”

First things first, they stopped by different venues, Ymir, Reiner, and Jean doing most of the inspecting to make sure it was okay. Eren really couldn’t care less about where it was, but seeing inside the different places was pretty cool. They got more than a few curious looks though. Teenagers apparently didn’t come by very often in search of bachelor party sites.

Then they discussed possible themes for the party. That’s where Eren made it clear that he wanted no strippers. At all. If there was even one stripper, he’d leave.

They promised nothing.

But if Eren had to say anything about the trips, he’d have to say that the most embarrassing part was when they dragged him into a sex shop. They joked and teased him, but Eren was the one getting the last laugh when he snuck several dildos into one of Ymir’s shopping bags before they left. The highlight of the day had to have been seeing Ymir try to explain to the poor employee that she would never steal a dildo because of how much of a flaming lesbian she was.

Eren may have actually bought one just to hide in her truck until Christa could find it.

When they stopped by an actual party shop, however… that was when they day started taking a slow spiral downward…

Eren peeked over his shoulder for what felt like the hundredth time. Gaze locked out the window, his hand fumbled around for a bit before it found the sleeve of the closest person to him. “Hey…” He tugged lightly. “You guys see that car over there? The black one?”

Jean, the owner of the tugged sleeve, followed Eren’s gaze, but scoffed. “You’re gonna have to be
a lot more specific.” Ymir and Reiner paid no attention, though. They were in their own world of party planning.

“The expensive one,” Eren clarified. “Like super expensive one.” It looked like a Maserati, but he couldn’t quite tell.

Jean squinted for a moment, but eventually found it. “Oh, now I know what you’re talking about…” But he shrugged. “What about it?”

“I swear I keep seeing it all over the place,” Eren confessed. He’d briefed a glance of it outside a couple of the venues, got a better look at it while they were at the sex shop, and he was recognizing it now. Mildly concerning.

“Do you really want to add paranoid to that clingy girlfriend title?” Jean half joked. Figures no one here would take him seriously…

“Dude, it got here right after we did, hasn’t moved, and no one has gotten out of the car since we got here. It was there the last place we were too!”

Jean quieted, a lot more serious now. “Okay, Eren… do you need to talk to someone? Is this because you’re not getting enough attention with Levi?”

“I’m not making this- Oh whatever! Just forget I said anything!”

Eren stormed past his friends, not entirely sure where he was going. Ymir and Reiner glanced back at Jean curiously, but Jean could only shrug.

After that, they decided food was probably the best option at the moment. With a little bit of discussion, they all agreed on a wings and pizza place a little ways away. It was a decent place, not exactly the best food, but on a college budget, it was practically gourmet.

They chatted mindlessly as they ate, their typical friendly banter.

“You would think that they’d put less pressure on kids the younger they are, but it’s simply not true,” Ymir prattled on. “I mean, I was expected to write sonnets when I was only five years old, and now look at me! No one gives a shit if I even know what a sonnets is.”

“Your parents were drunks, they were not expecting you to write sonnets. I call bullshit!” Reiner cackled, smacking Jean on the arm. “Am I right, Jean?!”

No response.

Quite quickly, they realized Jean wasn’t paying attention. Hell, he wasn’t even facing them! He sat half turned in his seat, head twisted around to stare out the window. They watched him worriedly until he finally broke through the awkward silence.

“You know… I think I might be starting to believe you now…” he stated softly.

Eren furrowed his brow. “What? About what?”

“That car is here… And some real shady guy came out.”

Dread spike painfully through Eren’s chest, and he couldn’t stop the cried out, “What?!” that came out. Eren whipped his head around to the window, and sure enough… there was the car… and there was the really shady guy. “Oh fuck…” He was really fucking shady.
Ymir made a face. “Car? What car?”

“This car has been following us around for a while, and he’s like watching us!” Jean explained in a panic.

“Shit!” Ymir swore, genuinely concerned now. “What do we do?”

“Should we kick the crap out of him?” Reiner offered, already cracking his knuckles.

“He looks like a classier, modern version of a 1940’s gangster, and you want to fight him?” Jean asked, incredulous.

Eren almost couldn’t pull his gaze away from the strange man. Fumbling, he reached for his phone. “I… I need to tell Levi…”

“Should we go back to campus? There’s police officers there.”

“What if he’s some crazy serial killer or something?”

Eren spared one last glance out the window before he dialed for Levi, and had no more doubts about who the man was. The man stepped over to the other side of the car. Opening up the passenger side door, a woman rose up. Her large, dark sunglasses covered most of the recognizable part of her face, but Eren remembered the dark, wavy hair. One delicate finger curled, calling for Eren to come out.

Fury. The grip on his phone became deadly.

How dare she… That fucking bitch…

Eren had half a mind to go out there and punch her right in the face, and he would have too. But… something stopped him. A small voice in the back of his head.

Taking deep breaths, Eren calmed himself down just enough to choke something out.

“Take me back to Levi’s. We have to go now.”

Once they were parked in front of the mansion, Eren kicked his door open, ignoring Ymir’s protests as he shouted back, “I’ll be right back!” After racing up to the porch, Eren didn’t even bother knocking before bursting through the front doors, startling a maid and Genevieve who had been relaxing in the front living room.

“Eren?” she asked worriedly.

He didn’t waste time with a response.

Jogging down the hallway, Eren pushed aside any warnings he had for himself on what he was about to do. It was the one thing Francis always commanded him to never do. So once the doors to Francis’s study came into view, Eren had to swallow down his fears. What he had to say was much more important, and, even if normally Francis would kill him, this time Eren was hoping the news would stun and distract him long enough for Eren to escape his immediate fate.

Now the he was right in front of the study doors, Eren steeled himself, taking a deep breath as he blocked out Genevieve’s calls, and began banging on the door.
“Eren?” Shock, confusion, and then worry were the emotions Eren registered that passed across Levi’s face. But Eren didn’t get a chance to respond just yet.

“Eren!” Francis bellowed, his face turning red. He looked like he was about to say more, no doubt that he was, but in the brief moment before that where he’d have to take a breath, Eren intervened.

“Your mother is stalking me!”

Eren’s words flew out so fast, he wasn’t sure if the silence that followed was because of the shocking statement, or just because they didn’t know what he’d said. Not even Genevieve, who’d followed him, spoke.

When no one continued to say anything, Eren elaborated. “While I was out with my friends, I noticed that a car kept following us around. Turns out it was your mother, and I know that because at the last place we were, she actually got out of the car. She gestured for me to go out to meet her but I came here instead and now I’m telling you guys…” he finished lamely. But no one else had said anything yet, so how was Eren supposed to react.

After a long while, Levi finally sighed out a long, “Ah shit…” Francis, after having stood to yell at Eren, let gravity pull him back down.

“What should we do?” Eren prompted. “We can call the police, right? She violated the restraining order, right?”

“We can’t,” Francis rumbled out, cursing under his breath. “That fucking bitch.”

“What do you mean?”

“The restraining order only applies to the Voclain family,” Francis explained with little patience.

Levi shook his head. “But Eren-”

“Is not legally a part of this family,” Francis continued. “Not yet. She can’t go anywhere near you, me, Genevieve, or Carlton. But she has no restrictions on Eren.”

Genevieve laughed bitterly. “… She found a loophole.”

Eren fidgeted with his hands. “So then… we revise the restraining order…?”

“Not an option.” Francis’s voice was hard and left no room for debate. “Revising it mean going to court, filling out paperwork, and by the time that’s all finished, you’ll have already been married to Levi and considered a Voclain under the current restraining order’s conditions. Granted, it could distract her until then, but there’s no guarantee of that and it would be useless after.”

Eren was breathing hard now, racking his brain for something… anything… But only one thing came to mind. “Then… We get married now.”

“What?” all three Voclain sputtered out.

Levi was the first to speak. “Eren, you said you wanted.”

“I know what I said,” Eren cut in, “but summer is too far away. I was thinking we could get the whole legality stuff out of the way and then have the… theatrics about it during the summer. Early
Genevieve gave it some thought, nodding slowly. “That’s… actually-”

“Out of the question,” Francis decided definitively.

“What? Why?” How could it be out of the question? Sure Eren knew Francis wasn’t really a fan of the marriage, but what else could they do?

“The media will pick up on that. They will make a story out of it, and then everyone will question why you did it. Eventually the real story will get out, and we will have another scandal on our hands. After the engagement, we really don’t need yet another story ruining our name.”

“Oh please,” Genevieve snarled. “That engagement was hardly a scandal.”

“That doesn’t mean we shouldn’t avoid a new one!” Francis’s voice rose.

“Well I don’t see you coming up with a better idea!” Eren jumped in, voice climbing in volume as well.

“Just stay out of her way,” Francis snapped. “Don’t talk to her. Don’t even acknowledge her presence. Once she realizes she won’t get anything out of you, she’ll leave. You’re not what she really wants, and it’s not like you’re very important anyway.”

Eren rolled his eyes, not even bothering with a comeback. “Whatever,” he mumbled. Genevieve stepped to the side as Eren turned and left, letting Levi by as well when he followed.

He caught up with Eren in the foyer, where he was pacing back and forth, trying to calm down. Once he caught sight of Levi, however, he paused. Levi took the opportunity to take Eren’s hands in his own, rubbing the backs with his thumbs until Eren had calmed down enough.

When he had, Levi said, “Eren, I still want to take some precautions. She’s a crazy, clever woman.”

Eren distractedly played with Levi’s hands. “What kind of precautions?”

“I don’t want you left alone. If Armin ever doesn’t stay in the room overnight, or you can’t find someone else to stay with you, I want you to come here. You’re safest here, but if you stay with your friends she’s not likely to actually approach.” Eren felt a smile spread across his face. Seeing Levi’s worry wart come out always made him feel better and loved as well.

But… “She’s still going to stalk me though, right?”

Levi shook his head. “Not if she knows that path won’t lead anywhere. And you already proved that today by ditching to come here after she tried. Eren, I don’t know what she has planned. She’s horribly clever. She never leaves any ties between her and the crime. We’ve never even been able to take her to court save for the divorce and restraining order. I can’t imagine what she has planned now, but if anything happens-”

“I know, I know!” Eren couldn’t help but laugh out loud. “I’ll tell you! Don’t worry! I always tell you. And I even remembered you when I saw her!”

“Really?”

“Yeah! I remembered one of your lessons for destroying people’s lives. ‘At the time of the
incident, don’t confront them. Pretend like nothing is wrong.’”

For the past couple of months, whenever he could, Levi stayed true to his promise in teaching Eren the Voclain way of ruining someone’s life. They didn’t have much time to really go over it, but it was nice to know that some parts were sticking.

The corners of Levi’s mouth rose in a small smile, and he reached up to kiss Eren. “Good,” was the last thing he said before his lips descended on Eren’s, gently.

During the kiss, though, Eren felt Levi’s hands break their hold to slip down to his hips. Fingers looped through the belt loops of his jeans, pulling their hips together. Little giggles escaped from Eren where they could, and Eren wrapped his arms around Levi’s waist as the kiss deepened.

Pulling back briefly, Levi asked lowly and in a husky voice that left Eren weak, “Where are your friends?”

“In the driveway,” he whispered back.

Levi hummed thoughtfully. “So does that mean no…” He pulled Eren’s hips forward, grinding them against his own, accentuating exactly what he wanted to do.

Eren bit his lip, muffling a moan at the delicious friction. “My friends will know even if it’s a quickie.” But he was really considering it anyway.

“How unfortunate.” The only thing unfortunate about that was how composed Levi could make himself after that teasing. “Seeing you all fired up like that is such a turn on.” Levi shook his head and sighed at the disappointment.

“You get turned by me bursting through the door telling you guys that your crazy mother is stalking me?”


“Hey!” Eren cried, nursing his side.

Levi nudged him towards the door. “Go back to your friends. She shouldn’t bother you again.”

“Alright.” Eren slowly made his way backwards as he left. “And hey! I’ll see you tomorrow! Because you will take me to the movies. Remember?”

“I remember. Have fun.”

Levi waved as Eren opened the door, only to hear, “EREN YOU SHIT, I CAN’T BELIEVE YOU SPENT MONEY ON THIS!”

Eren slammed the door shut, glancing back sheepishly. “Hey… Maybe I can just hang out here-”

Levi cut him off by pointing at the door. “Go.”

Eren groaned, mumbling out, “She’s going to kill me…” before heading back out into the wildfire of Ymir’s wrath.

“What are you thinking?” Genevieve demanded after Levi had left. “Eren actually had a half
“I have my reasons,” Francis said calmly, leaning back in his chair like his arch rival wasn’t trying to take a grab at the fortune and his only heir through his other adversary.

“Oh, you mean the ‘scandal’?” Which really wasn’t all that much of a scandal anyway. “You know as well as I do that we could easily create a believable enough reason to marry them now.”

“Think of this like a test.”

Genevieve crossed her arms over her chest. “A test?”

“In the past year and a half, neither Eren nor I have made any progress in our so called power struggle.”

“So you’re using her to settle the bet?!” Genevieve gasped. “She’s dangerous!”

“That woman is only dangerous to us. To Levi she can’t get anything from that boy, he knows nothing. He has nothing. Even if at first glance he seems like a one way ticket to the fortune she wants, he’s not. That path is only found through Levi. Soon enough, that woman will realize that and back off.” Francis made it sound so simple…

“Still, don’t you think playing around with such a dangerous woman just to settle a bet is going a little over the top there?” Even for him.

“It’s not just to settle the bet. It’s a test, like I said. If Eren cannot deal with that woman, then he has no right to call himself a Voclain. If Eren cannot pass this, he has no place in this family, and he loses. That marriage will never happen.” And Francis was counting on it.

In the past year, Eren made it obvious that he was not someone so easily gotten rid of, no matter how hard Francis tried. Even when he did something wrong, he somehow managed to make it work for the best! Though he would never admit it, he was little worried. If Francis couldn’t find a way to kick Eren out before the wedding, then Eren would win by default! Edith coming by was the perfect chance. The only problem was…

“So you turned down his idea, his perfectly reasonable idea of getting Edith off our backs, so you had a better chance of kicking him out.” Genevieve could see right through him.

“To test his abilities and character,” Francis replied smoothly.

“But will you really accept it if he passes? And what about Edith herself? She’s not just a pawn in this game you’re playing. She could have more up her sleeve than you think. She’s been at this for years, planning for years, and you think she hasn’t thought of the possibility of an Eren coming in? An outsider who had access to what she wanted? If you’re not careful, she could slither in without you even noticing.”

Francis almost rolled his eyes. “Genevieve. You know Edith, but you don’t know her like I do. Leave the strategizing to those who’ve actually had to fight her.”

Genevieve grunted, stomping her foot in frustration as she left. No matter how many years went by, Francis still managed to be the sharpest prick in the family. She only made it the door, however, when Francis spoke up again.

“Oh, and I hope you haven’t gotten too attached to Eren. Make sure to send Levi back in when you
leave.”

Francis smiled sickeningly, and Genevieve slammed the door shut.
Okay so SUUUUUUUUUUUUUPER late update today! But it’s finally here! T^T

By the way, there’s only about 4-5 chapters left! D: OH NO!!!!!!!! Oh… oh shoot… You’re not crying are you? Please don’t cry! Oh wait… that’s me. T^T BUUUUUUUUUUUT!! If all goes according to plan, I may have TWO fics I’ll be starting soon! Or rather… eventually… I’ve gotten some written for them, but since this fic has taken priority, there’s really not that much.

Also, I apologize if anything seems a bit… less than my usual standard. I didn’t get as much of a chance to really go over this chapter like I have others. But I still like it, so it really can’t be too bad right? XD

And now, without further ado… we start the chapter countdown…

I hope you enjoy this chapter!

Genevieve fumed. Never did she rue the day she was forced to marry Francis more than she did at times like these. What was he thinking? How could anything he was doing right now possibly make sense to him?

And while, right now, she had no power over any of Francis’s decisions regarding the marriage or their bet, she could level the playing field a bit…

If you were to ask Eren just how many times the ceiling of Levi’s room had been sponged to give it that weird spiky texture people for some reason liked, he wouldn’t even hesitate to belt out a number (47).

If you were to ask Eren how many pillows, blankets, and towels Levi stocked his room with, he could not only tell you the number, but also the colors of said pillows, blankets, and towels (8 (2 black, 2 tan, 2 red, and 2 white), 6 (1 beige and black comforter, 2 tan sheets, 1 white blanket, 1 red blanket, and one grey blanket), and 6 (all white) respectively).

If you were to ask Eren just how many hours he had to spend staring mindlessly in Levi’s room to be able to spout such statistics, without a doubt, he would tell you, “too many”.

And if you were to ask Eren why he spent so many hours in Levi’s room, you would receive a several hour long presentation (powerpoint, visual aids, and demonstration included) on why Levi’s grandfather was the spawn of Satan’s shit come back from the plumbing of hell to wreak havoc on the poor innocent souls of the living.

There they were… Levi and Eren… happily spending Levi’s day off spending rare quality, non-working time watching a cute family movie at the theaters like Levi promised Eren the day before.
Buttery popcorn, sugary candy, and cuddling in a dark room. What could possibly be wrong with that?

Well, there was nothing wrong with that part, it was when the movie ended and Levi decided to turn his phone back on (don’t do it! it’s a trap!) only to receive more than a few messages from Francis saying that, on Levi’s day off where no work was needed or was going to be done, Levi had to come back to the mansion to… guess what:

WORK!

Eren buried his face in one of Levi’s tan pillows and screamed out his frustrations.

He didn’t actually feel better after doing that, but Levi, for whatever reason, doesn’t appreciate it when Eren throws the pillows around instead.

So… screaming it was.

However, not long after he began screaming, did he begin tiring of it. So fairly soon, Eren was left curled around the pillow, face still buried in the feathery fluff, lowly growling as he imagined coercing Levi to just take the fortune and fly down to Fiji or something so Eren would never have to hear Francis’s ugly ass voice ever again.

“Clingy girlfriend much?”

The growling simmered down to nothing.

“No, you don’t understand. I feel like I’m fighting for his attention. And… Ugh… I do sound like a clingy girlfriend…”

“He’s got a lot on his hands! The fact that you can even see him at all is probably a miracle in itself.”

That was right… Levi really does have a lot on his hands… and Eren probably does seem like a clingy girlfriend…

Eren moaned into the pillow.

Why did his boyfriend have to be in charge of two major corporations?

But when a knock came at the door, Eren was forced to push aside those thoughts and attempt to straighten himself up so it didn’t look like he was moping.

“Come in!” he called out as he sat up. The pillow rested back in its original spot.

Genevieve peeked her head in, smiling softly. “Hey!” she greeted. “How’s it going?”

Eren scooched over a bit to let Genevieve sit down, and she graciously accepted the offer, closing the door behind her. “Oh… you know…” Eren chuckled unconvincingly. “Just waiting for Levi.”

“So I’m assuming you have a bit of time to talk?”

Eren let out a short laugh. “Do you really have to ask?”

Genevieve hummed. “I take it you’re not happy about it?” As if that wasn’t obvious.

Eren shrugged, a frown starting to pull on his face. “It’s just… He’s been in there for ages already.
Who knows when he’ll come back? It’s supposed to be his day off. He always has Sundays off! Or at least he used to.”

“Well-

“I know, I know!” Eren interrupted quickly, anticipating what he thought Genevieve would say. “He’s got a lot to do, what with managing two companies and all, and I should really be happy that he even went out with me to the movies today. This is all just… normal for him…” The frown became more distinct as he spoke.

A sympathetic sigh escaped from Genevieve, and she wrapped her arm around Eren’s shoulders. “Eren, do you know why Francis always takes up so much of Levi’s time?” she asked.

“Because he hates my guts,” Eren deadpanned.

He waited for Genevieve to say what people usually said in situations like this. Something insightful or character revealing of the person in question. Generally something totally reasonable that would leave Eren feeling worse than he already was.

Nothing came.

Curiously, Eren glanced over to Genevieve. She refused to make eye contact.

Eren shot from his seat on the bed, brow furrowing worriedly. “Wait…” he ventured slowly, voice rising in volume as he spoke. “Are you serious? That’s really why? Are you telling me that all this time, all that “work” Levi has to do is really just busy work to keep me away?!?”

Genevieve gave a nonchalant shrug, inspecting her nails. “I didn’t say anything.” Her voice was light and airy, as if the conversation had no strings attaching her to it.

The small wink, however, claimed otherwise.

Eren continued in shaky breaths. “And so that emergency Francis made Levi rush over here for is just his bullshit? But… why would he go to the trouble…?”

“He’s a man who works hard to get what he wants,” Genevieve clarified. “You just happen to be the exact opposite of what he wants for Levi. Doesn’t think you’re Voclain material.”

It didn’t count as cheating if Eren didn’t know about the bet, right? Besides, it’s not like Genevieve had given him any explicit details. Just… nudged him into the right direction. After all, Eren was already half way there on his own.

As the words set in, Eren felt his hands form into fists. The pain of his nails digging into his palm barely noticed. The edges of his vision were tinted an incredibly light, but still noticeable, red.

“So… that bastard is trying to tear us apart by overworking Levi and taking up all of his time? That… asshole. That… That fucking piece of shit!” Eren screamed out. The fact that Genevieve was still just a couple feet away from him didn’t register anymore. Not that she cared. Trying to calm down even a little bit, Eren started pacing, thinking out loud as he did. “Fine. If he wants to play this game so badly, I don’t mind. But if he thinks I’ll give up so easily, he’s so fucking mistaken.”

If Genevieve hadn’t been so sure that she’d just created a monster, the sight of Eren muttering out loud like a mad man would have been laughable.
Eren suddenly stopped pacing. He nodded to himself. “I’ll prove him wrong. I’ll win over him. Otherwise… I’ll never hear the end of it.” And with determination now cemented within him, Eren made a mad dash for the door and even slammed it as he left.

“You have no idea…” Genevieve whispered.

She really truly hoped Eren could pull it off. Despite Francis’s adamant beliefs of Eren, Genevieve was sure Eren was the best thing to happen to her family in a long time. Levi was happier, Genevieve was enjoying her family much more now, and even Carlton was livelier. When Eren was around and Francis wasn’t actively throwing out his shitty attitude, the Voclain house felt a lot more like family.

There was no way Genevieve was going back.

The door swung back open, and Genevieve shook her thoughts away. Eren, pouting a bit, stood in the doorway.

“Levi was my ride here…” he murmured softly.

A smile forcefully tugged at the corners of Genevieve’s lips. “I can drive you back.”

Eren shook his head. “That’s okay. He’d just question it and it was his idea for me to be with him today and I actually kind of want to take a shower and I’d rather do that here… I like his shower better than mine. And, what better place to create an attack strategy than in the shower? Plus his soaps are really nice- oh my god,” he gasped. “Please tell me I’m not ranting. Please tell me I’m not turning into Levi.”

Genevieve chuckled, heading for the door. “Eren, and I mean this as a compliment, you couldn’t be Levi even if you tried.”

The last thing she heard before shutting the doors for good was an exhaled “Thank god…”

Her smile only widened.

She really hoped Eren would win.

After a productive shower and a couple days to perfect his ingenious idea, Eren had an attack plan. Three phases of it, to be exact.

1 – Plan the weekend

2 – Kidnap the subject

3 – Keep in custody until all plans have been fulfilled

By Friday (the planned beginning of the plan), Phase One was already complete. He knew exactly what he wanted to do and when it needed to be done. Armin had even offered to stay in Jean’s room over the weekend to give them some privacy. Eren had originally refused, saying that they probably wouldn’t need it, but after giving it some thought, sheepishly accepted.

Now for Phase Two…

“Levi!” Eren whined into the phone once the aforementioned had answered. He was lying casually
on his bed as he spoke.

“Eren? What is it?” came Levi’s confused response. Eren very rarely called him, choosing rather to text him instead, so the out of character move would help make his next words seem more believable.

“I really need your help!”

“With what?”

Shit. Eren had anticipated Levi to question him more, but figured an idea would come to him in time. It hadn’t. “It’s… difficult to explain over the phone… can you come here?”


“No!” They weren’t who he wanted to see. “That’s why I’m hoping maybe you can?”

“Well…”

“It doesn’t have to be now, you can stop by after work. Just… please?”

“Alright. I’ll stop by on my way back home. I should be there around 6.”

“Yes! Thank you! I’ll see you in a bit!”

Eren hung up and giggled gleefully. Levi had fallen for it. Which meant…

Phase Two: half complete.

And at 6, a sharp knock on his dorm door grabbed Eren’s attention.

Go time.

Hopping up from the floor and abandoning his game, Eren sprinted to the door. Throwing it open, he launched himself at Levi (after checking to make sure it was Levi) and threw his arms around him in a tight hug.

“Levi! You came!”

Levi hesitantly returned the hug, taken aback by Eren’s greeting. “Of… course I did… Did you think I wouldn’t?”

“I knew you would but… I’m still glad you did.”

Though Eren couldn’t actually see Levi’s face, he could tell Levi was rolling his eyes at him. Steeling himself, Eren began moving backwards. Levi, still trapped in Eren’s arms, reluctantly felt himself following along. When they’d passed through the door, Eren kicked it shut and continued in his path.

Now Levi was really confused. “Eren, what are you doing?”

No reply. Instead, Eren just kept pulling Levi backwards into his tiny dorm room until his legs hit the edge of his bed. From there, he simply relaxed certain muscles, allowing himself and Levi to fall atop the bed.

“Eren!” Levi’s cry was muffled by Eren’s chest, so he rolled a bit, Loosening Eren’s hold just
enough to speak. “Eren, what the hell? What’s going on?”

“I’m kidnapping you,” Eren admitted, his hands locking himself to the back of Levi’s shirt.

“You said you needed help.”

“I do!”

“With what?”

Eren pouted. “I miss you…”

Levi pushed himself up a little higher so Eren could see the unimpressed expression on his face.

“You see me all the time.”

“But I don’t get to actually hang out with you!” he argued, sitting up as well. “Whenever I do, you’re always too tired from working or working!”

“I have a lot of work to do!”

“But you never take a break.”

“Yes, I do. I have half days on Saturdays and Sundays off.”

“Some Sundays,” Eren snapped, remember the last Sunday.

“Most Sundays,” Levi corrected.

“When was the last time you actually took a weekend off, though?” When Levi didn’t respond, Eren scoffed. “You can’t remember, can you?”

“Eren-”

“Please!” Eren was begging now. Angrily begging, but begging all the same. “It’s just one weekend! We can go up to the cabin if you want. Do some hiking. Maybe go to a museum or something…?”

“So, all you wanted was a weekend to spend time with me?” Eren nodded, begging with his eyes. Puppy dog look all the way. A corner of Levi’s mouth turned upwards. “I think that can be arranged.”

A smile broke Eren’s puppy façade. “So then-”

Levi held up a finger, silencing Eren. “But I have to run it by Grandfather first. He’s not gonna be happy if I just skip out without telling him.”

“But he’d gonna say no!”

“You don’t know that…” Eren merely gave him a look. Levi rephrased his statement. “If I give a good enough argument, he may say yes. Miracles do happen.”

“That’s not a miracle, that’s hell freezing over…” Eren muttered, slouching.

Levi ignored the comment and pulled his phone out, standing from the bed as he did. Eren followed suit, hoping to eavesdrop on the conversation, but Levi held him an arm’s length away. A whine left Eren’s lips, but Levi’s arm didn’t budge.
“Hello, Grandfather… Actually, that depends. You see-”

Eren’s desperately shaking head cut Levi short. If Levi told Francis the truth, there was no way in Heaven, Hell, or Earth that he’d give Levi permission to stay.

Levi understood and seamlessly followed up with, “Eren has a project he needs my help on. Says I’m the most suited for the job… No, he isn’t. It’s a writing assignment where you explore a world you’re not familiar with. I’m needed for research purposes.”

Nice, perfectly believable save. But they weren’t finished yet.

“… However long I’m needed. Shouldn’t take longer than the weekend… Why wouldn’t I stay over here? … You know, you’re taking quite a bit of interest in Eren’s project. If I didn’t know any better, I’d say you actually care.”

Even standing an arm’s length away, Eren could clearly hear the adamant objections coming from Francis. Nice to know he still hated Eren that much…

“Look. Whether there is a project or not, it’s one simple weekend with Eren. Just one. I didn’t see you put up such a fuss a year and a half ago when I took a whole week off just to hang out with him.”

Once again, Francis’s objections rang loud and clear. But then, Levi’s voice dropped low. Too low for Eren to hear. He tried scooching in closer, but Levi kept him away, and by the time Eren was able to strain enough to listen, Levi had reverted back.

“Then it’s settled. I’ll see you Sunday evening.”

Eren gaped, eyes wide in disbelief. A slow, low gasp escaped his lungs.

He couldn’t have…

It wasn’t possible…

Levi ended the call and faced Eren once more. Shrugging, he said, “I’m all yours.”

The squeal that erupted from Eren could have shattered windows, though he would forever deny it. He hugged Levi once more and would have spun him around too had he not known better.

“Yeah, I know. I’m awesome.”

“You are! Oh fuck you are! I don’t even know how you did it!”

“I know my Grandfather. Now what do you have planned?”

The grin that dominated Eren’s face couldn’t have been held down even if he tried.

That weekend had been the first and certainly not the last. Every chance Eren got, he’d attempt to kidnap Levi for a weekend, though with every weekend success, his chances of succeeding next weekend dwindled greatly. Eren found it harder to convince Levi that such weekends were necessary, even though Levi always ended up agreeing anyway. Levi was running out of excuses that could work, and Francis’s patience was running thinner than Eren had ever see it go.
Eren wasn’t going down that easily, and if Francis hadn’t gotten that yet, he was fucking blind.

Although, the fact that Levi would always somehow manage to convince Francis to let him stay was weird… Eren knew it had something to do with whatever he said under his breath that Eren could never hear, but since he could never hear it he had no idea what it was.

Still, the extra time with Levi was well worth it.

After about a month of his weekend kidnaps, however, Eren was surprised by Levi turning the tides on him.

“Levi,” Eren gasped, ignoring the small crowd surrounding the expensive and horrendously conspicuous vehicle parked outside the building of his last class. “What are you doing?”

Levi, leaning against his car, smirked. “Kidnapping you.”

Well, Eren had no problem with that. Without a second thought, Eren hopped into the passenger’s seat.

“God… is that what you wore to class today?” Levi asked as he took his own seat on the driver’s side and started the car.

Eren glanced down to his ripped jeans, t-shirt, and thin jacket. “Yeah?”

“Why? It’s freezing out! And getting colder each day.”

“My dorm is literally a block away! It’s not a big deal.”

Levi kept his eyes on the road, but maneuvered his arm into the back seat, producing a thicker jacket. Throwing it at Eren, he said, “Here. I don’t care how close your dorm may be, I don’t want to have to hear your whining when you get a cold.”

Eren rolled his eyes, but layered the thicker jacket on over his thinner jacket. It was pretty warm…

“So what’s up with you kidnapping me? Isn’t that supposed to be my job?” he teased, snuggling into the jacket.

“You don’t get kidnapped enough, so I’m making up for it.”

Bubbly happiness stirred inside Eren, and he couldn’t keep the giddy grin off his face. “And where are you taking me, kidnapper?”

“You’ll see. We’re almost there.”

Eren peeked out the windows. He knew this area. This was a pretty big hangout place for Eren and his friends. Dinner maybe? Bowling? No, Levi didn’t care much for bowling. And neither did Eren for that matter. Although, the ice skating rink had just been opened for the colder seasons…

“Ice skating?” Eren guessed, squinting over at Levi.

“You’ll see when we get there.”

Eren pouted and turned his attention back to the outside world, only to see them turn into a parking lot. A very familiar parking lot.

“The movies? You’re taking me to a movie?”
Levi shrugged a shoulder. “You said you haven’t had much time to go recently, so I decided to take you.”

“Which one are we gonna see?”

“You’ll see.”

“Levi! We’re already here! Come on, just tell me!” Eren urged, shaking Levi’s arm. Levi didn’t respond.

And he didn’t have to as they were just walking up to the ticket booth. Eren let Levi pay for the tickets, but gaped once he saw which movie Levi had chosen.

“That one? But it’s an action movie! You hate action movies!” As far as Eren knew, Levi would rather choose pornography over an action movie. Why would he willingly see this one…?

“Haven’t you been dying to see this one though?” Levi asked curiously, distinctly remembering Eren’s raving reviews about the trailers.

“Well… yeah-”

“There you go.” Levi dropped the conversation, heading off in the direction of the concession stand.

Eren wouldn’t let it end there though, as he raced to keep up with Levi. “But I was gonna go see it with my friends,” he argued. Anything to keep Levi from forcing himself to sit through something he hated.

“Then you can brag about it to them,” Levi countered unblinkingly. “What size popcorn do you want?”

“Large. Are you sure you don’t wanna see something different?” Eren offered. Hell, he was practically begging. “There’s a new horror out.”

Levi turned from the counter as they waited, worry subtly etched into his features. “Do you really not want to see this?”

“I do!” Eren exclaimed without hesitation. “But… I don’t want you to be bored the whole time…”

“It’s fine.” Levi gripped the front of Eren’s shirt, pulling him in close. “Just let me spoil you,” he whispered.

Eren bit his lip. The close proximity to Levi and that dip in his voice effectively breaking down any will he had left to fight.

“Okay,” he begrudgingly agreed. “But don’t think I won’t remember this!”

Levi gave a small smile. “I wouldn’t expect anything less. Now go pick a good seat.”

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Two and a half hours later, Levi stumbled out of the theater, remembering exactly why he didn’t like action movies. It almost made him rethink his decision to pass up on that horror that Eren had suggested.
Eren, on the other hand, was pumped up beyond belief. Action movies always got him all hyped up. Made him feel like he could take on the world! Or take over it. Either one would work really.

“Levi, I know you don’t care for them, but that was a really good movie… Oh I can’t wait to rub this in everyone’s faces! Hah!” Eren’s enthusiasm showed, too, in the way his grip nearly ripped the empty popcorn bag.

“That’ll have to wait.” Levi gingerly peeled Eren’s fingers off the popcorn bag one by one, throwing it away once the poor, mutilated bag was free. “We’ve got reservations.”

Eren perked up. “Movie and a dinner?” A slow grin spread from ear to ear. “Is this a date, Levi?”

Levi held out his arm, offering it up for Eren to hand on to. “It can be if you want it to be.”

Without a second thought, Eren accepted the arm and followed Levi. The restaurant was actually a ways away and required them to drive, but Eren didn’t mind all that much. A date was something rare with Levi and was to be savored.

In fact, it wasn’t until they actually arrived at the restaurant that Eren started feeling suspicious.

“Levi…” Eren ventured, eyes scanning every inch of the restaurant as they were led inside. “This isn’t what I think it is… is it?”

“College students deserve good meals every now and then,” Levi answered simply, following the host to their table.

The host sat them down at a booth in a rather secluded part of the restaurant. After she left, Eren hastily scanned the menu. Once he found what he was looking for, his eyes bulged comically.

“Levi!” Eren hissed quietly. “This place has like… the best steak in town! Good meal my ass!”

But Levi wasn’t affected by Eren’s tone, keeping his own cool and collected. “What? You don’t like steak?”

“I do! I love it-”

“Then I don’t see the problem.”

Eren glared over at Levi, letting the menu fall back to the table. “What are you doing?” he demanded.

Levi sighed, setting his own menu down. “Like I said earlier, I’m spoiling you.”

“Why?”

“Do I need to have a reason?”

Eren tilted his head suspiciously, counting off on his fingers. “You take off of work early to pick me up, sit through an action movie with me, and now you’re taking me out for the best steak of my life? How does that not sound out of character to you?”

Levi slipped his hands under Eren’s and held them up, kissing both of them. “You’ve been doing a lot for me recently. Forcing me to take care of myself and making me take time off to do it. I just want to return the favor, is all. At least before Grandfather forbids me from every seeing your dorm room again.”
A short laugh fell from Eren’s lips. “I still don’t understand how you’ve managed to get him to agree every time.”

“Believe me, it wasn’t easy.” Levi released Eren hands, picking his menu back up again and urging Eren to do the same. “Now enough of this conversation. I’m sure you’re dying to verbally dissect that movie to someone.”

“Oh my god, yes.”

Dinner passed without incident. And true to its reviews, that really had been the best steak in town. Blissfully full, Eren could have fallen asleep in the car. Actually, considering that he barely remember the ride back to his dorm, that’s probably what happened. But once they were there, the gentle hum of the idling car and the light shakes ended up stirring Eren into full consciousness.

“Mmm… thank you for the wonderful date, Levi,” he hummed, absentmindedly tightening the jackets around himself.

“I’m glad you enjoyed yourself,” Levi kept his voice low. “But… I have to admit, I did have some ulterior motives for tonight.”

“I kind of figured.” Eren relaxed sleepily into the seat. Might as well get comfortable while Levi explained himself.

“There’s something I need to tell you. I’ve actually been trying to tell you for quite a while, which is how I got Grandfather to let me stay all those weekends. I kept putting it off though, because it never seemed like the right time. Plus, if I kept putting it off, it was easier to convince Grandfather to let me stay all those weekends. But, I really can’t keep putting it off. For one, Grandfather will throw a fucking fit if I wait any longer. And I’m really running out of time to tell you-”

“Levi,” Eren cut it gently, biting his cheeks to keep from smiling too wide. “Stop ranting and just tell me.”

“Grandfather and I have to take a business trip. To China.”

Well… okay.


“Somewhere around a month or even… six weeks.”

“Six weeks?!” It wasn’t six months but that didn’t mean it didn’t sound like a long fucking time. “No! You can’t be gone for six weeks!” Eren wasn’t prepared to go without Levi for six weeks!

“Depending on the situation… maybe even longer.”

“Longer?! Levi, no! You can’t!”

“I don’t have a choice,” Levi argued sternly. “Something came up, no one knows how to fix it, so Grandfather has to go over there and make it work.”

“And I suppose he thought this was just the perfect opportunity for you, huh?” Jealously and
malice seeped into his voice, but Eren couldn’t really care.

Levi’s mouth formed a hard line. “Yes, he did.”

“Oh, of course,” Eren muttered, mostly under his breath.

It didn’t go unnoticed by Levi, though. “Considering that our international portion of the company is huge and I’ve had less exposure to that aspect then the rest, I’m going to have to agree with him.”

“Of course you do…” Eren slouched in his seat, totally not pouting, and crossed his arms over his chest.

“Eren! What in God’s name—”

“When?” Eren cut off quietly.

It took Levi a moment to register that Eren had said something. “What?”

“When?” Eren repeated, louder this time.

Levi was almost hesitant to say anything so as not to ruin Eren’s evening any further, but it had to be said. “We leave in a couple weeks.” He heard Eren scoff and found him slouching further into his seat. Levi sighed, his own anger dissipating at the pathetic display. “I should have told you sooner.”

A moment of awkward silence passed as Levi struggled to find something to say to calm Eren down. But it was Eren who ended up breaking the silence.

“Three weeks.”

“Eren—”

Eren straightened up, facing Levi with that determination Levi loved to see. “You get three weeks over there, but after that you have to come back!”

At least… Levi loved to see it most of the time… “Eren, this isn’t something that can be negotiated.”

“Levi,” Eren’s voice shook lightly, “promise me you’ll try to get back in three weeks. Promise me! I… I’m not prepared to lose you for that long… especially…” He bit his cheek, wondering if he should make that low blow or not. But the thought of Levi being gone for six weeks made the decision for him. “Especially not with your mother lurking about.”

Eren carefully watched for any change in Levi’s expression or demeanor, hoping the mention of his mother would influence Levi’s decision, but Levi merely shook his head lightly in sympathy.

“I’ll try, but I can’t guarantee anything. Come here…” Levi pulled Eren forward, kissing him gently. “Next trip I go on, I’ll be sure to take you along as well, alright?”

It wasn’t perfect but… “Alright.” … Eren agreed regardless.

“And as for my mother, she hasn’t tried anything lately, so I’m not too worried.” That was a lie. Eren could clearly see the doubt on Levi’s face as he spoke. “But if she does try something while I’m away, just know that you’re always welcome at the mansion. Grandmother and my father will be there, so you won’t be alone. Plus the campus has pretty decent security, and she won’t
approach you while you’re with your friends. Okay?”

No. It wasn’t okay. It was in no way okay for Eren. He didn’t want Levi to be gone. He didn’t want Francis to take Levi half way across the world from him. And he certainly didn’t want to think of Levi’s mother bothering him or his friends while Levi was gone.

But… Levi wouldn’t abandon him. It’s not like he’d have no way to contact Levi while he was gone… and it’s not like Levi would leave without triple checking Eren’s safety… so…

“Okay.”

Levi withheld the sigh of relief. It wasn’t the best way to leave things, but so long as Eren was agreeing, Levi couldn’t have fucked up too badly… right? He kissed Eren once more, but before he could pull away Eren mumbled against his lips.

“Stay the night?”

“I can’t,” Levi mumbled back. “Grandfather is expecting me back any moment now, and if I stay, he’ll definitely ban me from your dorm room.”

Eren groaned, and pulled away. His whole body emanated disappointment, but Levi didn’t know what to do about it.

Still, every fiber of his being raged at him. He needed to do something. Just as Eren was about to shut the door, Levi called out. “Eren!”


Levi knew he had to say something. Anything. Three words hanging off the tip of his tongue. Three words that have been there for longer than Levi wanted to admit.

“Stay warm.”

Eren, in spite of his previous displeasure, smiled. The gesture warmed Levi up more than his high quality car heater ever could.

“I will. Drive safe!”

The door shut, cutting Levi off from Eren shuffling away in the chilly night with Levi’s jacket.

Levi only drove away once he saw the door to Eren’s dorm building close behind him. He cranked the heat up as far as it would go, but even then it wasn’t enough to drive off the bitterness unfortunately not caused by the cold.

Coward.
Sorry once again for the later update! And... once again this chapter hasn’t really been looked over all that well, so please forgive any mistakes! Ugh... I keep slipping, this isn’t good... Man... I was really enjoying you guys being under the impression that I was actually cool...

And I can’t think of anything else to say.

I hope you enjoy this chapter!

With only two weeks until Levi left, Eren tried to capture as much time with him as possible.

But Francis was also competing for Levi’s time, what with all the finalizing of the details for the trip. And since Levi’s first and foremost responsibility was to the company, Francis always won.

Eren’s weekend kidnappings were nothing more than a dream now.

“You’ve gotta let it go, man! You can’t win every battle against Granddaddy Dearest,” Jean said one evening. They were lounging in Eren and Armin’s room playing video games.

Or rather, Armin and Jean were playing video games and Eren was patiently waiting his turn to cream the winner whilst bemoaning his fate.

To say that Levi’s news of leaving and Genevieve’s news of Francis’s plan had Eren feeling down was an understatement.

“Yes, but I’d still like to spend a little time with Levi before he leaves. I mean, he’s gonna be gone for like... two months at worst!” Add on the two weeks Francis was depriving him of, and it just got even worse.

Armin made a perplexed noise, but kept his eyes on the game. “I thought you said three weeks?”

“That’s when I want him to be back,” Eren clarified, “but even I know that’s a stretch...”

Armin nodded in understanding. “I know what you mean... Erwin is away for just a week, and even though I know it’s impossible, I still want him back in three days.”

“See, this is why I like- Oh fuck you, Armin! What the fuck is your problem?!” Jean mashed the buttons as many times as he could, but Armin just laughed, finishing off the match in a glorious final blow. Jean threw his controller to Eren, grumbling, and switched spots. “Anyway, this is why I like dating Marco. Nice, normal, stationary Marco...”

“How is Marco doing, by the way?” Eren hadn’t seen him in a while. Marco was one of the few in their group who actually took their studies seriously, after all.

“He’s...” Jean’s face fell. “Oh shit...”
“What?” Armin asked worriedly. Both Armin and Eren had set their controllers down, game paused.

Jean groaned and shoved a pillow over his head. “I just remembered he’s going on a field trip to France with the rest of his class… For a week…”

Eren unsympathetically belted out a cackle. Armin politely covered his grin with his hand.

“Nice, normal, stationary Marco, you say?” Armin’s voice was a pitch higher than usual from holding back his laughter.

“Now all we need is to call up Ymir and see if Christa is leaving anytime soon,” Jean moaned pathetically. “Then we can all hang out and wallow in our lonely misery by drowning ourselves in video games.”

“Exactly. Then we can totally fourway this,” Eren chortled out, referring to the game.

But that’s not how it came out.

Jean and Armin both stared at him.

“That… did not sound right…” Jean said carefully, a little disturbed by the idea.

Armin was more curious. “Three gay men and a lesbian… That would be the weirdest fourway I’ve ever seen…”

Jean’s eyes blew open. “Hopefully it would be the only fourway you’ve ever seen!” he cried.

“Don’t tell me Erwin is corrupting you. I’ll kick his ass if he is.” Eren cracked his knuckles in warning. He didn’t forget what he said to Erwin all those months ago, and he wasn’t bluffing when he said it.

“Same here. Your boyfriend better watch out.”

Armin blushed brightly. “He’s not! No~! Don’t say that!” He hid in his hands, whimpering.

“What? Boyfriend?” Armin nodded behind his hands, and Eren gasped. “Dude! You’ve been dating for two months! I think you can call him your boyfriend now.”

Armin shifted sheepishly. “We… we haven’t talked about it yet. He wants to make sure we take things slow, and I’m perfectly happy with that.”

“You literally just said that you were dying for him to come back,” Jean pointed out.

“I can miss people and not have them be a significant other!”

Eren placed his hands on Armin’s shoulders, then started prying his hands from his face. “Alright, alright. Calm down. We won’t call him your boyfriend yet.”

Armin complied, relaxing. “Thank you.”

Eren turned back to the game. Picking up his controller, he muttered quietly, “But that’s kind of what you are…”

“What?”
“What?”

Eren shrugged innocently, and Armin glared.

“Prepare to die, Eren.”

Because everyone in Levi’s family was apparently fucking weird, the plane was set to leave at five in the morning. And because Francis was the weirdest of them all, he insisted on getting there two hours before. It was a rule of thumb that usually made sense, but to Eren, he could fathom why anyone would want to be there two hours early if practically no one was even going to be there that early!

Plus, they had a private jet. It’s not like they had to wait for boarding or anything. And since they owned it, even though it was scheduled to leave at five, they could really leave as late or as early as they wanted!

Eren was guessing that Francis probably wanted to leave as soon as possible and had probably been hoping that if they left early enough that Eren wouldn’t want to go with to see them off.

Oh how wrong he was.

The drive to the airport was spent with Eren using Levi as his pillow while trying to stay awake and immersed in the conversation.

If Eren wasn’t going to see Levi for six weeks, then he was damn well going to make the most of now.

Now if only he could remember what they were talking about…

After a while, the airport came into view. Eren shifted in his position, preparing himself to say his goodbyes to Levi, when he found the car turning onto some weird road…

This… wasn’t how you got to the airport… The departure drop off was still up ahead, right?

Eren stared curiously outside, eyebrows knitted together in tired confusion. Levi caught notice.

“What is it?” he asked.

“We’re not… dropping… departure…” The jumbled, mismatched words tumbled out groggily, and Eren thinks one of his hands pointed in the direction of, hopefully, the departure exit.

“We’re… going to the plane…” Levi informed slowly. “Not through the main terminal.”

What? They were going straight to the plane? No security? No awkward pat downs? No stupid lines? Is this what it meant to be rich?

“Whoa…” was all Eren could manage though, in his sleepy state.

After a couple more minutes of driving, they began approaching a small aircraft waiting patiently off to the side. Eren openly gawked at the sight. A movable staircase led to the open door, and security guards lined the path. It was something he’d only ever seen in movies.

Oh god, he was living in a movie.
Wait. No. No, he wasn’t. He just needed sleep was all.

One of the security guards opened the limousine doors, and Levi helped Eren out of the vehicle.

The other security guards were already unloading the suitcases from the trunk and into the plane, so that gave Levi plenty of time to say good bye to Eren.

While Francis glared in the background.

“You guys didn’t even go through security…” Eren complained. “Why did we have to come so early? You said the plane left at 5.”

Levi shook his head, rubbing his hands over Eren’s arms in a vain attempt to warn him up. “No, I said we needed to be there at 3.”

“Yeah!” Eren exclaimed. “That usually means the plane is gonna be leaving two hours later…”

Levi tilted his head, confused.

“Y-You know…” Eren continued weakly, “to give yourself time to get through security… and bag… checking…” Did… did they not know that?

“That sounds like a poor person problem,” Francis commented snidely.

Eren sneered over at Francis, yelling out, “You sound like a poor person problem!”

A+ comeback there, Eren… Gold star for you.

The rest of the family giggled while Francis rolled his eyes. Levi brought a hand to Eren’s cheek, turning his attention back to him.

“Eren, I promise I will try to come back as soon as I can. I don’t want to leave any more than you want me to-”

“That’s a lie and you know it.” Eren most definitely didn’t want Levi to leave more than Levi did. Because at least Levi saw some good in going. Eren just thought Francis was doing this to keep Levi away.

Levi chuckled. “-but I have to go, and I’ll work hard to get back quickly.”

Eren fell forward a bit, until his forehead rested against Levi’s. “Thank you,” he whispered. “I’ll miss you.”

Levi reached up, kissing Eren in between each sentence. “I’ll miss you too. Stay warm. Stay safe. And…”

He paused.

The air around them became heavy with the weight of nothing. A silence that needed to be filled, and could only be filled by one thing.

Levi took a shaky breath in.

“Keep out of trouble.” You coward.
Eren kissed Levi back.

“I make no promises,” he grinned.

Stealing one last long, sensual kiss, Levi followed after his grandfather who’d been inching his way towards the plane the whole time.

Eren began tilting back, hoping to lean against the limo while he watched the plane fly out of sight, only to realize the vehicle had been farther back than he thought. So he ended up falling against the limo instead.

Unfortunately for Eren’s plans, Genevieve misread the stumble as a sign that Eren was about to fall asleep.

“Come on,” she said softly, gently hands guiding him towards the door. “Let’s get you to back to bed.”

“Wait!” Eren pushed back against the guiding hands. “We’re not gonna see them off?”

“We already did,” Carlton said, pointing to the small jet. “They’re on the plane.”

“Oh…” Made sense… “But we’re not gonna watch them fly off?”

Both Genevieve and Carlton gave him confused looks.

God, did no one in that family understand clichéd romantic gestures?

In one last desperate move, Eren brought his gaze back towards the plane. Levi was already inside with the door shut, and the windows were tinted so no one could look inside. Still, hoping Levi would see, Eren waved and then climbed back into the limo.

They drove away, but the plane hadn’t moved an inch. And by the time it was out of sight, Eren lost hope for his movie-esque goodbye.

When they got back, Eren could have sworn that Levi’s bed had never been colder.

The first week, Eren was fine.

Sure, he missed Levi, but it’s not like he was obsessed with him. Eren didn’t need Levi to constantly be there, though his friends liked to tease him about it. And if he ever got too lonely, he could just pretend that Levi would be back soon, or that he was just working hard at the mansion. Desperate, but it worked long enough for him to move on.

And Levi still texted him. Sporadically and… the frequency started to dwindle… but with Levi constantly with Francis, the lack of communication was expected.

Plus the time difference was messing with Levi a bit. Eren would receive texts at three in the morning and then another text an hour or two later asking why he hadn’t responded yet. And then a third text that often went along the lines of:

*Never mind. Just respond whenever you wake up.*

Yeah, the first week didn’t have Eren worrying.
It was the weeks that would come after.

Eren had never gone more than a week without at least seeing Levi, so he could admit that he was a little concerned for how he would handle the next couple of weeks.

The scenario planned out in his head went something along the lines of Eren’s self-restraint and longing for Levi to gradually worsen bit by bit until his friends would end up locking him in some cellar like a damsel in distress to keep him from ruining everyone else’s lives, and by the three week mark, Levi would end up bursting through the cellar door, rescuing Eren and then banging him right there while whispering sweet, loving nothings in his ear.

… Although only the first part of that situation was actually realistic.

“You know, you’re taking this really well so far,” Connie commented one evening. Eren and his friends had piled into Jean’s room to hang out. Enviously, it was the largest room they had in the group of friends.

“It’s only been a week,” Eren droned, having listened to that sentence the whole week.

“Yeah!” Ymir retorted, and for a moment Eren actually believed she was on his side. “Have patience! He’ll be crying and blubbering on us in no time.”

How foolish of him.

Christa elbowed her girlfriend in the side, smiling sweetly at Eren. “So… China you say?”

“Yup.” Eren settled down, making himself more comfortable on the floor next to Jean’s bed. “Six weeks of China.”

“Huh…” Christa contemplated the information for a moment. “You know, my father was considering expanding into China. Apparently it’s cheaper there.”

“Only because their workers are treated like shit,” Jean chimed in.

But Christa paid to attention to him. “Hey, do you think you could ask Levi or his grandfather about business-”

Eren interrupted her before she got too far. “Christa, you know you might as well be asking Ymir this question, right?”

“Shoot… that’s right.” Christa snuggled back into Ymir’s side, disappointed. “Just… let me know when they get back.”

“Oh, you’ll know when Levi gets back because you’ll be hearing Eren’s screams from across the city,” Reiner teased, his grin a mile wide.

“Don’t act like you have a right to say anything! You’ve woken up the whole floor before!” Eren accused, remember very vividly that night.

“Hey, that’s not-!”

Eren held up a hand. “Wait! Everyone shut up!” His phone was vibrating and…

Levi was calling him!

Without hesitation, Eren accepted the call. “Hello?”
The chorus of jeers that followed were loud enough for Eren to flinch back as his friends piled around the phone, yelling as many obscenities as possible.

“Oh my god, guys! What the fuck?!” Eren shot up from his spot and leaped over the giggling bodies out into the hallway, shutting the door firmly behind him.

When he held the phone back up to his ear, he heard Levi groaning.

“If that mess was your friends, kindly tell them to shut the fuck up. I just woke up…”

Eren chuckled nervously. “Sorry. They’re all assholes at the worst times.”

“You are too, so you can’t say much.”

Eren shrugged, though Levi couldn’t see it. It was true.

“So what’s up?” he wondered. “This is the first time you’ve called me.”

“This is the first chance I’ve gotten to call you. We’ve been so busy I barely have time to eat or sleep. This crisis was much worse than we imagined.” Levi was rubbing his temples, probably from an oncoming headache. Eren couldn’t see it, but he knew. “In fact, we’re so busy, this is probably the last chance I’ll get to really talk to you for weeks too… And that may include texting…”

Oh… “Well, shit…”

“I’d try explaining the problem to you, but I’m pretty sure you don’t care and wouldn’t really understand it either.”

“Both are true.” Once again, Eren couldn’t argue with Levi’s statements. “By the way, Christa wants to talk to you guys about business in China when you get back.”

“Fun, fun…”

“So why are you calling? Anything in specific?” It certainly wasn’t to tell Eren that Levi would be leaving earlier than expected, especially since he just said that the situation was shit.

Levi sighed. “I just wanted to hear your voice.”

Eren bit his lip, a light blush dusting his cheeks. “Heh… thousands of miles away, and you can still make me feel like a giddy school girl.”

“Thousands of miles away, and you still manage to occupy my thoughts all day and night.”

“Levi…” Eren gasped. “What’s with you? Not gonna lie but you’re acting really cheesy.” And it was making his heart skip beats.

Francis’s voice filtered through the phone, and Levi sighed. “I have to go now. I don’t know when I’ll be able to talk to you next, but I’m working hard to get back.”

“Oh… alright.” Eren shoved back the disappointment. “I miss you.”

“I miss you too.”

They said their goodbyes, and Eren hung up, holding the phone close to his fluttering heart.
He could wait for Levi.

Snickers from beside him made him glare over at his friends who were now all peeking out from behind the dorm door.


“We’re engaged, you dumb fucks!” Eren threw his phone at the terrible singers, but laughed nonetheless.

Levi was working hard to get back to him.

So he could wait patiently for him to do so.

Thursday came. It signified the beginning of the end of the second week of Levi’s trip in China. And surprisingly, Eren had been faring better than he thought. Even though Levi had been correct in his assumption that the excessive work load would leave him too busy to call or text, Eren had hardly thought about it. He hadn’t really thought about anything concerning Levi, actually.

Not how much work Levi had over there… Not how stressed and tired Levi must be feeling over his work… Not how Eren wasn’t even sure if the beds were comfortable enough over there… Not how Levi was probably not even sleeping all that much anyway… Not how Levi would have to deal with the interesting food over there… Not how Levi was probably eating as much as he was sleeping… Not how Eren didn’t know when Levi would be coming back… And certainly not how much he missed curling up next to Levi in bed and kissing him and hugging him and bugging him and fucking him…

… Okay so now he was, but before that Eren had been perfectly fine!

**Armin**: You know he’s prolly working extra hard just to come home early right? You know. For you.

Eren read the words on the screen with a slight flutter of his heart, biting down the smile trying to force its way through.

That is, until he really processed the words.

**Eren**: No! That’s not good!

**Armin**: What are you talking about? This is exactly what you wanted!

**Eren**: Well… yes I wanted him home early, but not at the expense of his health!

Although, to be perfectly honest, Levi would probably be working this hard even if Eren hadn’t begged him to get home early, which… really didn’t bode well for Levi.

**Armin**: Good luck trying to tell him that. When was the last time you talked?

**Eren**: Aren’t you supposed to make me feel better?
Armin: I tried that. Literally 30 seconds ago. Didn’t work.

Eren: Whatever. Is your class almost over yet?

Armin: You know this class never lets out early! Stop being so impatient!

Eren: Well then stop taking classes with such stupid professors!

Armin: If you’re that bored, just head back to the dorm and I’ll meet you there.

Armin: Oh, I’ve got to stop now. Professor is starting to get suspicious.

Eren slouched back.

Damn, there went his entertainment.

Why was it that Armin always managed to get the worst possible professors every semester? No food or drink, no pajamas to class, no texting, no talking, mandatory note taking, never lets out early, seating charts… blah, blah, blah. Those were always Armin’s professors, so if anyone in their group shared a class with him, they knew the professor would suck.

Poor Armin. How did he get such bad professor luck?

Eren, on the other hand, generally had pretty laid back professors. Most of the classes were spent as optional work time for whatever piece they were writing. So really, he could leave whenever. Just so long as the work got done.

And, as it just so happened, Eren had finished all his work.

So he was early to his and Armin’s daily lunch hang out. As was common.

See, most of their group of friends had booked a class in the same time slot save for Eren and Armin. That period was free time for both of them, and it just so happened to be lunch time as well.

Therefore, lunch hang outs.

The perfect place to grill Armin on any new details regarding the not-a-boyfriend-but-totally-a-boyfriend Erwin.

… Just as soon as he got out of class.

Eren crossed his legs on the bench underneath him. He was waiting outside the building where Armin’s class was until Armin could finally run free. But considering he still had an hour left…

Settling in for a long wait, Eren pulled up whatever game interested him.

Others hurried past him. The days were getting colder, but Eren merely wrapped his jacket, Levi’s jacket, tighter around himself. The material keeping him nice and warm. The jacket was nice. Probably leather. And, it did a better job than most of his sweatshirts.

It even smelled like Levi.

People came and went. Some sat down. Some ran for the warmth of the building. Some even strolled along, for some reason enjoying the chilly breeze. But most stayed indoors.

Eren paid no attention to them. His game was starting to get interesting now, and he didn’t need
some random passerby distracting him. It’s not like they were ever talking to him anyway.

“Ahem.”

It was always someone else.

“Ahem!”

And Eren didn’t want to be that awkward person waving at someone who was really waving at someone else behind him.

Whoever was next to him started coughing loudly, uncontrollably.

Without looking up, Eren said, “You should get that checked out.”

A hefty sigh and a deadpanned, “I’ll be sure to keep that in mind.”

Wait…

Chills ran up Eren’s spine, and there was no way it came from the cold.

He knew that voice.

Stumbling up from the bench, Eren almost tripped trying to untangle his crossed legs. Messily, his feet twisted him back around to face the owner to that familiar but not too pleasant voice.

“Y-You!”

A coy smile, crossed arms, crossed legs, an aura of confidence and deceit dressed in designers no one with a salary under $1,000,000 could pronounce.

“It’s about time. Not exactly the brightest, or sharpest, crayon in the box, are you?” Edith tittered in a light and airy breath. She stood and extended a hand. “I don’t believe we’ve been properly introduced. I’m Edith Brown. Levi’s mother.”

Eren instinctively stepped back.

“I don’t believe I want to be introduced,” he growled lowly. “What the hell are you doing here?”

Edith gasped pulling her hand back in mock offense. “Why, Eren! I simply want to meet my future son-in-law. Is that really so bad?”

“By law you’re not Voclain anymore and aren’t even allowed to be near one. I don’t think ‘son-in-law’ is the right term for this. Now beat it! You have no business here!”

“Oh contraire. You’re here. And seeing as how you’re the closest link to my son and not a Voclain yet, therefore, by law, you don’t apply under that restraining order, you’ve just become my new favorite person,” Edith giggled. If she was expecting Eren to be honored by the news, she was about to get an ugly surprise.

“I can call the police on you,” Eren threatened. “Or worse, I can call Francis on you.” He wouldn’t be able to do anything, nor would he really care, but hopefully Edith would still be frightened by the thought.

Instead, he got another laugh out of her.
“And what?” she inquired teasingly. “He’ll fly back from China just to protect someone he doesn’t even like?” Eren must have made some kind of face, as she smirked and said, “Oh yeah. I know about that.”

But… how? Did she really keep such close tabs on Francis to know that he had flown to China specifically? Or… did she…?

Eren’s face distorted in growing rage. “You… you didn’t-!”

Edith blinked, taken aback by the sudden outburst, before gasping. This time, it wasn’t faked. “What? You-You think I created whatever problem he has in China? Do you really think so low of me already that you think I’d risk creating a problem in China just to talk to you?”

Well… “From what I’ve heard…”

Edith rolled her eyes and pitched the bride of her nose, much like Levi did… “Their brainwashing starts quick, doesn’t it?” It was said more to herself than Eren, but he didn’t get the chance to respond. “Look, whatever they’ve told you is all blown out of proportion. There are two sides to every story, and theirs paints me as this horrible bitch of a villain.”

What kind of fucking bullshit was this woman spewing at him? For fucks sake, she sounded more and more like a movie villain with every word she spoke.

“And let me guess, yours paints you as the innocent victim?” His voice was about as monotone as he could manage, suddenly very blasé about the whole conversation.

Seriously, though. If you were going to play out the whole “gain sympathy and pretend not to be an evil bitch” trope, at least have the decency to mix it up and not make it so obvious.

“Victim? Yes. Innocent? Well… maybe not entirely.” Edith smirked like she was showing off an accomplishment, but it soon disappeared. Desperately, she grabbed hold of Eren’s arm. “Just hear me out. That’s all you have to do right now.”

“Excuse you!” Eren scoffed, ripping his arm from her grasp. “I don’t have to do anything! Especially not anything you order me to do!”

Edith glowered. A frown began forming on her face which started to accentuate the wrinkles and creases. The air around her grew even colder.

“Look, Eren,” she hissed condescendingly. Her voice low and threatening. “You’re not smart. And you’re gutsy in all the wrong ways. I may not be a Voclain, but neither are you. The only difference is that I’m much more dangerous to piss off than you are. And with Francis and Levi on the other side of the world and no restraining order to protect you, I’d be very careful with that attitude if I were you. I’m not afraid to get my hands dirtier than they already are.”

But her threats needed more juice to scare Eren.

Without missing a beat, Eren fought back. “That doesn’t change the fact that you’re trespassing and harassing a student on campus grounds. Francis may not be able to do anything, but the several security officers hanging around can.”

“Don’t make me an enemy, Eren.”

“And underestimate me.”
Edith opened her mouth, probably to retort some more, but something behind Eren caught her eye.

Following her gaze for a brief moment, Eren found one of the security guards patrolling the area. He eyed the odd pair suspiciously, hand resting on his belt, mere inches from the gun they were required to carry.

Edith straightened up, her face smoothing out as she adorned a sweet smile.

“Well, Eren, it’s been lovely chatting with you. But I supposed it is time for me to go. I’ll see you later, sweetie!” She turned on her heel, blowing a kiss and waving like they weren’t just about to rip each other’s throats out. Her shoes clacked loudly against the pavement.

The security guard pursed his lips, shrugging off the interaction, and Eren realized why she had suddenly acted so sweet.

The hand was off his belt.

Eren now stood alone.

The adrenaline was starting to wear off too. He could feel his heart hammering in his chest, his muscles twitched. The instinct to protect himself even after the danger had driven off was powerful. Breath ragged and legs torn between running and falling to the ground, his illusion of safety had been shattered.

Anxiously, Eren spun around, trying to find any sign of a black car or suspicious man watching him.

Then he ran back to his dorm.

“What?! Are you serious?!” Had Armin been holding anything, it would have dropped just like his jaw.

After the encounter, Eren texted Armin telling him to head back to their room after class. The idea that Edith was out there and waiting to pounce left Eren with an uneasy apprehension at being anywhere outside. So he ordered pizza for delivery. They’d never had their lunch hang out in their dorm before, so at least it they could try something new…

Not like Eren was going to enjoy it, though.

“Dead serious,” Eren mumbled through a mouth full of food. “That fucking bitch.”

“You can say that again…”

Eren, not caring that Armin clearly meant for his comment to be rhetorical, screamed out, “That fucking bitch!”

Armin sighed, unfazed by Eren’s cry. “What did she want anyway?”

“For me to listen.” Eren angrily shoveled more food into his mouth. “You know, after she stalked, insulted, and threatened me.”

“Listen? To what?”
“Apparently her side of the story. She said Levi and his family were blowing everything out of proportion, and that she wasn’t really as bad as they said she was.”

“That sounds exactly like something someone would say in a movie to gain trust.”

“That’s what I thought!” Did rich people just not watch movies, or was she just that oblivious to how she sounded? “I have no doubt that’s what she was trying to do, too. She already thinks I’m stupid.”

“So what did she say?” Armin leaned forward. As insensitive as he may have felt thinking it, he actually was really curious about what it was.

Eren shrugged. “I don’t know. And I don’t want to know. Some security guard came over and she ran before telling me. But not before warning me that she’d be back…”

Armin pursed his lips, thinking.

“Okay…” he started. “I’m going to suggest something, and you may not like it.”

Eren regarded Armin with a worrying glance. “Armin…”

Armin bit his lip, bracing himself. “What if you tried… listening to her?”

Eren’s reaction was instant.

“Armin!” he shouted, shooting up from his spot. “You’re supposed to be on my side! This is the woman who forced us to expose the engagement prematurely via blackmail! This is the woman who filed for divorce and ditched Levi all for money! This is the woman who’s been stalking me!”

“Exactly!” Armin interjected. “And she’s obviously not gonna stop unless you listen to her. I’m not saying you need to believe her, just listen.”

“What could she possibly have to say to me, though?” Eren wondered aloud. “I can’t give her the money, it belongs to Levi. And once we’re married, I’ll be a Voclain by law, and she won’t be able to come near me.”

Armin shook his head sympathetically. “I really don’t want to be in your shoes right now, no offense.”

“None taken. But whether I listen to her or not, I have to tell Levi what happened. Maybe he’ll have some advice for me.”

Armin gave Eren a one armed hug. “Good luck.”

“Thanks.”

Because from what it looked like, he needed it.
IT’S STILL MONDAY IN HAWAII

So, I apologize for the late update, but my life has been ridiculously hectic recently. In fact… it’s still hectic. Like… majorly hectic. And I may not be able to get these last few chapters out every Monday like I want. That doesn’t mean I won’t try though! I will try for Monday updates, but… I don’t know how often…

Just a PSA so I don’t have a ton of messages asking me why I’m not updating yet.

But, in other words, I hope you enjoy this chapter!

You have reached the voicemail box of- BEEP

Eren threw the phone onto his bed.

He mocked the standard phrase in a high nasally voice, “You have reached the voicemail box of an asshole who doesn’t know how to answer a phone!”

“Eren…” Armin called carefully. He sat at his desk, doing his homework while listening to Eren attempt to call Levi for the past hour. “He’s incredibly busy. You know that. Hell, you knew that before you even knew you needed to call him.”

“I know, but this is important!”

“And I’m sure he’ll realize that after he sees the billion phone calls you sent him.” The eye roll could be heard in Armin’s voice.

“Don’t forget the texts,” Eren added pitifully.

“And those too. Just give him time to see them.”

“We don’t exactly have a lot of time, now do we?”

“She hasn’t done anything drastic yet-”

“YET!” Eren exclaimed loudly. “Yet! We can’t wait around until she does and then tell someone!”

Armin sighed, trying to be the voice of reason. “She just wants to talk for now, and you know she won’t try anything if there’s someone around.”

Eren whined, fidgeting and stomping. He looked like a child, and he knew that, but this was important! Why couldn’t Levi just sense that something was wrong…?

The phone started vibrating, and no sooner then it started to vibrate, Eren dove onto the bed to get it.
It didn’t even make it to the second ring.

“Hello?” Eren breathed, not bothering to check the caller id.

“Eren? You okay?”

It took all of Eren’s restraint to not audibly groan in disappointment.

“Mikasa!” he greeted with forced enthusiasm. “What’s up?”

Armin’s eyes widened, and he waved his hands, mouthing, Don’t tell her!

Eren made a face, shaking his head as he mouthed back, What do you think I am? Stupid?

“Well… everything’s fine over here… I was just checking in on you.” Mikasa had the chance to attend a different college on a full ride, so of course everyone told her to jump at the opportunity and she took it. It just meant they couldn’t meet up as much. “So, you’d tell me if something happened, right? Something important?”


Leave it to Mikasa so somehow manage to call at the wrong time. Now if only she could instill that sense for danger in Levi…

“Probably because you know it’ll get you in trouble.” So true.

“And why would you think something was wrong in the first place?” Eren asked, trying to seem nonchalant.

“Probably because I can always tell when you’re lying. You’re terrible at it, even now.”

Well shit.

“Look! I’m not lying! I’m really not in trouble and there’s nothing wrong!” No crazy woman stalking him for his fiancé’s immense fortune. Nope. Not at all. No reason to worry.

There was a pause from the other end of the line as Mikasa thought. Finally, she demanded, “Give me to Armin.”

“What?” both Armin and Eren exclaimed at almost the same time. Eren from Mikasa’s demand, and Armin from Eren yelling out.

“Go on,” she urged. “Hand me over to Armin. I want to talk to him.”

“Oh! O-okay!” Eren held the phone out to Armin and mouthed, Don’t tell her.

Armin frowned, glaring at Eren. He mouthed back, What do you think I am? Stupid?

Eren sighed and shoved the phone into Armin’s hands.

Armin, taking a deep breath, accepted it.

“Mikasa!” he grinned. “How’s it going?”

“Armin, please don’t lie to me. Is Eren in trouble? Is he doing something wrong? Has something happened?” The worry was painfully clear in Mikasa’s voice…
But she couldn’t know.

“What?” Armin laughed as naturally as if it had... well... actually been natural. “No. Why would you think that?”

“Because he’s using that tone of voice he always gets when he lies.”

“Nah, he just got freaked out because he had just mentioned that he was avoiding studying for this next test that he has, and you always call when he’s avoiding studying.”

Mikasa gave a sigh. “Hand me back over to Eren.”

Armin handed over the phone, grin still intact.

Eren, cautiously brought the phone back up to his ear. “Hello...?”

“Eren. Study. Now.”

And the line went dead.

Eren dropped the phone as he maintained eye contact with his devilish friend.

“You got scary good at lying.”

Later that night, Eren couldn’t help but lie awake in bed. His eyes searched the ceiling as if the answer was imbedded somewhere above him. The answer to all his questions. What should he do? Why wouldn’t Levi call him back? What did Edith possibly want to talk to Eren about?

Groaning, Eren yanked his pillow out from under him and shoved it on top of his face, whining some more.

It was never this hard before, dealing with his problems. And actually, now that he thought about it, he’d never had to face a problem like this on his own. He’d always had his friends to back him up whenever his anger had gotten out of control. Even when he’d felt so alone during the early stages of his engagement, he’d found the most wonderful refuge with the very man he’d sworn to hate. The very man who, later on, would continue to stand by his side no matter the weather.

And now that very man was countries away with the only other person on Earth who would know what to do and refused to communicate.

Letting his arms flop limply from the pillow over his face, Eren realized that he didn’t just miss Levi, he missed the comfort he got from him. He missed his confidant. He missed knowing that Levi would always be there for him.

Because, at the moment, he wasn’t.

Another whine escaped him, and apparently Armin would have no more of it.

“Eren, you’ll figure this out,” he reassured his moaning friend, albeit crossly. “Now please go to sleep. Or at least stop making noises. I have to wake up earlier than you.”

“I can’t help it. I can’t stop thinking about it. I... I don’t know what to do...” Eren whispered. He felt so small against the weight of his thoughts.
“Eren…” Armin breathed out, a lot softer this time. “I know… this must be, despite your tough attitude, really scary… but she has a reputation to maintain. She won’t hurt you, and she won’t draw attention to it. You’re as safe as anyone can be with a crazy stalker.”

“That’s not what I’m thinking about.”

“Oh… what are you thinking about?” When Eren didn’t respond, Armin added, “There’s a Taco Bell nearby if you want.”

“No… it’s fine. I don’t want to keep you awake any longer than you need to…” Eren trailed off.

“But…” Armin prompted.

“I miss Levi.” Eren’s voice was no higher than a whisper.

“He’ll come back,” Armin reassured.

“No, you don’t understand. I could always depend on him. If anything ever happened, I knew I could count on him. He was always there for me when something went wrong, and now… he’s not. Like, back when I had trouble sleeping at his house. He knew something was wrong, and even though I wouldn’t tell him or let him help, he still tried. Every time I felt upset or unsure, he’d be right there beside me and… and… now I can’t even text him…” Eren’s words were laced in bitterness.

“Well… it might be a step down, but you always have your friends. We may not be able to kiss your tears away, but anything ever happens, you do know that half of your friends would barricade you in hugs while the other half beat the shit out of whatever was bothering you, right?”

“Heh… yeah.” The mental image of his friends piled on top of him in a collective attempt to comfort him while the others charged in valiant cries of curses at an offending ball of feelings was simply too hilarious to not smile and laugh at. “Thanks.”

“That’s what friends are for.”

“I hope you remember that when we all attack Erwin for corrupting you.”

“Eren…”

“Feel the wrath of our smothering love.”

“Alright, you’re fine now. Go to sleep you dork.”

Eren laughed, but laid back feeling better.

Armin was right. Eren wasn’t really alone. Levi may be the only person who could actually help in permanently getting rid of Edith, but if he didn’t think his friends would have his back then he had a rock for a brain.

Which Francis thought either way…

Actually…

Eren stifled a gasp, mindful of the sleeping Armin next to him. Perhaps Levi wasn’t the only person who could help…
Jean honked a goodbye from Marco’s car as he dropped Eren off at the doorstep of the mansion, early Saturday morning. With Marco in France with the rest of his class, he’d left his car in Jean’s hands. And so long as Jean didn’t wreck it, he was allowed to drive it.

As Jean drove away, Eren found himself thinking that he should get a car of his own so he wouldn’t have to keep bumming rides of his friends.

But cars cost money that Eren didn’t have yet. Besides, he had no doubt that Levi would get him a new, much more expensive car once they married, whether Eren had a car or not (fucking rich people). Best not waste money.

Shaking thoughts of cars from his head, Eren knocked on the big double doors.

Carlton, surprisingly, was the one who answered.

“Eren! What a pleasant surprise! Haven’t seen you for a while…”

“Hey, Carlton.” Eren smiled. “Is Genevieve home, too?”

Carlton nodded his head and wordlessly led Eren through the house and into the backyard.

Eren had never been into the mansion while Levi and Francis were out of town, and while he wasn’t really expecting anything, the difference was not something he could ignore.

The air seemed… lighter. Breathable. Maids that had previously worked out of sight were now out in the open and almost carefree in their cleaning. When they reached the backyard, Eren found Chef Hannes chatting and lounging with Genevieve as she snipped, salvaged, and sowed what she could before winter came. And, overall, the whole place was just brighter.

Eren glanced back between the mansion and the garden, wondering if Jean had made a wrong turn.

“Eren!” Genevieve finally noticed him. She stood from her crouched spot on the ground and strode up to Eren to hug him. “Oh, it’s so nice to see you! You should visit us like this more often.”

“What’s… am I in the wrong universe?” It certainly didn’t feel like the mansion he was so used to…

Carlton tilted his head curiously. “Whatever do you mean?”

Eren gasped. “What do I mean? This place… it’s so different!” It’s colorful! It’s lively! It’s like… the exact opposite of what it is usually!

“Well, it’s just autumn,” Genevieve said, thinking Eren was talking about the garden. “You’ve been here during autumn before, you know.”

“I think,” Chef Hannes laughed, joining the conversation, “he’s referring to how relaxed this place is right now.”

Understanding flooded both Carlton and Genevieve’s faces, and Eren nodded.

“Yes! I’ve never seen the mansion like this.”

“It’s because Francis is gone,” Genevieve answered, sitting down on one of the chairs laid out.
“But… I’ve been here when Francis was gone before.” That one better-than-expected week from so long ago…

Chef Hannes spoke up next. “Yes, but Genevieve is here. She encourages a more relaxed environment for the workers here. Doesn’t happen often though, since she usually leaves with Francis.”

Curiously, Eren looked over at Genevieve, realizing for the first time, “But you stayed behind this time?”

Genevieve shrugged. “Francis wanted to take Levi with him, not me. Not that I’m complaining. It just means I get to spend some time away from him and give this house a break from its horridly strict life. And now, I get some quality time with you!”

Huh, well then. Eren relaxed into the new feeling the mansion had. “Man… if this place had always been like this, I may not have had so much trouble sleeping here…”

“So what brings you by here, Eren?” Carlton asked, leaning against the mansion wall. “As much as I’d like to indulge myself, I doubt you came here just to see us old folks.”

“I’ve… got a situation.” Here it came… “Edith confronted me at school yesterday.”

“What?” all three of them replied at once. “What did she say?”

Quickly getting over the strange unison, Eren continued. “She said she had something she wanted to tell me, said she wasn’t as bad as you guys painted her, but-”

“What did she tell you?” Genevieve inquired.

But Eren shook his head. “I don’t know. She was scared away by a security guard before she had the chance. But she said that she was going to come back.”

“Oh boy…” Carlton had a slight panicked look on his face. “This is not good. Have you told Levi yet?”

“I keep calling him, but he doesn’t pick up!” Eren glanced back and forth between Carlton and Genevieve, hoping for answers. “I know he said he would be busy, but too busy for a quick phone call?”

“I have no doubt Francis is keeping him busy just for that,” Genevieve glared at the ground, and then returned her gaze back to Eren. “You have to keep trying, though. Francis and Levi have the most power to do anything about this.”

Well that wasn’t what Eren wanted to hear.

“You mean you guys can’t?” he asked, baffled. “Your part of the Voclain family! She’s been attacking you guys for years!”

“Well, what would you want us to do?”

“I don’t know! Take her down! Get her arrested! Something to get her away from us once and for all!” Surely he wasn’t the only one with ideas here!

“Once you’re a Voclain, she’ll-”

“She’ll just keep coming!” Eren shouted suddenly and without thinking, but the moment the words
left his mouth, he knew they were true. “Don’t you guys see this? She hasn’t stopped for two and a half decades, even with the restraining order, so what makes you think she’ll quit just because I marry Levi?! No… we have to stop this.”

“Eren, taking down Edith is a lot harder than you think,” Genevieve said knowingly. She remembered when she thought like that about Edith. “We’ve been trying for the past two and a half decades, but she’s clever and stubborn and has very good lawyers. Taking her down would require hard evidence, witnesses, a very carefully planned out attack, and a knowledge of Edith that… well… we just don’t have. Besides, Francis has the key to all of our legal work, and mounting an attack without him is unwise. If we move, we move as one.”

“Which means,” Carlton interjected, “we’ll just have to hope Levi answers so Francis can help us decide on what to do until he gets back.”

Eren couldn’t believe his ears. “But… she’s stalking me… she’s blackmailed us before… she threatened me! I’m not going to sit by idly as she threatens me!”

“Eren, you cannot be rash going into this,” Genevieve warned. “She’s dangerous. She’s cunning. If you’re not careful, she can hurt you. Ruin you. Please. If you want the best chance at taking her down, you’ll have to wait until Francis and Levi come back.”

“But… she’s going to come back.” And well before Francis or Levi would. What was he supposed to do until then?

“While we can’t do much, she can’t come near here without breaking the restraining order, and she can’t risk that.”

“I can’t stay here for the next month. I have class.” And a life. But Eren wasn’t going to say that out loud.

“If you need to,” Carlton thought out loud, “you can probably ask for your assignments to be emailed to you. Get your friends to send you notes…”

“No,” Eren grumbled. “What I need is for her to be gone.”

“We can’t always get what we want.”

Chef Hannes, who’d remained quiet until then, nervously laughed. He probably shouldn’t have listened to that, after all. But put a hand on Eren’s shoulder. “I’ll go make something to help cheer you up.”

Carlton then nudged Eren, and said, “Hey! It’s not defeating Edith, but maybe you can help me beat the other team in that game you got me. I’ve gotten better at it you know.”

Eren cracked a smile at that, even though he didn’t feel much like smiling. For Carlton’s last birthday, Eren had decided to get him one of those football games for the PlayStation. With his love of American football, Eren figured Carlton would enjoy the game. He wasn’t disappointed, though Carlton took quite a bit of time getting used to the controls.

“Yeah, I can do that.”

Eren stayed for dinner, but had Carlton drive him back afterwards. As much as he’d enjoy Levi’s
comfy bed as opposed to his rock slab they called a dorm bed, it was far too big for him at the moment. Besides, if Eren spent all of his time at the mansion, he’d just feel like he was running away from his problem.

Armin silently greeted him when he walked into their room, questions about how it went at the mansion evident in his gaze. Eren sighed, shaking his head.

No luck.

“We’ll figure something out,” Armin offered in a desperate whimper. It was like the situation was just getting worse and worse.

“More like Francis and Levi will figure something out…” Eren bemoaned, wanting to throttle something.

Armin gasped. “You mean he finally answered?!”

“No. But that’s all they were saying while I was there. ‘We have to wait for Francis and Levi to get back’… ‘They’ll know what to do’…”

“Well, if it gets her off your back…” Armin was really running out of ideas here.

“Not for another month though!” Sure, having Francis and Levi kick Edith away would be nice, but Eren wasn’t going to wait a month for them to do it.

“Then… hope Levi eventually answers?” Armin finished, the last thing he could think of to suggest at the moment. But Eren said nothing and dropped back onto his bed.

For the rest of the night, Eren would spend ten to fifteen minute intervals every hour where all he did was try to call Levi. He didn’t even bother leaving messages, though. He figured that if Levi had the time to listen to a message, he would have the time to call Eren back.

“Can he really be that busy?” Armin asked as the clock rode in close to midnight.

“Apparently… either that or he’s just ignoring me…”

“He wouldn’t ignore you.”

“Maybe Francis confiscated his phone…”

“That’s more likely.”

Eren sighed and pressed redial more on reflex than anything. “God this sucks… why did this have to happen now? I mean, she even showed up after it started getting bad there and-”

“Eren?”

Eren gasped, shooting up from the bed so fast his vision blurred. Not that it mattered. Because that hadn’t been Armin’s voice.

“Levi??” It couldn’t be possible.

But Levi wasn’t so happy.

“Eren, what the fuck are you doing?!” he yelled. “I’ve gotten over a two hundred missed calls from
you, what the fuck were you thinking?!”

“Levi! Oh my god, I didn’t think you were going to pick up!” Eren was positively breathless. Despite how angry Levi sounded, it was so nice to finally hear his voice again.

“Eren, I told you, I wouldn’t have time for this! I still don’t! I haven’t had a proper night’s sleep in days and any sleep I have had has been in the fucking conference room! Fuck, the only time I’ve been able to leave that room is for bathroom breaks! I don’t have time to talk!”

Eren shook his head clear, reminding himself why he’d called in the first place. “Well right now you need to make time!”

“I can’t. I don’t know how else I can stress that! The more time I waste here- Fuck. Just… When I get back home, you can talk to me all you like, but until then stop calling-”

Quickly, Eren realized that Levi was more than likely going to hang up on him, so he rushed out, “Levi, no! You don’t understand! This is important!”

But Levi wasn’t listening.

“Just be patient. I’ll be back before you know it and then we can talk about whatever required two hundred fucking calls-”

Eren couldn’t be patient with this.

“Levi! Please! Listen to me!”

“Eren!”

Eren froze as dread seized his body.

Oh no… That wasn’t Levi…

“You fucking idiot!” Francis bellowed. “Do you have any idea how much of our time you’re wasting here?!”

“Francis… please…” Eren begged. He hated that he would stoop so low as to beg for Francis, but he needed them to listen.

It still didn’t work.

“No! You don’t! You can’t possibly hope to understand, you stupid boy! I don’t want to see you calling Levi again until we’re back in the states! If I find that you have, there will be hell to pay, DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME?”

“Francis, I-”

“Please, Eren.” Levi again. “Just wait a little bit longer. I’ll be back in no time.”

“Levi-”

But the line was already dead.

Frantically, Eren redialed. He didn’t care what hell had to be paid, just so long as he could talk to one of them. The ringing ended at the second ring, but not because anyone answered. Panic flooding his veins, Eren redialed once more and-
The arm that held up his phone dropped limply to his side, but his hand gripped the phone to the point of pain. Not that it registered. Eren was having a hard time registering anything. Not his shaking body. Not his ragged breaths as his subconsciously tried to calm himself down. Not Armin frantically texting on his phone. Not the slight red at the edges of his vision.

It was too much.

Too much.

He didn’t even know it had been building, but now it was breaking down.

A year and a half of battling Francis. Scavenging for bits of Levi’s time. Making a fool of himself at parties. Losing Levi to China for six weeks. That bitch of a woman stalking and confronting him. And now this… now… Eren couldn’t handle that.

From power struggles to food fights to stalkers… Eren really couldn’t care much about those. Because he could take those. Roll with whatever punches they had. But this…? No.

Of all the things Eren could deal with, having Levi ignore him wasn’t one of them.

“Eren?” Armin ventured slowly, cautiously, carefully. His voice barely a whisper.

Eren couldn’t force his body to respond even if he wanted to.

“Eren,” Armin tried again, this time placing himself in front of Eren. Softly, Armin let his fingers ghost across the skin on Eren’s hand, right over the white knuckled fingers gripping the phone. “Eren… let me see your phone.”

Eren stared straight though Armin. He couldn’t see anything. Couldn’t focus on anything. Tears welled up in his eyes, blurring the red of his vision into the rest of his view. His lips trembled and he choked back an angry sob.

He knew Armin must have been panicking, gently prying Eren’s fingers off of the phone. He remembered the last time he got like this around Armin, and the memory was the only thing keeping him grounded.

With the phone safely out of harm’s way, Armin gradually guided Eren back to the bed. Using soft, calming words, he encouraged Eren to sit back on the bed and placed a pillow in Eren’s lap. Something for him to grasp onto that wouldn’t be expensive to replace or painful to break. Eren immediately fisted his hands around the material.

Why?

Why would he do that? Why would Levi blow him off like that? Did he really think Eren would call two hundred times just to say hi? What the fuck? Then there was Francis… and fucking Edith would no doubt show her ugly ass face sometime soon. And no one would help him!

Why…?

The door to Eren and Armin’s dorm room slammed open, a curious Jean peeking in.

“Armin, what was with that text? What’s-?” Jean cut himself off at the sight of Eren. He’d been at the scene of too many episodes to not recognize one. Or, at least the makings of one.
“You’re the one with the most experience with this,” Armin explained shakily. “I… I wasn’t sure who else could help.”

Jean glanced around the room. “Has he-?”

“No,” Armin immediately answered. “Nothing’s been broken yet.”

Jean’s gaze centered in on Eren, and he glared. Without a second thought, he kneeled down in front of Eren, grasping his shoulders and shaking him.

“Eren, snap out of it!” he ordered.

Finally shaken out of his stupor, literally, Eren managed to look at Jean. He tried to say something, but his lips wouldn’t stop trembling. His clutched the pillow tighter, fighting back his frustration and need to throw something.

Jean didn’t take the silence well.

“Eren!” He shook Eren harder. “You need to snap the fuck out of this right now! Don’t you remember what happened last time? With Armin?”

“Of course I remember!” Eren snapped out, spitting the words out messily.

“You’ve gotta fight it!” Jean continued. “You can’t let it control you!”

“I know that! I’m trying not to!” It’s not like he wanted to go into fits of rage.

“Take deep breaths,” Jean then ordered.

“I can’t.” The words hurt. But Eren knew he couldn’t obey. Not like this.

“Yes, you can,” Jean urged. “Come on, do it with me!”

“No! You don’t understand!” Tears began falling now, leaving red, blotchy streaks down Eren’s cheeks. “He hung up on me.”

Jean paused, very thoroughly confused. “What?”

“That bastard hung up on me! That’s what! Wouldn’t even let me fucking talk!”

Throwing aside his confusion, Jean turned back to the task at hand: calming down a raging Eren.


If the situation hadn’t been so serious, Jean and Armin could have laughed at the extreme frown Eren had formed his mouth into. Brow furrowed deeply, Eren grudgingly attempted to take deep breaths. But the thought of what happened riled him up too much.

“Damn it!” he yelled out. “I can’t! I’m too fucking pissed off!” Eren shoved his face into the pillow and screamed, bloody and raw.

Jean sat back on his haunches, contemplating the situation. The frown and glare still in place.

“Well… at least he’s not throwing anything…” Armin offered weakly.

“So are you going to tell me what happened?”
By the time Eren’s screams died down, both from exhaustion and a raw throat, Jean had been filled in. Armin did all the explaining, while Eren threw in a couple hoarse details.

“Well, shit…” Jean whistled lowly. “Your fiancé is an ass.”

“Jean!” Armin elbowed Jean in the side.

“Well it’s true!” Jean countered as he dodged Armin’s attacks. “How would he not be concerned about his boyfriend calling him two hundred times?!?”

“You’re not making it better!” Armin chastised.

Eren burned holes through the pillow with his eyes, imagining it to be all of his troubles as his softly growled out, “Levi won’t help me… No one at the mansion will help me… So what? Does that mean I’m just expected to suck it up and forever deal with Levi’s mom breathing down my neck?”

“Just punch her in the face.” Wow. Jean was even worse at suggestions than Armin out of suggestions.

“I can’t.” Eren rolled his eyes. “Apparently even thinking about it can cause all sorts of legal troubles that only Francis can deal with. Bullshit…”

Armin looked over Eren with a longing to help. “I’ve said it before: your friends will always be there for you.”


Eren’s eyes widened, and a glint must have shown through them as Jean and Armin regarded him cautiously.

“Eren?”

“You’re right. No one is going to help me… but I have my friends, right?” Eren could hear a slight feral tint to his voice, but couldn’t really care. The wheels of his mind were rolling, and like hell if he was going to stop them.

Armin scooted away. “Eren… not gonna lie, you’re kind of scaring me.”

Jean nearly followed suit. “What exactly are you thinking?”

Eren found himself staring at his phone, lifeless as it laid atop his dresser. The pillow was thrown from his arms, and he stood with renewed purpose. Vengeance.

“That someone needs to pay.”

When Monday came, Eren was no closer to calming down than he had all weekend. He was just a lot better at hiding it. All the better, though, if he wanted to carry through with the plan he’d created in his rage.

Armin and Jean worried about him. And while Eren didn’t want to worry them, this time, he really didn’t have a choice. This wasn’t some petty rivalry. This wasn’t like those fights on the
playground. This was his whole future.

Eren’s professor set down his roster after just taking attendance. “Alright, class. As I mentioned earlier, you’ve got a new project. I’ve passed out the instructions so feel free to work on it to your heart’s content.” And then he sat down behind his computer and ignored the rest of the class.

Eren had actually finished the project beforehand due to a happy accident (aka he didn’t read the syllabus properly), so he just grabbed his stuff and left.

Now, he had quite a bit of time before Armin got out of his class, so Eren headed straight for the bench outside his building. Same place as always.

The day was exceptionally cold and class had just started for most, so Eren wasn’t surprised to see anyone else outside. The biting wind howled around him as he made his way across campus, the temperature seemingly dropping the closer he got to his destination. Eren couldn’t help but shiver.

He’d left Levi’s jacket back in his room.

As he neared the bench, however, the source of the freezing like temperatures became known.

Edith had beaten him there. And she immediately caught sight of him.

“Eren!” She called out, giggling her fake innocent giggle. “Over here!”

Autopilot brought him closer, until he was mere inches from the edge of the bench. Edith patted the seat next to her, but Eren didn’t budge. Shrugging it off, Edith dove right in.

“I know we may have gotten off on the wrong foot before, but I really am not as bad as all those Voclains make me out to be. I mean… I’ve barely even gotten the chance to properly meet my own son. How could he know what I’m like?”

At the mention of Levi, Eren stiffened. No matter where he went, something reminded him of Levi, which reminded him of that fucking phone call. But the memory did prove useful, as it spurred on his determination for the plan he had.

Taking a deep breath, Eren cut off Edith’s ramblings.

“What did you have to tell me?”

Edith smirked, gleefully.

“Let’s go to the coffee shop and talk there.”
What Do You Want?

Chapter Notes

I………… don’t have an excuse for this one. I finished writing this one earlier today, but forgot about it until now… huh…

It’s been a while, and I realize that so I made sure to update today! >:D I may not be entirely happy with it, but hey what can you do? If I was happy with everything I did, I would never improve… (aka *spouts half assed wisdom to cover laziness*)

Aaaaaanyway… The moment you’ve all been waiting for! :D

I hope you enjoy this chapter!

The blast of warm air from the coffee shop was more than appreciated by Eren, as was the short line and mostly empty building. Fewer people to listen.

While they waited in line, Eren glared at Edith’s back, but not necessarily because of Edith. He was just angry in general. No, angry wasn’t quite the right word. He was pissed. And Levi would know exactly how pissed he was once he returned. That much was for sure.

“I’ll take caramel macchiato,” Eren heard Edith order in front of him. “And then whatever the boy wants.”

Hold on.

Eren shot his glare up to meet Edith. “No, thanks. I’ll pay for myself.”

“Oh please,” Edith giggled. “I insist!”

Eren took a step back, the hand in his pocket grasping his wallet. “No. I’ve got my own money.”

“Not Levi’s?” A sly smirk slide across Edith’s face for a brief moment, but Eren didn’t give an answer. Rather, he stepped up to the counter, keeping his back to her.

“I’ll have a hot chocolate, but make sure that it’s paid for separately,” Eren ordered quickly and, before Edith had a chance, handed the barista a five dollar bill. “Keep the change.”

“Curious…” Edith hummed. She paid for her drink and followed Eren to the end of the counter. “Now, does Levi send you a weekly allowance in cash? Or do you have a bank account and just prefer to use cash?”

“Why the fuck does that matter?” Eren’s brow furrowed as he tried to understand why Edith was asking him about his financial status.

“Well, it’s just that most people I know never pay in cash. Just strange is all.” Edith shrugged, as if what she’d said was no big deal.

Eren couldn’t help the scoff that came out. “Whatever…” He really didn’t need to hear about the
rich’s money habits.

Eren’s drink came out first, but he didn’t drink from it at first. Rather, he cradled it in his hands, warming the still frozen digits. Edith contemplated Eren for a moment before starting again.

“But Levi does send you money then?” she asked curiously.

“What the fuck?” Eren nearly yelled it out, but remembered the other people in the room and kept it to an angry whisper. “Why do you want to know? It’s none of your business, after all.”

“Oh, touchy,” Edith jeered, then reached out to grab her drink. “Let me make a guess. Levi, under Francis’s rule, has been keeping the family fortune from you, am I right?” She didn’t wait for a response. “And now, you’ve been left to fend for yourself in regards to money, and, with college expenses and other such needs, you became frustrated with the lack of support from your fiancé. Which then led to a fight and your less than cheery mood.”

Eren took deep, heavy breaths. He didn’t meet her eyes. “Whether we did or not is none of your business.”

“I’m right… How sad.” Edith didn’t sound sad at all.

Getting tired of standing, Eren made his way over to a nearby table. “Don’t get a big head. I didn’t say you were right.”

Edith followed and sat across from Eren. “But I know, because denying it only proves its truth.”

This talk needed to be over soon, otherwise Eren would end up punching something.

“If you’re not going to talk about what we came here for then I’m leaving now.”

Edith sighed. “Oh, fine. But if you ever need money, I’ll never hold back from you.” She winked, her smile inviting and warm.

But Eren wasn’t moved.

“Goodbye.”

He stood, drink in hand, but was stopped by a well-manicured hand on his arm. Edith silently imploring him to stay. After taking a moment to think over his options, Eren sat back down.

“Now what do you want?” he asked. After all, this was the only option he had if he wanted something to change.

Edith took a deep breath, any signs of her previously pretentious and confident attitude seeping out with it. “Alright… all the walls are coming down now… I know you must think horribly of me, no thanks to the Voclains, but please… you have to understand where I come from with all of this.”

“You filed for divorce and abandoned your child for money.” Really. It wasn’t that hard.

“So that’s what they’ve been saying. Complete bullshit. This is the truth: that old man took everything from me. Everything. He lied to me, controlled me, and then stole my son from me! I never abandoned my child, he was ripped from my arms! I wasn’t to hold him, care for him, raise him. That was Francis’s job. He treated my son as if it was his own, and I was nothing but an heir delivering machine. And then he was going to force me to live with him and the rest of his family in his house, and watch him raise my son. Are you telling me you wouldn’t leave after all of that?
And then… I tried… I tried so hard to fight for my son; take him back. I wouldn’t expect you to truly understand how I felt, but a mother’s love is strong. Just not strong enough for the court.”

Edith slumped in her seat. Defeated. Dejected. Disgraced. The memories of what had happened aged her as she sagged. Wrinkles from worry, stress, and age appeared, and Eren no longer had an idea of what her real age was. All he knew was that the woman in front of him had changed.

Still, Eren sat straight, keeping his disinterested manner. “So the money had nothing to do with it?”

Edith gasped, looking perfectly broken at Eren’s words, before tired anger took over. “You think I love money more than my son?”

“I know you fought for the fortune, too.” Eren knew the terms of the divorce, and the fortune had definitely been a center topic.

“Who doesn’t want their child to grow up comfortably?”

“For yourself!” Eren clarified accusingly. That money was supposed to go straight Edith if she’d won.

“Of course! How else would I spoil him if the money wasn’t accessible?” Edith stopped suddenly though, realized she was too loud. Composing herself, she continued. “Now… You are right. In the beginning, before I had Levi, I really was all about the money and the prestige. After all, who wouldn’t want to marry into the richest, most influential family around? Francis had even boasted about the size of the inheritance his heir would receive. It was only after I’d given birth, that he revealed to me that his heir would not be Carlton, but Levi.”

“So it was at least partially because of the money?”

Edith leaned forward, dangerously calm. “Tell me, how would you feel if you’d been told you’d receive a fortune the bigger than the worth of all the Royal Jewels… and then had it all ripped away from you, because, despite being constantly reassured you’d get it, it was never meant for you.”

Eren scooted back and away from Edith. A wide and bright smile stretch on Eren’s face.

“Wow, touching story! No, really. I’m tearing up.” Sarcasm coated his words in a thick layer, and the fake smile dropped. “And, not to be rude, but what was the point of telling me?”

Edith dropped her calm and sat back against the chair again. “Tough crowd. But, the point was that really… all this time… I just wanted my son back.”

“And the fortune.”

“For my son.”


“And what do you think telling me will do?” Eren wondered. “That I’ll fall for your story? Help you get Levi and his fortune?”

Edith shook her head. “No. Recently… I’ve realized that I’ll probably never get the chance to be a family with my son. But that doesn’t mean I want him to think so badly of me… That doesn’t mean that I don’t want to know my son. Please… I just want a chance to… reconcile with him, and let him know that his mother does love him. I’m not a perfect person, nor am I completely faultless.
But I’m still a mother, and Levi is still my son.”

Eren didn’t have a response. Instead, thoughts of his own mother invaded his mind. Her sassy comebacks. The wrinkles around her eyes. She loved him. She’d do almost anything for him.

“Eren.” Edith gently placed her hand over Eren’s. “You can’t understand what I’m feeling right now, because you are not a mother, but everything I’m doing is purely out of my love for Levi. Everything I’ve ever done has been out of love for him. You must know that. And… you love him too, right?”

The word stabbed right through him.

Well… they’d never really talked about it. Eren supposed that he probably would have loved Levi.

But right now…

Eren’s gaze hardened, and he stared right at his cup. “And what if I didn’t? What if, in actuality, I hated him? He isn’t exactly lover material now is he? Maybe you were right, and we did fight. Maybe we fight all the time. Doesn’t really care like he seems to let on… And his grandfather may as well be the personification of Satan’s asshole.” Eren lifted his head up, looking into Edith’s eyes. “How would your plan even begin to work?”

Edith smiled knowingly. “But you do love him, don’t you?” Eren kept on staring, and Edith retracted her hand, narrowing her eyes. “Don’t you? Or was all that excited talk of marriage just faked? All those kisses?”

“So then there is a plan,” Eren said, avoiding the question.

“What?”

“You didn’t deny it.”

“Of course. My plan is to reconnect with my son.”

“And you needed me to do that. But if I didn’t really love Levi, how would that work? In all your years of plotting, you’ve never managed to break through Francis’s barricades. I’m the only shot you’ll ever have at getting close to Levi, and everyone knows that. So tell me, if I don’t love Levi, what are you going to do.”

Edith stood, taking her still full cup with her. “Look, Eren… for the moment, just think about what I said.” She turned to leave, but paused. “And… think about the benefits of helping me too. Have a nice day.”

Her heels clacked on the way out.

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Eren spent the next few days doing what Edith had said, thinking over her words.

Surely she couldn’t be telling the truth. She didn’t really want to just reconcile with Levi. She wanted the fortune. She wanted Levi away from Francis. She wanted to blackmail, threaten, and throw tantrums until she got what she wanted!

And yet…
Her story about Francis wasn’t exactly farfetched. In fact, Eren would be more suspicious had Francis acted any differently in her story. And she was so… sincere. She reminded Eren of his own mother.

That wasn’t good.

How was Eren’s plan supposed to work now that she was refused to take action against the Voclains? How was his revenge supposed to happen if the one person he could turn to no longer wanted her own revenge?

And speak of the devil…

There was Edith, loitering about the campus. Expensive coat and all. When she spotted Eren, she gestured for him to follow her to her car. That same fancy black car that she’d used to stalk him with his friends the first time.

Despite everything, Eren was a little apprehensive.

“Why?” he asked, eyeing the sneaky car.

“Because it’s warm in there. And it’s cold out here,” Edith explained as if it was obvious.

“Why not the coffee shop?” Eren suggested, taking a few small steps in that direction.

“I’m not walking across your huge campus in this cold. Especially not in these heels.”

Edith then resumed walking over to her car, expecting Eren to follow. Eren, now conflicted, stole one last look at the campus, the safe and crowded campus, before shoving his hands in his pockets and following her. Edith’s henchman opened the door for him, and a blast of hot air hit him in the face, along with the heavy scent of perfume.

Scrunching his nose, Eren asked, “Okay, so what do you want?”

Edith settled into the warm leather seats. “I’ve already made my intentions clear. I want to reconnect with my son. You’re the best person to help me do that.”

“If that was true, why are you marrying him?” Edith asked, clearly not believing him.

“Arranged marriage. Much like your marriage to Carlton. Did you love him?”

Edith didn’t answer.

Eren forced down the triumphant laugh. “But I wanted to ask you something. Before you left the other day, you mentioned benefits. What did you mean by that? Like a… reward?”

Edith crossed her arms over her chest, considering. “Perhaps… if you really did hate Levi.”

“What kind of rewards?”

“I think it’s time you get back to class.” Edith waved, and Eren’s door opened. The henchman began pulling Eren from the car.
“Wait! You didn’t answer my question!” Eren protested, struggling against the iron like grip.

“I’ll see you later, darling.”

Eren was tossed out, and while he wanted to bang on the window until she opened up again, he knew it would make too much of a scene. One he didn’t need. So the henchman got back into the car and drove away.

What a useless meeting! What was she trying to accomplish with that? Now Eren wished that Levi hadn’t torn up the business card she’d given him. It might have had a personal number on there so he could call without annoying secretaries…

Now he was forced to wait.

A week.

A whole week had passed, and Eren had heard nothing from Edith. At this point, his plan would never work!

But he did hear from his mom. She invited him to dinner, complaining about how she never saw him anymore, and was tired of having dinner alone whenever Grisha worked late. And with everything that was happening… Eren was far too eager to agree.

He had Jean give him another ride, and Eren even packed a bag in case he wanted to spend the night. And once the house came into view, a sense of nostalgia and security washed over him. Carla waited on the front porch, not quite so white anymore paint peeled from it, but the memories of his childhood remained. Summers playing in the sprinkler. Winters building snowmen and snow forts. Leaves littered the front yard now, as they always did in fall, and the urge to rake them up to jump in them was a strong one.

Those times were so much simpler. The marriage never plagued his thoughts, nor did it rule his life. The biggest problems he faced were petty fights with other neighborhood kids, and bringing home the report card from school. Most of his thoughts were about what game he should play, and the only crazy mother bounding around his life was his own, who, after all of this, really didn’t seem all that crazy.

Said mother outstretched her arms, welcoming Eren in a warm embrace when he ran up to her.

It was good to be home.

“So, Eren. I’ve got a nice heaping pile of spaghetti waiting inside, and I will be demanding news about your life in exchange for it,” Carla said, leaving no room to argue.

Eren laughed. “That sounds fair. It means I won’t be cleaning up then right?”

Carla smiled wickedly. “As long as you still have a room with your name on it, you’re still apart of this household. Which means you will be cleaning up.” The wickedness fell. “Or at least helping me.”

Eren groaned, briefly rethinking his decision but the thought of free, homemade food and the chance to separate himself from his life for a night was far, far too enticing for him to be swayed by dishes.
Carla, on the other hand, was practically bursting and almost couldn’t wait for Eren to sit down and piled up the spaghetti on his plate. But once he did, she couldn’t be stopped.

“So! Eren!” she grinned gleefully. “How’s life been for you? I haven’t seen you since you went back to the dorms after summer. Are classes going okay? Your teachers aren’t being too hard on you, are they? And you’re still writing those chapters for… um… um… Recon? You’re still enjoying that? Oh! How’s Armin doing? He hasn’t been driven mad living with you for another year yet, right? Are your other friends doing well? Have you seen any good movies recently? Oh, and Levi! How’s he? I think I heard from your father that he was on a business trip to China… Does he like it there? I bet you wish you were with him-”

“Mom!” Eren shouted, wide eyed and trying not to laugh. His first bite still resting on his fork, waiting to be eaten. “Wh… Slow down! I can’t answer all of those questions all at once! I… I mean, I don’t even remember what the first question was.”

“Well… I- You know? Neither do I.” Carla slumped her shoulders, and sighed, though a smile still graced her slowly aging face. That’s when she noticed she hadn’t even gotten any food for herself yet. It started with giggles, but soon Carla’s laugh bordered a bit on hysterical, and Eren shortly followed suit.

“You’re kind of a mess, Mom…”

“Oh shut up, you rude little child,” she chided with a grin. “You’re more of a mess than me on most days!”

“At least we’re not as bad as Mikasa was when she was packing for college her first year.” Eren shuddered at the memory. They’d never seen Mikasa so distraught at leaving.

“Oh dear! I thought she was gonna snap! I never knew she could get that frazzled, and I’ve seen her deal with you!”

“At least your food isn’t a mess.” Eren punctuated his statement by shoving a mouthful of spaghetti down his throat.

Carla sighed again, shaking her head as she finally grabbed some food for herself. “I’m sorry. It’s just that I never get to see you two anymore! Both at college… living your own lives without me… I just miss having you two around, I guess. You two never visit, and while Mikasa actually has a viable excuse, you have none! It’s barely a twenty minute drive!” She gently kicked Eren under the table.

“I have no car!” Eren laughed, kicking back.

“I’m happy to pick you up! Anything to give myself something to do… Do you remember that book club the neighbors always invited me to?”

It took a moment, but the memory came back to him. “Oh yeah! The one you never went to, because if you did you’d either have to hire a babysitter or take us with you? And I was always too rambunctious to bring along?” Ah… memories…

“Yes, that one. Well… I decided to accept their invitation. My friends said it would be good for me.” Carla stopped there though. She simply stared off into space, almost wistfully.

“And?” Eren prompted, urging her to continue.

“I’m so glad you were too rambunctious to bring along. I have never met a group of women so…
so…” Carla trailed off, trying to find the right words.

Luckily, Eren had her back. “White, middle class, suburban? Soccer moms? Minivan moms? ‘Oh, Susan! You have to try this new recipe I found online for zucchini cookies! It’s soooo healthy!’?”

Carla cringed at the voice Eren made. “All of the above. I mean, I’m not one to judge, but I think it’s better if I just know them as neighbors rather than anything else.”

“They were that bad after only one meeting?”

Carla rested her head in her hand, massaging away the oncoming second hand embarrassment. “Their book of the month was 50 Shades of Grey.”

Eren grinned, then reached over and held Carla’s free hand with one of his own. “Your welcome.” He knew his rambunctious personality would come in handy one day.

Carla smiled and lifted her head back up, squeezing Eren’s hand comfortingly. “Alright, but enough about me! What about you? You still haven’t answered any of my questions!”

“Well you asked too many! Why did you ask that many?” And all at once too. Did she even breathe the entire time she was asking them?

“What?” Carla leaned back in her chair and crossed her arms, playfully offended. “I can’t be interested in my son’s life? I just want to know that you’re happy and living life how you want to. I love you, and I only want the best for you.”

Eren stopped. He slipped his hand out from under his mother’s.

“Even if you’d never met me?” he asked slowly.

Carla glanced around, confused. “What?”

Eren sat up, dinner forgotten. “Okay, so… let’s say that when I was born, you were forced to give me up. Someone… made you give me up. Would you still love me, and want to be involved in my life?”

Shocked, Carla could barely find words to speak. “Um… I… suppose? Eren, where is all this coming from?”

“Please,” Eren begged. “What would you do?”

Playing along, Carla thought about it. “Well… If I had to give you up, certainly there would be a good reason for it-”

“But what if it wasn’t?” Eren interrupted. “What if… it was the stupidest reason on Earth?”

“Eren…” Carla reached forward, concerned with more than a few questions to ask about Eren’s behavior. But, she pulled back, sighed, and continued to play along. “I would be… angry. Miserable. No doubt I’d try to fight tooth and nail to get you back.”

“And if you couldn’t?”

Carla looked as if she wanted nothing more than to reach across the table and hug Eren until he felt better about… whatever he was talking about. Like if he said anything more she’d wrap him in a warm blanket, make him hot cocoa, and put on an old movie for them to watch together.
She reached out and held both of Eren’s hands in hers, stroking them gently with her thumb.

“Well, I’d still love you. And… in loving you, I’d still want the best for you. I’d want you to be happy, healthy, and loved. I’d be devastated at the thought of missing out on your life and being unable to raise you myself, but… if you were happy, then that would be enough for me.”

Eren stared at their mingling hands for a moment, then his gaze trailed upwards until it was focused on his mother’s face. The tender smile caused the crow’s-feet around her eyes and the laugh lines around her mouth to crinkle, but they in no way aged her.

She gave off the feeling that no matter how old you were, how bad your problem was, that everything would be okay and she would always be there.

Carla chuckled quietly. “Now, are you going to tell me what that was all about, or are you going to change the subject?”

Eren shook his head, smile back on his face and any sense of seriousness gone. “It was nothing… Just a passing thought I guess. But I’ve evaded your questions long enough.”

“Subject change it is, then,” Carla giggled, but dropped it. If her son wanted to tell her he would, and no amount of pushing was going to get it out of him.

“Whatever…”

Carla’s smile curled in slight mischievousness, and she tugged on Eren’s hands to get his attention.

“What do you say we pop in an old movie for us to watch? I’ve got some popcorn in the pantry, a nice fuzzy blanket in the dryer, and a new and improved hot chocolate recipe that tastes like s’mores in a mug. And you can tell me all about how you’ve been while we get situated.”

His mother’s old, tried and true recipe for happiness. And the one she always used. Predictable, but… in a good way. Eren’s grin spread. “I like that idea.”

“Great!” Carla stood, gathering up empty plates and other dishes before shoving them towards Eren. “You clean up dinner and I’ll make the hot chocolate!”

The grin dropped, and Eren began inching towards the door. “Oh… wait, no. I think I have to leave now…”

Carla pinched at Eren’s cheeks, pulling Eren into the kitchen with a wide smile on her face. “Cheeky child.”

Eren thinks he might have fallen asleep while watching their movie, if the marks and drool on his cheek as well as the strange sense of grogginess was anything to go by, but he couldn’t exactly remember when or for how long. All he could remember was his mother shaking his arm.

“Eren, wake up.”

Oh, so he was asleep.

“Come on, I know the hot chocolate was good, but you need to wake up now.”

Eren groaned, stretching cramped and sore limbs. He didn’t fall asleep in a good position…
“Mmmm’what?” he slurred, the grogginess merging his words into intelligible sounds.

“It’s time to wake up, Eren,” Carla sang, helping Eren sit up. “We should get you back to school before it gets too late.”

Eren sighed, the thought of moving making his muscles sag lazily. “Can I just stay here? I don’t have class tomorrow since is Saturday, and I’m already here…”

His body tilted to the side, getting ready to fall back onto the couch, but Carla kept a firm grasp.

“No, no, no,” she chided. “I think it’s best if you head back to the dorms. There’s supposed to be a big snow storm tonight and I don’t want you getting caught here until Monday.”

“Oh please. Those reports always exaggerate. We’ll probably get like… an inch of snow if it does.”

“I won’t take any chances. Now come on, let’s get you in the car.”

Another loud groan escaped, but Eren grudgingly followed along, his feet dragging the whole way.

The cold bit him furiously on his way to the car and the wind sent pinpricks of biting, frozen pain against any exposed skin. Briefly, Eren wondered if those snow storm claims actually had some kind of plausibility to them, but past experiences with such claims reminded him otherwise. There may be snow, but it wouldn’t be anything serious.

Unfortunately, snow or no snow, the cold had turned the car into a movable freezer, and it always took forever to heat up.

“Honey, why didn’t you bring a coat?” Carla chastised, as they drove. “You could have at least worn a jacket. It’s freezing outside!”

Eren only shivered in response. If memory served him correctly, Levi’s jacket was on the floor next to his trash can. Probably covering dust.

Scenery passed by, dark and hardly visible, but it was Eren’s only source of entertainment. He was still too groggy to hold a coherent conversation, and Carla didn’t bother. She’d only get grunts as answers anyway. Still, despite the darkness, Eren could still make out some of the familiar landmarks.

It wasn’t until they pulled up into a driveway that Eren actually began to realize why the drive had been so familiar.

This wasn’t his school.

“Mom-”

But he cut himself off, not sure how to form the words he was thinking. The questions. Carla stopped the car and gestured towards the door encouragingly.

“I hope you enjoy your weekend.” She winked.

Eren glanced out the window and then back to his mother, jaw dropped and silent. Carla gestured again, and Eren mindlessly opened the door.

Step by step. Up to great double doors. Frozen fingers faltered there though.

Thankfully, his mother understood his need, and honked her horn loudly a couple times before
driving off. One of the doors opened, but Eren couldn’t see who’d opened it. His eyes had flitted past them. Their greeting flew over his head. Nothing to get to him. Nothing could distract him now. Tired eyes brightened considerable as they met his own.

Levi leaned against the railing of the stair case, a suitcase set next to his feet. Stoic lips twitched into one of his rare genuine smiles.

Eren’s breath caught in his throat, the air seeming to have disappeared from his lungs. The very sight of Levi alone overwhelmed him, and the added emotional baggage only weighed him down more. The image blurred, but Eren had no energy to spare on wiping away tears.

“Eren.” The voice wrapped around him, pulling him closer. Levi took his own steps forward. “I-”

No more words.

They weren’t necessary now.

Eren shot forward, feeling his feet and body move of its own accord until finally, the only thing he could feel was Levi’s body against his own. Lips smashed together roughly, refusing to pull away even a fraction. Hands roamed, gripped, pulled.

There was nothing more to say.

The world around him became muddled and faded away. All that mattered was touching, kissing, grabbing, hands, lips, legs, sheets, bed, now.

Their bodies moved together, despite the fatigue, despite the distortion. It was irrelevant. They didn’t need thought. Just emotion.


How long they went for, neither of them knew. They were together, and for the moment, that’s all they cared about. All that mattered.

For the first time in a month, Levi held Eren close, arms in a tight lock around his shoulders. His breath warmed the top of Eren’s head and the smell of Levi filled Eren’s nose. It was more comforting than Eren wanted.

This wasn’t supposed to happen.

He nuzzled Levi’s chest, hiding his face as small twinges of guilt tickled his throat.

“Damn it…”
Disorientation was the first thing Eren noticed.

This wasn’t his bed.

This wasn’t his room.

Where was he?

What had happened last night?

Eren shifted, the soft silk pillows smooth against his bare skin. The heavy down comforter weighted him down and surrounded him with a sense of safety. And once Eren turned his head, a flood of bright morning light bouncing off freshly fallen snow blinded and warmed him despite the chilly air. He blinked slowly, pushing himself up a bit more to get a better look.

And memories rushed him.

He was in Levi’s room.

A strange sense of nostalgia he felt like he shouldn’t have overwhelmed him. Lying in Levi’s bed, the sun sneaking through, water from the shower created a swirl of billowing steam that seeped through the bathroom door. And for a moment, it was like nothing had changed. Like nothing from the past month had ever happened.

Because here he was. Back in Levi’s arms (or bed rather since Levi was in the shower) and somehow fallen back into a simple morning routine.

Levi always did wake up earlier than him.

And for that moment, Eren relished. No Edith. No fight. No Francis. No plan. Just warm sheets, snow, and a soon to be freshly cleaned Levi. Couldn’t he just stay like this forever? Forget about anything else and pretend everything was back to normal?

Reality crashed onto him and Eren fell back against the bed.
Rolling over onto his back, Eren caught sight of the mess of clothes still littering the floor. Strange how it hadn’t been picked up yet, but regardless, Eren groaned when he saw them.

He hadn’t meant to sleep with Levi.

It was just… a result of overloading emotions at finally seeing Levi again, he supposed. Although, he didn’t really know what he’d meant to do. He had no idea that Levi and Francis would be back last night, so he had no idea what he would do if he saw them. He’d fantasized that he’d go all out and cuss them out when they got back more than once. Yell and scream at them until they saw the error of their ways. Not like that would be a very plausible outcome. Yelling and screaming would always be satisfying, but it would probably only make Francis that much more disdainful about Eren.

Oh why did his mom surprise him like this! Why did she think that all Eren wanted was to see Levi again? He had no idea what he would say! What he would do? Would he still yell at Levi? Would he just forgive Levi and forgo his whole, carefully thought out plan?

No… No he couldn’t do that. It was too late to turn back now.

The water from the shower stopped, and Eren could hear Levi drying himself off and dressing.

Quickly, so as not to see him, Eren turned back on his side, facing as much as he could away from the bathroom entrance. For an added measure, Eren pulled up the covers up to his chin, piling them up high so he was still hidden from sight.

Footsteps sounded, and Eren’s heart beat faster with each one.

He hadn’t planned for this… He didn’t know what to say…

The bed dipped behind him and a hand pressed down on his shoulder through the mound of blankets.

“Eren,” a smooth and deep voice that was too heavenly at the moment called gently.

But Eren pulled the comforter all the way over his head, curling in on himself and away from Levi.

He wasn’t ready for this.

Levi didn’t seem to sense his distress, however, as he chuckled and attempted to pry Eren apart.

“A little cold this morning, huh?”

Maybe not in the way Levi thought…

Eren once again, refused to answer.

Hands stilled, and Levi opted for just sitting next to Eren, enjoying the company of another person there.

“I have to say,” he began. “It’s nice to finally get to see you again. Even if you’ve covered yourself up. And I know it wasn’t three weeks like you wanted, but we did finish two weeks earlier than we thought, so there’s that.”

The hand on Eren’s shoulder began to soothingly move up and down, following where Levi supposed Eren’s shoulder was.
There was a moment of silence. Levi was probably hoping that would coax Eren into talking, but it wasn’t happening. No words were coming to him, and Eren wasn’t really sure where he wanted to take this yet. Not quite sure what to do…

Levi sighed, disappointed at the lack of responses, but continued on. “You might not be happy when I tell you this, but I practically worked myself to the bone to get back here sooner. Really, we shouldn’t have even bothered to get a hotel room since we spent most of our nights in the conference room, but we did get some fairly nice gifts there. I even got a few things for you too.”

Nope. Not even the prospect of presents would get Eren to come out.

Another sigh. “Well, if you ever feel like coming out, I’ll be getting breakfast downstairs.”

The bed bounced back up, and the hand slid off leaving a cold spot where it had been. The footsteps got farther and farther away, and Eren shot up, the covers thrown off his chest. He shivered in the cold breeze of the room, but his anger was quickly warming him back up.

“Are you kidding me?”

Levi stopped short of the door then twisted around on his heel. Looking back at Eren in mild surprise and confusion.

“Excuse me?”

“Is that all you have to say to me?” Eren gasped. “Great to see ya, I worked hard, oh and I got you presents?! That’s it??!”

Levi narrowed his eyes, crossing his arms over his chest. “Well what do you want me to say? You weren’t exactly joining in the conversation.”

“How about an apology?” Eren offered, glaring as hard as he could. “Or do they not do that in China?”

Levi’s eyes widened and he took a moment to process what Eren had said. “An apology? For what? Working my ass off to see you again?” Was Eren that mad at him for working so hard?

Eren growled. “How about for ignoring me!”

Oh. That was why he was mad.

“I wasn’t ignoring you,” Levi explained carefully, but annoyance snuck in. Eren was acting childish about all this.

Eren, on the other hand, did nothing to stop the onslaught of emotions. His hands gestured wildly just to relieve some of that pent up energy. “Oh, so I suppose 200 missed calls is just your way of saying you had it on silent the whole time?”

“Eren, you knew how busy I was! I told you beforehand that I wouldn’t have time to call or text.”

“You couldn’t spend five fucking minutes listening to me? Out of four fucking weeks you couldn’t spare five fucking minutes?!” Tears of anger began blurring Eren’s vision.

The dams of Levi’s emotions began cracking, and quickly, from the thought that Eren would take this so personally. Couldn’t he try to understand this from Levi’s point of view?

“I was trying to fix the problem and get back home quickly! Did you want me to stay for the full
six weeks?!

“If it meant you would answer one goddamn call! Yes! I’m not like you, Levi! I can’t ignore everyone I know just so I can work on some stupid company!”

“That ‘stupid company’ happens to be the reason I’m here with you to begin with! I don’t understand why you’re taking this so seriously! I work hard for this family, for our future, for you! If I didn’t bother taking care of it in favor for frivolous conversations with my friends, then there would be no company.”

“You know, if your company is so fragile that five fucking minutes will destroy it, then it doesn’t seem like a very good company!”

Levi took a deep breath, pinching the bridge of his nose while closing his eyes to calm himself down. “Eren, I don’t expect you to understand since you decided not to go into business, but you need to trust me when I say that I just didn’t have the time to talk to you then.”

“But you won’t trust me?”

Levi opened his eyes slowly, dragging them up to meet Eren’s only to find him looking at the comforter. The material sliding under his fingertips. Levi’s voice softened. “Eren, what makes you think I don’t trust you?”

Eren held no emotion. “Because apparently it’s more probable that I would call you 200 times just to fuck up your company than it is that it was probably something important.”

Numbly, Eren threw the sheets off and reached down for his underwear.

Levi’s body slackened, the fight over. “What are you doing?” he asked, tired all of a sudden.

“Getting dressed,” a monotone voice said. “What does it look like?”

“In your clothes from yesterday?” Levi shook his head. What was Eren thinking?

Eren avoided the question. “How bad are the roads do you think?”

Oh no. “Eren, you are not leaving.”

“Oh,” Eren finally made eye contact with Levi, but he was all sarcasm. “But… what if I take up too much of your time and your company implodes on itself? We wouldn’t want that.”

Levi deadpanned, his arms returning to their crossed position across his chest. “Talk to me.”

Eren slipped his shirt on and went back to evading Levi’s gaze. “About what? I have nothing to say to you.”

“What about whatever you were calling me 200 times for? I wasn’t available then, but I am now. And I’m all ears.” But Eren wouldn’t say anything. Levi tried again. “Come on, you said that it was important, so what is it.” Nothing, again. Levi reached out for Eren’s arm, turning him back around. “Eren-!”

“It wasn’t important,” Eren’s dull voice cut Levi off. “Just forget it.”

He was lying. Levi could tell. “Are you sure?”

“Yes.” Eren broke free, grabbing his phone and keys from the nightstand and headed for the door.
His hand was on the door knob when Levi called out.

“Eren.”

The hand paused, but Eren didn’t turn around. “What?”

“If it really was something important, you’d tell me right?” Eren always told Levi what was wrong. Eren didn’t like hiding something from Levi. They trusted each other. Right?

Eren’s head twisted around, oddly serious.

“Of course.”

The door slammed shut.

Eren slammed the door of his dorm room shut, nearly giving Armin a heart attack.

“Eren!” he cried, clutching the area over his heart. “What was-”

“I don’t know what I expected!” Eren interrupted, most likely not even registering that Armin had said anything at all.

“Expected?” Armin ventured carefully. He took small steps over to Eren. “Expected what?”

“Levi! That asshole! That complete, insensitive asshole!” Eren threw his phone and keys off to the side before plunging face first into his (much harder than Levi’s) bed and screamed into the pillow.

Armin pulled up a chair next to Eren’s bed. “Levi? Is he back?”

“Yes!” Eren cried, sitting up so he wasn’t talking into the pillow. “And…”

“And…?”

Eren shoulders dropped, the anger burning off and leaving behind only emptiness. “And he yelled at me for not understanding how vital his company was… He… he didn’t even think he needed to say sorry for ignoring me…”

Armin shook his head. Figures. But he still needed to console his friend. “Um… well… and I’m not trying to say he’s right or anything, but from his perspective… maybe he wasn’t trying to ignore you…?” Would that help?

“But he did!” Eren flopped onto his back, letting his head rest against his pillow. “And he doesn’t understand why it hurts! He doesn’t understand how it feels…”

“Eren…” Armin’s heart was breaking for his friend.

“I’m not sure what I expected… no matter what happens… no matter how much we hang out or… how long we’re married… he’ll always love his company more than he does me.” It was time he accepted that now. It’s not like it would get any better in the future.

Now hold on… Armin gasped. “You can’t really think that… Erwin said that Levi’s never been
this cheerful or motivated in his work before you. You’ve shaped his life more than you think!”

Whether Levi or Eren knew this or not, Levi definitely loved Eren more than either of his companies.

“But the company is his life. And I just can’t compete with that.”

“He’ll come around…”

Eren scoffed. “What makes you say that?”

Armin glared, and punched his friend on the shoulder. “Because you guys have a level of trust I
never thought existed… especially after Annie. I want to believe that trust will survive!”

Eren rubbed at the spot Armin punched, grimacing. “Not if he’s busy fussing over his stupid company.”

Huffing, Armin moved from the chair to Eren’s bed and shoving him. He was done playing nice in
this stupid game of theirs.

“Then change his mind.”

“Levi?” Genevieve tapped the table space in between her and Levi, as it was too far for her to hold
Levi’s hand. She tilted her head in worry. “What’s wrong? You’ve hardly touched your food.”

True to what Genevieve said, Levi’s plate was full but untouched save for Levi’s halfhearted
pokes. His brow furrowed in concentration as he tried to best sum up the situation in his head.

“Eren’s mad at me,” he eventually said. “No… he was livid when he woke up.”

“Is that why he stormed out earlier?” Carlton asked, looking put out. “He didn’t even get
breakfast…”

“He didn’t seem all that angry last night,” Francis commented dryly. He seemed to care more
about cutting his food than the conversation.

Levi didn’t take notice. “That’s what I thought, too. But this morning he just exploded on me. I’ve
seen him worse, sure, but…” But somehow this fight didn’t seem to compare. There was
something else about it…

“What was he so angry about?” Genevieve inquired, forgetting about her own food.

“That I wouldn’t talk to him while I was in China.”

“Oh for fuck’s sake!” Now Francis cared.

Levi dropped his fork, but kept his eyes down as he tried to make sense of everything. “I mean,
sure I would have loved to talk to him, but I didn’t have the time! He somehow seems to think I
didn’t miss him or care while I was over there. All because I wouldn’t talk to him for five
minutes.”

And now he was starting to think maybe it was a bigger issue than he originally thought…

Carlton and Genevieve shared a look.
“He… just wanted to talk?” they asked slowly.

Levi didn’t comment on their synchronization. “Well, he called me nearly two hundred times, but he said it was nothing important.”

Francis grunted his annoyance. “If he can’t handle waiting until you’re finished working just to talk, then I can’t see him being very-”

“Oh shush,” Genevieve cut off, smacking his shoulder. Francis rubbed the spot and glared at her.

“Is that what’s bothering you?” Carlton asked.

Little thoughts tickled the back of his mind. Little thoughts that had begun their gnawing after Eren had left.

Levi scratched at the table in a vain attempt to dull the nuisance. “It’s more than that… There’s just… There are just some things that he said that I can’t get out of my head.”

“Like?”

Levi bit his cheek. Did he dare? With his grandfather right there? Listening intently to every word spoke now?

“… Do I spend too much time working?”

Genevieve made a face while Carlton scratched the back of his head and avoided eye contact.

“Well…”

“What the hell would make you think that?” Francis bellowed as he jeered without amusement.

Well… he asked, so Levi couldn’t be blamed for his response right?

“It’s something I always here from other people. My friends, my coworkers… Eren. They all say something similar, and,” Levi cut off Francis by holding up a hand, knowing exactly what he was going to say, “I know I have two companies to manage and that owning two companies is a lot of work. But I just… I… like spending time with Eren. And he likes spending time with me. In fact, he’s always trying to get me to hang out with him, even if it’s just to have a snack, and yet every time he does it feels like I have to turn him down because I’m working or going to work or I’m too tired from work.”

“You two spent quite a bit of time together before you left, if I’m correct,” Francis pointed out in a gruff voice. “You kept put off telling Eren about the trip just so you could spend a few silly weekends with him.”

“Exactly! I actually had to put off telling Eren about this huge trip just because I knew it was the only way you’d ever allow me to spend even one weekend with him.”

“So that was a conscious decision-”

“Alright!” Genevieve slammed her fist on the table, effectively silencing the two as she waved her fork at them. “If you two want to fight, do it after breakfast. Levi, eat your food. Francis, shut up.”

A few minutes of silence passed as the table reluctantly returned to eating.

Save for Levi.
He sighed deeply, and looked over as Genevieve. “… What do you think?” he asked quietly.

“Why ask her opinion?” Francis mumbled, glaring at his horrible wife. “She doesn’t understand business.”

She glared right back.

“Perhaps not,” she directed at Francis before softening her voice and turning to Levi, “but I do understand that you have to balance your time. You and Eren aren’t like Francis and I. For one, you actually like each other and actually enjoy spending time together. So you can’t do what Francis and I did. You can’t lock yourself away in your study for hours on end and expect Eren to simply entertain himself each time you do. You’ll have to spend a little time working and a little time with Eren.” Genevieve smiled knowingly. “Even if it means taking five minutes out of a month away just to say hi.”

“What the hell kind of shit are you spouting?” Francis blew up. “It was an emergency! You don’t know what that five minutes could have done!”

Genevieve growled to herself, and years of angry regret became visible in her eyes. “… Or… you can let your grandfather give you marriage advice. Because, you know, his worked out so well.”

Francis pointed his fork at her, hand shaking lightly, before he commented, “I thought you said no fighting at the table.”

“Hmm… then maybe you should shut up?”

Levi huffed out a quiet laugh at his bickering grandparents. If there was one thing he knew for sure in this situation, it was that he didn’t want to become his grandparents. The thought of fighting with Eren all the time, not unlike when they first met, was both exhausting and almost unbearable to think about.

His hunger still evading him, Levi decided now was a good time to leave. He still had to pick up the mess in his room, no thanks to his and Eren’s shenanigans last night.

Hopefully it wouldn’t be the last.

Since Eren had, disgustingly, put on his clothes from yesterday, there really wasn’t much of a mess to be cleaned. Just tossing some clothes in the hamper and remaking the bed with clean sheets. But it was just the kind of mindless and simple work that gave Levi a chance to think. About what his grandparents had said, their advice, and the choice words Eren had given him. Because perhaps…

Perhaps Eren had been right.

In the moment, spending time to talk about something not related to the crisis seemed like a waste of precious time. He could blame it on whatever he wanted: sleep deprivation, stress, hunger, ect. But looking back, no matter how he tried to spin it…

Levi had been a major dick.

What he did to Eren was exactly what Francis would have done regardless of who it was. And wasn’t he just saying how he didn’t want to become like his grandparents? How he didn’t want to fight with Eren?

And the more he thought back to that short conversation, the worse he felt. He hadn’t even let Eren speak. The entire conversation was probably five minutes. Five minutes he could have spent
listening to his future husband rather than yelling at him and letting Francis yell too. He tried so hard to get their attention too. So panicked and begging… after calling two… hundred times…

Why… would he call two hundred times and sound that panicked over the phone…?

Knock, knock.

Levi jumped out of his thoughts as Carlton pushed open the door slowly, poking his head in.

“Hey.”

Levi nodded in greeting, gesturing for Carlton to come in. “Hey.”

Carlton, with permission granted, closed the door on his way in and sat down on the couch in Levi’s room. He patted the seat next to him as an invitation.

Levi took it.

“How ya feelin’?”

“Like a dick,” Levi sighed out. “I can’t believe I actually ignored Eren for weeks and then had the gall to insist I wasn’t ignoring him. No wonder he’s so fucking mad at me…”

Carlton’s hand hovered over Levi for a moment, debating whether or not to initiate touch, before deciding against it. “Do you remember the first fight you and Eren had? The one in the ballroom?”

Levi smiled fondly at the memory. What a terrible fight that had been. “How could I forget?”

“When I walked in on that, I was so sure the marriage was off, that it would never work. I remember you telling me that you’d never marry him. How you wanted him gone or burning in hell. For a while I was actually certain you were going to send him there yourself too, with how mad you were. And yet… the next day I find you two cuddling under a tree in the backyard.”

“I certainly remember that too.” Fucking Hamlet.

Carlton chuckled at the memory himself. “Eren may be mad now, but you two have the ability to understand and forgive. So I know you two will be fine.”

He… was right. Levi may have to do some serious apologizing, but as long as there’s mud to clean and paninis to eat, they’d be find.

Figuratively, of course.

Levi didn’t want to clean up mud every time they fought.

Carlton smiled, and Levi returned it with one of his own. A genuine smile.

“Thanks.”

Carlton felt a bubble of pride in his chest, happy that he could help. But that wasn’t all he had to say. “I… know you don’t really see me as a father, and I’m not very good at being a father. But I know what it’s like to live under my father’s rules and expectations, and I need you to know this. Whatever you decide to do, don’t let Francis take charge of your relationship with Eren. He did the same thing with Edith and I, and look how that turned out. A divorce, lawsuit, restraining order, countless attacks, and now stalking and confrontations with Eren.”
“What?!”

Levi shot up, pieces clicking together.

Two hundred calls.

Panicked begging.

Edith was stalking Eren! And she was making contact with him!

Carlton stood as well. “Which… is what Eren was trying to call you about while you were in China.”

“Oh… oh no… oh my god. Why did I-? That’s why he-! But then why would he-?” Levi couldn’t voice his thoughts as fast as he thought them. “Fuck! I am such an idiot! But how could he keep something like that from me?! God damn it! Eren… I have to find Eren!”

Levi raced over to the nightstand and snatched his keys. Checking his pocket to make sure he had his phone, he paused, sparing a glance over to Carlton.

Carlton jerked his head towards the door. “Go. My mother and I will tell Francis.”

Levi dashed out without another word. He startled maids, pushed past his grandparents, and nearly crashed his car trying to get out. But he couldn’t care.

He didn’t have time to care.

There was no telling what crazy nonsense Edith would feed to Eren, what insane plan she had to win his trust and turn him against Levi. And he’d only made it easier. If he didn’t get to Eren in time… apologize in time…

He had to find Eren.

Change his mind, huh? Well, Eren was already trying to do that, though actually succeeding would be much harder.

Levi spent his entire life being raised on that company, being raised for that company. The company was groomed into his very being, no thanks to Francis. Francis had built that company from the ground up, and the only way he could pass it off to someone he could trust was by building that someone from the ground up as well. In Francis’s eyes, Levi was made purely for the company.

And now, Levi was following right into the footsteps Francis had carved out for him years before Levi even knew how to walk. Francis’s plan was working just like he’d expected.

There was just one mistake he’d made along the way.

Underestimating Eren.

It was a mistake they all made, actually. Assuming that inexperienced, non-business major Eren could be ignored and exchanged.

Even Levi…
But this is where it all changed. Their misjudgments would be their end.

Once… Eren’s plans were back in action…

The wind felt colder than it had in months, stinging against any bare skin and slapping snow into his face. A little less than a foot of snow blanketed the ground, and very few walkways had been shoveled. Even so, Eren wandered the campus as he decided where to go.

If Levi were to go after him, his dorm would be the first place he’d look. Same with someplace like the movie theater or one of his friend’s dorms. And as much as Eren wanted Levi to follow, he also didn’t really want to be found. He had no idea what he would do if he was found, especially if Levi had been the one to find him.

What would their meeting be? Especially after their confrontation earlier that morning…

Tires squealed, and Eren jumped back as the car next to him came to a screeching halt. The door flew open, and Edith gestured for Eren to get it. Her sunglasses made it difficult to read her expression.

Eren glanced around wildly.

There was no one else in sight.

Pulling out his phone, Eren shot a quick text before climbing in. His phone stayed out, however.

“ Took your sweet time, didn’t you?” Edith grumbled. “Letting all the cold in like that… Who were you texting?” The suspicion in her voice was unnerving.

“Just my roommate,” Eren answered, shrugging. “I let him know I’d be late for lunch and not to worry.”

“You’ll be more than late,” Edith commented dryly. She nodded towards her chauffeur. “Drive.”

More than late? Eren’s brow scrunched in cautious curiosity. “Why? Where are we going? And what makes you think you can just drag me wherever after disappearing for a week?” Did this woman think she owned Eren or something?

Edith relaxed back into her seat, crossing her legs and letting an arm rest across the back. She gave off an aura of nonchalant, but beneath that Eren could sense fidgety excitement. “I don’t like making decisions unless I have an absolute certain opinion on it, Eren. I was thinking about some of the things you said, but with Levi back so soon, I had to take a chance.”

Well this wasn’t making sense to Eren. He shook his head, trying to understand. “What? What does Levi being back have to do with anything?”

Edith let out a soft, exasperated sigh, but continued on. Explaining slowly, she said, “Levi being back means my window of opportunity for this plan is closing, and quick. And like I said, that’s forcing me to take a chance.”

Eren felt his body move closer to the door. “What chance?”

Edith sat up. The nonchalant fading away, as she leaned forward and pushed her sunglasses up atop her head. She gave a wicked grin.

“I can get you out of that marriage, Eren.”
At first, Eren wasn’t sure what he’d heard, but when he knew he almost couldn’t believe it. Get him out of the marriage? Something he’d hated since he first understood what it meant?

Something he’d been dying to hear his whole life?

“Wh… what?”

Edith’s giggle sounded like a witch cackling.

“Follow my lead, and we can all end up happy. You’ll pretend to be my hostage. Levi, thinking you love him and vice versa, will not only hand over the fortune but will also join me and become my son again. With Levi no longer being the heir, your marriage contract will fall apart. You’ll be paid handsomely for your help, of course. Just a fraction of that fortune will leave you wanting nothing for the rest of your life. If you want, you can then leave and we’ll never speak again. Or, you can continue to marry Levi and relish in the riches of two highly successful families. You’d live a life far grander than any king that’s ever lived. What do you say?”

This was it.

The plan Edith had planned since her first encounter with Eren.

A way out of the marriage…

Eren swallowed hard. “I was right… There was a plan.”

“Eren…” Edith crooned. “Think about what you’ll get from this. The riches, the freedom. You’ll never have to hear another one of Francis’s insults or orders again. The benefits far outweigh the losses here.”

Her grin was as wide as ever, but Eren couldn’t bring himself to look at her.

“What of the company…?” he asked quietly. “The company Levi is supposed to inherit?”

“Francis will have to find himself a new heir.” Edith outright laughed at that. Then she let her hand rest on his shoulder.

The same spot Levi’s hand had been not hours before…

“Just think Eren…” Her voice was wispy with delight. “All the money you’d ever need in life and more… Francis finally falling and paying for everything he’s done… Levi, to have or do with as you please.”

And a plan that couldn’t possibly fail now.

The first place Levi was going to check would be Eren’s dorm. It was where he lived, after all, and therefore would probably be a place of comfort for him. Plus his best friend lived there too, so he would also have someone to talk to.

Still, he called Eren’s mother on the way. And his father… and his sister… and his professors… and even the coffee shop Eren liked to frequent while he wrote.

Levi left no stone unturned.
Without telling them too much about what was happening. No need for widespread panic.

He’d just gotten off the phone with the last of Eren’s professors when he pulled up to Eren’s dorm. Thankfully, there wasn’t much trouble in getting up to there. He assumed that other students were sending him strange and curious looks, but like hell if Levi cared at the moment. All he cared about was that Eren was safe and away from Edith.

When he reached Eren’s door, Levi had to restrain himself from banging on it or even breaking it down.

A simple knock would have to do.

Armin answered in no time.

“Levi?!”

“Please,” Levi sounded out of breath, but he wasn’t exactly sure where it went. “Please tell me Eren is in there.”

Armin crossed his arms, looking a little more than peeved. “Why should I?”

And as much as Levi felt awful about how he acted, he was not about to play a game of back and forth with Armin. Eren was in trouble.

“I know, I get it. I was a dick. I ignored Eren when he had something important to tell me, and worst of all I refused to acknowledge it when he confronted me about it. I should have trusted him and understood that it would be extremely fucking illogical for Eren to call me two hundred times and not have it be important. I know that. But right now, my crazy ass mother is out there stalking him and filling his head with lies to get him to go along with whatever plan she has, and he could get very hurt. Please. I need to know that he’s safe.”

Armin considered Levi for a moment with scrutinizing eyes, but soon let him in with a nod of his head. Levi, beyond grateful and planning to get a nice present for Armin later, slipped inside.

And frowned.

“Where is he?”

In a small room like this, there was no way he was hiding…

Armin shut the door and leaned against it, blocking the exit.

“I was there, you know,” he started, his voice small. “I was there when you hung up on him. He had an episode from it.”

Levi’s heart dropped. “Ah shit…”

“And when he came back this morning, he was practically swearing on his life that you loved your company more than him.”

“That’s not-” Levi started, but he stopped himself. “I… can see where he’d think that…”

Armin met Levi’s gaze, growing in confidence with every word. “Eren puts a lot of faith and trust in you, Levi. More than he’s willing to admit while fully conscious. Eren and the rest of our friends always tell me how they’ll beat up Erwin if he ever hurts me. They’re always there to protect me and now it’s my turn, so you’d better listen carefully. When you find Eren, I don’t want you to
apologize. I want you to grovel.”

Now that was a good friend.

Levi nodded. “I give you my word. Then we can figure out this whole Edith mess together.”

“If you don’t I’ll find you and make you pay, understand?” Armin warned, looking for any hint that Levi might be lying.

He gave none. “I understand.”

Armin bit his lip, and sighed. “… As far as I know, he’s out wandering the campus avoiding you. Just head back home. He knows this campus like the back of his hand and could easily lose you. And Edith too. I’ll let you know when he comes back so I can watch you grovel. He could be out for a while.”

Levi nodded again in understanding, not exactly happy about leaving Eren to fend for himself. But if Armin was right, then Eren could get away.

He just hoped Eren would run away.

As he was headed for the door, however Levi caught sight of something. Picking it up, he asked Armin, “Does Eren own a coat?”

Armin, a little taken back by the question responded with, “Huh? Uh… I think.”

“Does he use it?”

A small laugh. “Not really.”

Levi rolled the jacket up, his jacket, to take it with him. “Then if I happen to run into him on my way out, I’m wrapping him in this. That idiot…”

Unfortunately, Levi did not run into Eren on his way out, but he didn’t really expect that he would. Eren tended to stay angry for a long time, so he would probably be out for a while seething. Which he had a right to do. It just… didn’t help with Levi’s nerves.

Or Francis’s.

“Stop pacing already,” he grumbled, tired of watching Levi wearing down the floor in the living room. “It’s unbecoming.”

Levi continued to pace in front of the fire. “I haven’t heard anything yet, which means I don’t know if he’s okay or not. It’s unsettling.”

“Look, if Eren had even the tiniest shred of intelligence, he would know to stay away from Edith,” Francis grunted, not exactly thrilled at having to comfort his grandson about this. “Hopefully,” he added under his breath.

“Maybe after all this is over I’ll take Eren to the beach or something…” Levi thought out loud.

“And miss work?”
“Yes!” Levi snapped, his nerves on fire. “And miss work! It’s our fault that Eren’s in danger right now and refuses to be found so the least I can do is miss one fucking weekend of work to take him to the beach!”

“And maybe when all this is over I’ll knock some sense into that brat,” Francis muttered to himself, but continued speaking to keep Levi from commenting on it. “Now come on, we have to fix the books to account for that whole China fiasco.” He stood, but Genevieve entering the room made him stop in his tracks.

“Not now, you won’t,” she said, blocking his path. A piece of paper was wedged in her hands.

“And why not?” Francis challenged, eyeing the paper.

“Because we have a bigger problem,” Genevieve challenged right back.

Francis waited, but after a few moments said, “Well? Are you going to tell us?”

“That’s a transcript of the phone call we just received.”

Genevieve held out the paper for Francis to see. Francis ripped the paper from her hands, and Levi paced his way over to see as well. They skimmed the sheet, recognition slowly showing on their faces. Still, Genevieve gave a condensed version for them:

“Edith has taken Eren hostage and is demanding Levi and the fortune in return for his safety.”


Francis merely shoved the paper back at Genevieve

“Then she’s going to be very disappointed,” he stated, before stepping around Genevieve and heading towards the hallway towards his study.


“What do you mean?”

Francis paused only to turn around and say, “I mean, I’m not biting. She can keep him. Levi, let’s get these books finished.” He gestured for Levi to follow and began walking again.

“Are you serious?!” Levi yelled, shocking both his grandparents.

Francis paused again. “Why… would I not be?”

Levi gasped incredulously. “Why would you not be? He’s my fucking fiancé! He’s a crucial part of a deal you made! And you’re not going to do anything?!”

The shock had quickly worn off, and Francis was left with stern frustration. What little patience he had was almost out. “That boy has been far more trouble than I care to handle, and truth be told I should have gotten rid of him the moment I met him. The deal is off, and so is the marriage. He’s on his own.”

Levi wouldn’t let up, though. “It’s our fault he’s in this mess to begin with! We have to get him out!”

And the patience was gone. “I am not going to jeopardize my company and your future for some idiotic brat who can’t even keep himself out of trouble! He’s uncouth, disrespectful, inconsiderate,
and just plain stupid! Levi! If you’re going to run my company, you need to surround yourself with
the right people. *Eren. Is not. One of them.*

“So we’re just going to leave him. That’s it? Years of preparation, gone? Eren…”

Sensing the weak moment in Levi’s rebuttal, Francis lowered his voice. He guided Levi to the
hallway and towards the study as he spoke. “Levi. Listen to me. I know what I’m doing. This is for
the good of the company and you. Trust me. Now let’s go.”

By the time Francis was finished, they’d reached the study. Francis ushered Levi inside, but
Genevieve pulled Francis away and back into the hallway.

She spoke quietly. “Francis… What about-”

“The bet?” Victory gave Francis confidence, and he spoke with a condescending inclination.
“Over. I’m not going to forfeit everything I’ve ever worked for. Not for him. And certainly not for
some silly little bet. He’s gone. Get over it.”

“Francis-”

“Enough!” Francis’s voice bellowed through the hallway. “He’s gone, and he’s never coming
back! That’s the end of it!”

“No.”

Francis and Genevieve jumped, not realizing Levi had left the study.

“Levi? What are you…?” Francis shook his head, getting back on track. “Get back in the study!
We have work to do!”

Levi shrugged, uninterested. “No.”

“Levi, you-”

“You do know that I have access to the fortune, right?” Levi asked offhandedly.

“Huh?”

Levi continued. “Legally it’s actually mine. I can do whatever I want with it.”

Recognition flooded Francis. “Levi… You aren’t actually thinking…”

Deathly serious, Levi stood his ground. “I am.”

For the first time in a long time, Francis’s face turned red with anger. “No. I forbid it! You will not
get involved in this!”

“Oh what?” Levi growled. He was done playing. “What are you going to do to me? Disown me?
Cut me off? *Ground* me? I am the sole heir to your precious company, and without me it won’t
stand a chance in the future. It won’t even have a future. I’m almost 28 years old, built a billion
dollar company from the ground up, and have the largest inheritance the business world has ever
seen. If you think I won’t cut myself off from you to save my fiancé, then you’ve underestimated
me.”

Francis glanced around, searching for something… anything to say. “You’d throw away everything
you’ve ever worked for just for him?”
Levi stood tall, feet firmly on the ground. More sure about this than anything he’d ever felt before. And more sure that he should have said this much earlier.

“Yes, because I love him. With my entire being. He’s everything to me.”

Francis clenched his fists. There had to be something… something he could say… “Levi, this company—”

“Is more replaceable than you care to admit! There are millions of companies and there will be millions more! But there’s only one Eren, and I’m not losing him. So you can either help me find a way to save him, or you can lose your company’s future. It’s up to you.”

Nothing more. Francis could say no more. This was his ultimatum. Levi was no longer his perfect child. The perfect successor.

Now he was just Levi.

Francis shook his head, resigning himself. “… I should never have accepted that deal.” Levi opened his mouth to retort but Francis beat him to it, sending his a weak glare. “You’d better have a good idea.”

And then he pushed past Levi and into the study.

Levi felt his heart hammering in his chest. Standing up to his grandfather, the man who raised him, had been no easy task. But it had been a necessary task. Eren’s fate rested with it, and if Levi knew anything, it was that Eren was worth it.

Genevieve hugged Levi, squeezing him tight.

“Oh… you have no idea how proud I am of you right now…” she whispered, either to keep Francis from hearing or because she was so overwhelmed with what Levi had done. Maybe it was both.

Levi hugged her back. “Hmm… thanks…” But she wasn’t getting off easy either. “You do know that once this is all over you’re going to have to explain this whole “bet” thing to me right?”

Genevieve chuckled, guilty. “Only after we get Eren back.”

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Hours passed. Plans of attacks were announced, dissected, and eventually thrown out. They had less than twenty four hours to rescue Eren without giving up Levi or the fortune while keeping the press out of the way.

Even with the entire Voclain family using their heads, nothing was working.

And even worse, all Levi could think about was Eren and whether or not he was alright and what kind of conditions he was in. Where was that woman keeping him? Was he hurt? Was she feeding him? Was he scared? Levi’s hand tightened its hold on his jacket. Was he cold? Would Eren even be happy to see him if they managed to save him?

A knock at the door startled all four of them.

“Come in,” Francis ordered gruffly, hiding the slight embarrassment of getting startled.

A maid stepped in the room.
“You have a phone call.”

Francis groaned. “It’s probably Edith… Alright, transfer the call in here. I’ll deal with it.”

“They’re asking for Levi.”

A moment of silence passed, and all eyes were all Levi. He sighed, heading for the phone.

“Let’s see what the bitch wants…”
Bracing himself, Levi reached for the phone. Thoughts raced through his head, phrases he just couldn’t wait to scream at Edith, but he took a deep breath a calmed those words down. He’d have plenty of choice words for her, but only after he saw her rotting in jail for this.

The cold plastic against his cheek sent shivers through his body.

“Levi speaking.”

Francis, Genevieve, and Carlton kept their eyes locked on Levi’s form. Watching his facial expression for any change that could indicate what was happening. They couldn’t hear anything besides the muffled noise indicating someone speaking on the other end, but they assumed it was Edith. No one else who knew Levi called him on the landline after all.

Suddenly, Levi’s countenance shifted. Brows furrowed, lips downturned, shoulders sagging. The rest of them shifted into stiffer stances. Holding their breath. What happened?

“Wait…” Levi finally spoke. “What do you mean Eren is at airport security?”

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**Earlier that day…**

“What will you say to him?”

Edith paused in her giddy triumph. She’d expected that Eren would agree with her plan without a second thought, so his question threw her off. “What?”

Eren wasn’t looking at her, rather his eyes remained focused on the seat in front of him. His voice was soft. “Levi. If I go along with what you want… if it works… What will you say to him if you
see him?”

Edith almost laughed. “Why does that matter?” What a strange question to ask her. All that mattered was getting Levi, after all.

“Just answer my question!” Eren demanded, much more forceful now. “What will you say to him?”

Edith supposed that she could humor him. She leaned back on the car seat as she thought. “Oh… I don’t know! I… I suppose… I’ll have to explain to him how all of this will work. The general situation, the money, his house, you. But, most importantly I’ll have to try and explain to him why I did all of this and get him to understand why I did all of this. Happy?”

But Eren didn’t look happy. He looked thoughtful. Then pissed.

“Stop the car,” he ordered.

Edith scoffed, thinking he was joking. “Excuse me?”

“I said stop the car!” Eren yanked hard on the driver’s shoulder, causing the young man up front to slam on the brakes. The car swerved and skidded over the ice, but soon came to a stop on the shoulder of the road.

Eren fumbled with the lock for a moment before falling out door and into the unmarked snow. Steadying himself, he turned back around to see a bewildered Edith gawking at him.

“What the hell are you doing?!?” she screeched, the sudden halting of the car had rattled her.

Eren glared, breathing hard. “Like hell if I’d ever help you,” he finally confessed. “All you’ve ever done is attack Levi and his family! Sued them, blackmailed them. Blackmailed me! And you think if you batted your eyelashes and wallet while throwing me some overly emotional sappy backstory, I’d follow you just like that?!”

The giddy joys Edith had now vanished. She slowly, and much more gracefully, exited the car. Standing tall and emotionless, her ice cold demeanor reflected their surroundings. She was too calm. “So you strung me along? And for what?”

“You don’t care about Levi.”

“You don’t know that-”

“Yes I do!” Eren was yelling. Couldn’t stop yelling. Oh how he’d wanted to say all of this for a long time… “And you just proved it! All you care about- All you’ve ever cared about is that fucking fortune and winning over Francis! That’s all he’s ever been to you! A ticket to money and humiliation for your arch nemesis!”

“How dare you-”

“And don’t you dare try and pull that ‘mother’ crap on me! You may have given birth to Levi, but it doesn’t mean that you actually care about him and it certainly doesn’t make you his mother! You’ve never been there for him! You don’t know anything about him!” Eren took a deep breath. Visions of his own mother and memories of when he visited her flooded his mind. “And you certainly don’t care enough to ask…”

“What exactly are you trying to accomplish here?”
“I’m going to take you down. I’m going to make sure you never bother Levi ever again! And I’m never going to help you.” And the recording of their conversation he had on his phone was all he needed as proof at this point. Not that he would actually say that.

Edith shrugged, not looking as put out as Eren hoped that she would. “Fine. I don’t need your permission to make you my hostage. But you should have taken my offer, brat. I’m done playing.”

The world in front of Eren spun, turning sideways. A sharp pain blinded him on the side of his head.

And then nothing.

“Mmm… Marco… you feel so good…” Jean moaned, wrapping his arms around his boyfriend. Light kisses were exchanged and feather touches trailed across their bodies.

The soft music…

The fresh after shower feel…

The phone buzzing on the night stand…

The soft sheets wrapping around their tangled bodies…

What a perfectly romantic morning…

“Umm…” Marco started, pausing their movements. “Do you need to get that?”

Jean groaned. “It’s probably nothing important. If they call again, I’ll get it.” He made to get them to start up again, but Marco was having none of it.

So after the vibrations dies down, they waited.

Not half a minute later, it started up again.

Jean shouted in frustration. Ripping himself from Marco, he answered with intent to kill.

“What?!”

“It’s about time you fuck wad!” Ymir screamed through the phone. “Get dressed and come down as quickly as possible! I’m waiting outside in my truck! And for fuck’s sake, next time close your damn curtains!”

The line died, and Jean looked outside. Sure enough, there was Ymir’s truck with a full view of everything that was going on in their room.

Fighting down the embarrassment, Jean noticed a text amongst the missed calls from Ymir.

**Eren:** *Edith car driving south follow HURRY*

Only one emotion registered.

“Shit!”
Jean raced to get his clothes, dressing as he grabbed what he needed.

“Jean,” Marco called worryingly.

Still only half dressed, Jean turned to face Marco as he backed towards the door. “Gotta go. Emergency. Love you!”

And he was out.

By the time he reached Ymir’s truck, thankfully he was fully dressed. Especially since Christa was there too.

“What’re you doing here?” he asked her while Ymir sped down the street.

Christa held up a folder. “Evidence. Just in case.” Then she held up her phone. “I’m also tracking Eren’s phone so we don’t lose them.”

“How did you-”

“Erwin taught me,” she shrugged. “He thought it would come in handy in case something like this happened.”

Jean raised his eyebrows. “You know, if you and Erwin weren’t gay as fuck, I’d be worried you two were thinking on going behind your lover’s backs with all the time you spent bonding while digging up dirt of Edith.”

“If you don’t mind,” Ymir rushed out, a little more than stressed, “I think we have more pressing matters to deal with than a clearly impossible love affair!” She gripped the steering wheel tightly, her eyes glued to the road.

Christa sighed. “She’s right. Out of all of the times she’s met with Eren, she’s never driven off with him. Oh! And get on the highway headed south.”

Ymir nodded confirmation, and Jean turned Christa’s attention back to him.

“You think she could be making her move?” he asked. “Like… the move? The final move?” Worry began making itself known in his voice. He couldn’t help it.

“I don’t know,” Christa admitted, and held up the folder again. “That’s why I brought the dirt.”

“What if we don’t make it?” The worry speaking.

Christ flipped through her phone, pulling up a recent massage. “Erwin said he’s closest and will try to intercept them if we can’t catch up.” So if they couldn’t be there… hopefully someone would be.

Jean sighed. This was all too much. Why did he ever agree to be a part of Eren’s plan? Actually, why did he agree to be part of the spy team in charge of recording all of their meetings? It might have been cool in the beginning, but now it was just stressing him out. Eren could actually get hurt!

“Oh! Oh!” Christa suddenly cried out, eyes wide and locked on her phone. “We’re getting close! It looks like they’ve stopped. We have to pull over too!”

“We’re on the highway though!” Ymir argued. “I think they’ll notice if a random car decided to just park behind them!”
“Stop on the other side then!” Jean butted in.

“Hurry!”

Ymir growled, but pulled harshly against the steering wheel, throwing them off on the side of the road. Luckily, they just barely avoided smashing into the car already parked there.

Jean, already with his phone in hand, started recording before looking out the window through the lanes of traffic to…

Jean’s arm dropped along with his shoulders. Defeated. “Fuck. We missed it… We… We have to catch up again! We have to-”

“We can’t…” Christa interrupted sadly.

“What do you mean?” Ymir asked this time, focusing fully on the conversation now that she wasn’t driving anymore.

Christa shook her head, still staring at her phone. “It says Eren’s phone is right across the highway, on the other shoulder. Right where it was before.”

“But there’s nothing there!”

“There was,” came Erwin’s voice, startling the Jean and Christa. Ymir had her window rolled down, allowing Erwin to join the conversation. He leaned against the truck as he spoke. “I caught up with them in time to see them pull off to the side of the road. Eren got out, yelled a bit, and they knocked him out and shoved him in a suitcase. I recorded it all.”

“And Eren’s phone?”

“Dropped it.”

Everyone in the car slumped in their seats in disappointment, sighing.

“Fuck… How are we supposed to find him now?” Jean moaned. This was all too real. Being a spy was no fun anymore…

“I’m not sure we can,” Erwin said, disappointed too. “At least not quickly enough.”

“Then what do we do?” Jean cried. “Eren’s been kidnapped!” That couldn’t just be the end!

“Get an arrest warrant for Edith,” Christ said, grabbing all their attention. “We have evidence of her attacking and kidnapping Eren as well as proof and witnesses of her blackmailing and threatening other companies for business! If that’s not enough hard evidence Eren wanted to send her to jail than I don’t know what is!”

Erwin nodded. “She’s right. Eren asked us to help him take her down in any way we could, and this is how we do it.”

Details of how Eren got to the airport were fuzzy. After Edith’s goon snuck up behind him and knocked him clean out, the only thing Eren was conscious of was the throbbing pain in his head and the confining darkness of what he only assumed could be a suitcase. The area was too small to be the trunk of a car anyway. That and the way he was jostled after a while.
That is… unless the car somehow managed to turn on its side and do a wheelie.

And go up steps.

Eren considered shouting out, squirming, or something, but his body was tied and squished almost painfully in a suitcase too small for him, restricting his motions, and the gag and tape combo over his mouth worked wonderfully at silencing even the smallest of whimpers. Even when the suitcase was opened, Eren could do nothing as bright lights blinded him. And the rag like movements they were putting him through only worsened his already throbbing head.

But when everything was said and done, Eren found himself sitting and both his hands handcuffed to the seat’s armrest with the gag still in his mouth.

They were on a small, private jet.

All the windows had been closed and there was no personnel on the aircraft. Edith eyed him with mocking sympathy.

“You really should have taken my offer, Eren. You stupid boy.” She grinned wickedly. Her words stabbed like rusted knives through Eren’s head. “Did you really think you could outsmart me? Me? Francis himself couldn’t do anything after all these years! And he never will…”

Eren glared as hard as he could, seeing as his mouth was unavailable to retort, but the severity clearly lacked.

Edith chuckled. “Now, if you’ll excuse me. I have a ransom call to make.”

She made her way to the front and out of sight. While she was gone, Eren rattled the handcuffs, pulling at them until red marks turned to scratches on his wrists. He couldn’t even lean forward to pull of the gag either, as he’d been strapped to the seat back across his shoulders.

And he didn’t even have his phone.

How stupid of him! He knew Christa and Erwin knew how to track it, and he went and fucking lost it on the side of the road! In the snow no less! He’d be lucky if it even worked…

If he ever got to see it again.

“My coffee!” Eren heard Edith yell. Looks like the ransom call was over. “Where is my coffee?!” A soft and unintelligible voice spoke briefly before Edith began yelling again. “Figures you’d leave it in the car! And now I’m going to have to go get it! Keep an eye on the boy, alright? You think you can do that much? Or do you need to go back to kindergarten?!”

Edith slammed the door of the plane shut on her way out, rattling the vessel.

That’s when Eren caught eyes with her henchman.

In all the weeks he’s had to meet him, Eren never actually got a good look.

Decently handsome and well built, he had the aura of a rich kid whose daddy paid his way through college. His back was straight, shoulders held back. Like he was some hot shot at a business party, not unlike the asshole Eren shoved into a pile of food at the last party he attended. The only difference, though, was the massive bags underneath his otherwise perfect eyes and the look those perfect eyes had, like they’d seen too much.
And with Edith, that was probably the case.

They held each other’s gazes for a long time. Eren didn’t actually know exactly, though. He looked away when Edith came back aboard, coffee in hand, but the henchman kept on staring.

Eventually, after Edith decided to head back up front and out of sight, Eren decided to continue his pathetically thought out escape plan. AKA, pulling at the handcuffs.

“You’ll only hurt yourself.”

Eren was almost too determined to free himself to register that the henchman had spoken. But quickly getting over the shock, Eren turned his head to glare before trying to use his feet as well to push against the arm rest.

“You won’t be able to break free that way.”

Eren’s foot slipped and he shoved it into the seat in front of him, bending it forward more than it was probably supposed to go, then he sent yet another glare towards the henchman.

The henchman was only mildly impressed.

Edith passed through then, making her way to the back. She mumbled something about continuing to keep an eye on Eren before she disappeared out of sight. The sound of a door shutting was all Eren registered before the henchman was sitting right next to him. The blank stare of a goon replaced with the desperate pleading of a man determined.

“I know you have no reason to trust me,” he rushed, “but if you want to make it out of here then you’ve got to listen.”

O…kay… This was new…

The henchman began ripping off the packing tape that kept Eren tight against the seat, explaining as he worked.

“I’ve slipped a few laxatives… or more… into her coffee, so that should give us some time. While she’s in there, I’ll release you and you can escape. Do not go to security first. That’s the first place she’ll check, and no doubt she’ll spin some story about you being her trickster son or something. I can’t give you much time, but the more we hurry the better your chances of out running her are. Now…” he sighed, fingers ghosting next to the tie holding the gag in place. “I’m going to remove the gag, alright? And don’t yell. That’ll only alert her and we’ll lose our chance.”

The henchman waited for Eren to nod his understanding before taking the gag off. As soon as it was out, Eren moved his jaw and tongue around, getting used to the feeling of the gag being gone. What a nice feeling.

And now the million dollar question.

“Why are you helping me?” Eren asked after feeling had returned to his face. “Doesn’t your paycheck depend on whether or not she wins?”

“Oh don’t worry…” the henchman assured. “In regards of paying me back for this, I already have something in mind.” Key in hand, the henchman reached out for the handcuffs.

But Eren blocked the path using his body and gave the henchman a curious glare.
“What?”

The henchman shook his head, reaching forward again. “Don’t worry about it. That matter will be between me and Levi.”

But again, Eren blocked him. “No. You will tell me. I’m not going to get Levi into debt when I don’t know the price. Now tell me. If not, put that gag back on me and I’ll find a way out myself.”

“You wouldn’t understand,” the henchman stressed. “I doubt he’s ever even mentioned me. I… he would have gotten in trouble if he ever did…”

Eren still didn’t move, his glare becoming more and more determined. “Try me.”

The henchman sighed, thinking it over. Was it worth it to tell him? But continuing to avoid it would only waste more time… And Edith wouldn’t stay in the bathroom forever…

“I’m… his ex-boyfriend.”

The plot twist Eren never saw coming.

The henchman sighed and started to explain. “It was back in college, we were-”

“I know who you are!” Eren interrupted, thrashing slightly in anger. He hadn’t forgotten that conversation on the dock with Levi. “And you’re lucky I’m all tied up or I’d break your pretty little nose for what you did!”

“Good to know I left such a good impression,” the ex-boyfriend henchman deadpanned. “But believe me when I tell you that I’ve learned my lesson. Or rather, I’d do whatever it took to get me out of this hell. Even become a monk! You’re fiancé is powerful and after my stunt, he ruined me. My parents cut me off, my friends abandoned me, and I couldn’t even get a job at some drive through. The only person who would hire me was his crazy as fuck mother! Even after eight years, I can’t escape! Still, no one will hire me! You’ve seen how she is, how she acts. And let me tell you something, working for her could make an atheist pray to God. I’m not going to say I didn’t deserve it. I was a terrible person. Just… all I ask… All I want is a new job… any job. Just so long as I’m not working under her.”

Eren considered him for a moment, the sincerity of his words, and then moved aside, allowing the henchman to unlock the handcuffs.

“Thank you,” the henchman breathed as he worked.

“Don’t thank me yet…” Eren warned. He rubbed his wrists after they were free and winced. Those marks wouldn’t go away for a while…

“And why is that?” The henchman tilted his head in wonder.

Eren turned his head to look the henchman in the eye. “Just so you know, I’m grateful for your help, but I’m not sorry for this.”

Eren’s fist met the henchman’s face, making a satisfying crack, and the henchman fell limp in the seat. Eren shook his hand out in an effort to dull the pain. It hurts, punching someone.

“That’s why.”

Without wasting another second, Eren ran out. The door to the plane was… an interesting obstacle,
but he managed to get it soon enough. Then he was sprinting across the tarmac.

His gaze flew around, searching. He had no idea where he was. He had no idea how to get inside the airport. And he’d have to be careful not to get caught by security just yet. Just like the henchman said. If he was caught too soon, Edith might find out and ruin everything. So he had to hide. And quick. But it couldn’t be near the plane.

Choosing a direction that would at least bring him closer to other people, Eren ran.

Levi could only fidget.

After all, what else could he do? Especially with Eren in the situation he was is…

“Okay,” Francis started, “so what exactly was said on the phone?”

Levi recalled the phone call he’d received earlier. The one everyone thought had been from Edith. “They said that Eren was found hiding in a luggage cart, half frozen with scrapes all over his body and marks around his wrists. He said he’d been kidnapped so they took him to the security office to warm up, and that’s when Eren told them to call me.”

“And what of Edith?”

Levi shook his head. “I’m not sure. They didn’t say…”

Silence fell over them then. An uncomfortable silence. None of them really knew what to say. But after a several more minutes, Levi spoke.

Softly, ruefully, he said, “They think he must have been out there for hours… No coat… injured… fuck… this is all my fault…”

Genevieve gave Levi a sympathetic look. “We couldn’t predict something like this would happen-”

“Yes!” Levi suddenly shouted, cutting her off. “We could have! If I had just let Eren talk in the first place, we could have figured something out! And instead, like an idiot, I just yelled at him! I know him better than that!”

“And I’m the one who hung up on him!” Francis burst, startling them all. “I’m the one who locked your phone away to get you to focus! Hell, I brushed off Edith’s stalking the first time around so that when Eren fucked up with it, I would have a reason to throw him out! So go ahead! Blame this all on me! Or keep blaming yourself! I don’t care! Just stop sulking about it. You feel bad about it? Then apologize when you see Eren. Apologize like the Voclain you were raised to be! Just stop beating yourself up over it.”

Another silence, only this time the rest of them were letting Francis’s words sink in. The news that Francis had deliberately thrown the issue out the window just to get rid of Eren should have bothered Levi more, and maybe later it would, but the meaning behind the words mattered more.

Francis was right. There was no point in fretting about it now. All he could do was hope Eren was really okay and that he’d forgive him. The mess had already happened, so now all that was left was cleaning it up.

“It’s weird to see you care about something that isn’t your company,” Genevieve commented, a sly
smile crossing her face.

Francis grumbled, too refined to slouch in his seat though he did turn his gaze out the window.

“Shut up…”

It only took a few more minutes before they arrived at the airport. Once there, they were escorted to the security office. Levi right behind the officer leading them. And once the door opened.

Levi gasped. Whether in relief or shock, he wasn’t sure. Maybe both.

There was Eren, wrapped up and safe in a few blankets while he sat on one of the chairs sipping what he assumed was hot cocoa. Eren never did get into coffee. He was smiling, laughing with a few of the other officers on their break. And… There he was… Same green eyes… same tousled hair… same goofy grin… And he was… he was safe… smiling… safe…

Levi could feel his chest constricting, tightening around his heart, forcing a lump up his throat, and…

Eren was safe…

One of the officers pointed over in Levi’s direction, and Eren looked over with those bright eyes. A grin spread over his face.

“Levi! You came!”

He couldn’t waste another second. He couldn’t wait any longer. Levi sat down in the chair next to him, bringing Eren in close for a tight, but careful, hug. He wrapped both his arms around Eren, just to feel him and know that he was there.

“Le-?”

“I’m sorry.” Eren stilled in Levi’s arms, relaxing into it as Levi said the words he’d been holding in for far too long. “You were right. I should have listened to you, and I have no excuse for the way I treated you. But never again, do you hear me? I’m never going to put work ahead of you ever again. You’re too important to me…”

Hands wound themselves around Levi, clutching the back of his coat and bringing him in even closer. Someone must have taken the cup away. “And you’re too important to me…” Soft sniffles were heard in between Eren’s words. “I don’t know what I would do without you… That’s why… That’s why-”

“You don’t have to explain yourself to me.”

“What about Francis?” Eren asked, mumbling into Levi’s shoulder as neither of them were prepared to move. “He’s not gonna like you skipping out on work… I mean, I’m kind of surprised he let you show up here at all…”

“I wasn’t going to,” Francis chipped in. Eren peered at him over Levi’s shoulder. “I know you’ll believe me when I say that I was just going to let Edith have you.”

“So why did you come?”

“Because I threatened to leave if he didn’t.”

That’s when Eren pulled away, though only just enough to see Levi’s face. Shocked and almost
disbelieving, Eren stared at Levi as his words were processed.

“You did?” The disbelief was more than apparent in Eren’s voice.

Levi shrugged. “He knows I have the means to do it and that I’m all he has. So if he doesn’t want me walking out and losing an heir, then he’s going to treat you with the respect you deserve. The respect my soon to be husband deserves.”

“But… what about the company? You’ve been preparing for it your whole life… I… it’s~”

Levi brought up a hand to the side of Eren’s face, letting his thumb glide along Eren’s bottom lip. An effective silencer.

“Not as important as you.”

The words sliced straight through him, hitting Eren’s heart straight on with full force. Tears welled up in Eren’s eyes. His breaths became shaky.

“I’m sorry…” he apologized. “I should have told you about Edith, told you what was going on. You know, when I actually had the chance. Then you wouldn’t have been worrying so much about me.”

Levi’s lips turned up a bit, humor slipping into his voice. “There’s a crazed stalker turned kidnapper out on the loose, and you think I wouldn’t worry about it just because you told me about her?”

Eren shook his head, still completely serious. “No, no, that’s not what I’m saying. She’s in custody right now. And the police are on their way to pick her up, so she’s technically not on the loose.”

Levi froze.

“You got her arrested?”

Eren nodded, noting Levi’s change in demeanor. “Well… yeah. That was the whole point.”

Confusion, shock, and more confusion. “What? What are you talking about? You mean to tell me you planned this?”

Eren nodded without the slightest bit of irony. “Yeah. Well, actually, getting kidnapped wasn’t part of the plan, but it ended up being good in the long run.”

“What exactly do you mean? Plan? What plan?”

“Well…” Eren bit his lip to keep the smile from showing. They wouldn’t be happy, but Eren couldn’t wait to tell them. “After she approached me, I tried calling you to figure out what to do, and we all know how that ended, so I decided I would take matters into my own hands. I figured she was trying to use me in some sort of plan to get you and the fortune, so I decided to make a plan of my own. I’d meet up with her, listen to what she wanted and have either me or one of my friends recording the whole thing until she told us her plan and we could go to the police about it. I even ended up getting Christa and Erwin’s help, and when I called them after the airport called you, they told me they not only had footage of Edith kidnapping me but they also had evidence of her blackmailing other companies to build herself up and fraud. So that along with… what… five witnesses, means that she’s going to jail.”

“You… put Edith in jail?”
Eren tried, but failed, as the smugness showed. Holding his head high, Eren glared half-heartedly. “I don’t like being underestimated, and I certainly don’t like being ignored.”

Levi could only stare in wonder, torn between laughing and just staring some more. How had someone this amazing ended up as his fiancé? Words bubbled up. Words Levi had tried to say too many times before. But he wouldn’t hesitate this time.

“I love you, Eren.”

The confession took Eren for surprise. Of all the things he’d expected Levi to say… he was too reckless… he should have waited for them to get back… he certainly wasn’t expecting that.

But it didn’t matter. He knew with every part of his being, could feel it in every cell in his body…

“I love you too.”

Levi descended upon Eren, kissing him with all of the love he felt contained within himself. Eren eagerly kissed back.

Levi pulled back, but just barely as he littered Eren’s face with even more kisses. “You are just so. Amazing. Wonderful. Beautiful. Smart. Perfect.”

“Levi!” Eren laughed, the kisses fluttering across his face tickling him. “If this is what I get when I put someone behind bars, I should become a police officer.”

“You’re such a little shit.”

Then, words became useless as Levi brought Eren in closer and their lips met again. Anymore useless words were simply swallowed up, silenced. Nothing more needed to be said.

“‘When’ he was going to fail, huh?” Genevieve murmured triumphantly. “Looks like Edith wasn’t the only one who underestimated Eren.”

Francis gave one humorless laugh. “So now what of our bet?”

“Oh, now you’re interested in the bet again? Didn’t you say it was over?” Genevieve was teasing him, but as of that moment, she had every right to. She always knew there was a reason why she liked Eren so much.

Francis sighed as he reluctantly watched Eren and Levi. “It is now.”

“And Eren won.” Genevieve leaned back against the wall, completely satisfied. “I did say in the beginning that the prize would decide the winner.”

Francis nodded. “Levi is a worthy prize. And as much as I hate to say it… Eren isn’t a totally unworthy winner.” Grumbling, he realized that it was time he do something he’d hoped never to do. “Eren!”

Eren and Levi broke apart from their kiss, though they remained in each other’s arms, hoping never to leave again.

Francis strode over, sighing, and began swallowing his pride.

“I don’t like you, Eren,” he started, “and I never will.”

Eren glared, clearly upset that Francis had interrupted their reunion for that. “Ditto.”
“You’re just as rude and unrefined as you were when I met you, and you’ll always be like that, I’m sure. But—” Francis cut Eren off before he could say anything “—despite all of that, I’ll tolerate you. You’ve proven yourself well enough to deserve that. Enjoy my grandson.” Then Francis turned to Levi. “And while I can no longer tell you what to do anymore, just… try not to slack off too much.”

“I won’t,” Levi promised, and Francis, as satisfied as he could be with the conversation, went back over to his annoyingly gloating wife.

He’d had more practice ignoring her than he had ignoring his grandson make out with his fiancé.

Pride swelled in Eren. “I beat Edith and won over Francis within only a couple hours… what a great day!” he laughed, then winced. His head still hurt from before, and in all honesty he probably should go to a doctor to check it out. Levi noticed, though, and immediately began inspecting the area.

“What happened?” he demanded as gently as he could.

“It’s nothing much, really! I just got… knocked out briefly. I’ll be fine.” Yeah, like that would sway Levi’s attention…

“Knocked out? That’s not fine! By who?”

“By…” Eren was interrupted however, by the police barging in. They were there to pick up Edith and her henchman and take them to the station. The henchman was escorted out first, and Eren pointed him out. “… By him, actually… But it’s okay! Because he actually helped me escape and is the reason why I’m sitting here and not waiting for you guys back on Edith’s plane or worse. So… at least hear him out.”

Eren tore his gaze from the henchman back to Levi, expecting to see a murderous glare, but instead found thoughtful surprise.

“Farlan… you… you saved him?”

Off to the side, Eren had turned his head away, mouthing ‘Farlan? His name is Farlan? What kind of name is Farlan? Why didn’t I ask this before?’ to himself. Francis and Genevieve were doing the same thing, but they were mostly wondering why Levi even knew this ‘Farlan’ to begin with.

But Levi and the newly named Farlan paid them no attention.

“Yeah…” Farlan gave a sigh, and the police escorting him, paused to let them speak. “I know it doesn’t make up for what I did to you before, but I’m begging you… Whatever you did to keep me out of a job… please undo it! The only person who would hire me was your crazy ass mother and I wouldn’t wish that torture on anyone!”

“Done,” Levi stated, almost nonchalantly. “Come by Recon next chance you get and we can find something for you.”

“Ple-…” Farlan began to beg, then stopped. “What? You’re… agreeing? Just like that?”

“Do you not want me to offer you a job?” Levi asked carefully.

Farlan held up his handcuffed hands. “No! No, that’s… that’s fine… thanks… and about knocking your fiancé out… don’t worry.” Farlan pointed to the black eye forming and the nasty looking cut on his eyebrow. “He got me back.”
Levi turned back to Eren. “Good.”

The police finished pulling Farlan away, probably for questioning at the very least due to his part in helping Eren escape, and then the next pair pulled out Edith. She caught sight of Eren and Levi, though her gaze remained locked on Levi alone. She gasped silently, looking as if she had a million things to say, but nothing she could actually speak out loud. But it didn’t matter. The look of pure broken heartedness spoke for her. And Eren actually felt a small twinge of pity for her.

She was a terrible mother, but… there was really no denying that she was, in fact, a mother. A mother whose son had been torn away from her. A mother who fought tirelessly just to have him back in her arms. A mother who failed every time. Sure she spent most of her time trying to get her hands on the fortune and sweet revenge but… Regardless of circumstances, Eren was sure that on some level, even if it was just superficial, Edith did love Levi.

Still, that fact didn’t stop Eren from grinning widely and waving gleefully as they dragged her away.

“I’d say don’t underestimate me next time, but from the looks of it you won’t be getting a next time!” he yelled out at her.

Levi rolled his eyes as he wrapped the blankets, which had fallen due to Eren’s ecstatic waving, back around his insane fiancé… a word Levi had never been so happy to hear.

“You nearly caught hypothermia out there, you shouldn’t throw away your blankets so carelessly,” he chastised with little actual venom. “You need to stay warm.”

“Oh?” Eren grinned mischievously and wiggled closer. “And are you going to help me with that?”

Levi smirked, snaking his arms underneath the blankets and around Eren’s waist, pulling him close. “I don’t see any way around it.” He leaned in, kissing Eren once more, then reached down and offered his jacket, once again, to Eren.

Putting playfulness aside, Eren stared in wonder at the jacket. The one he was sure he’d left on the floor in his room. “What are you doing with that?”

Levi carefully attempted to put the jacket on Eren while still under the blanket so as to not let any heat out. “Did you think I wasn’t going to check your messy dorm room when you ran off? I’m just lucky it was within sight, otherwise I’d be out another jacket.”

Eren helped, putting arms where they needed to go when they needed to go, and once the jacket was on, the blankets were shed once and for all. Taking a moment, Eren held the end of a sleeve up to his nose and giggled.

“It still smells like you.”

“Probably because you never wear it. Now come on.” Levi held out his hand, and Eren graciously took it, squeezing it lightly. “Let’s go home.”

Chapter End Notes

Now would be a good time to let out any feels you have about this chapter into review form.
I think this the only time I’ve ever added end notes to this story... but I just had so much to say!

Btw, if you scroll up to about half way through the chapter and listen closely, you can hear my reclining back with a blissful sigh as I await the onslaught my plot twist bomb brought when I dropped it.

Seriously though, I’ve been waiting to drop that for like 20 CHAPTERS NOW. YOU ALL FORGOT ABOUT THAT EX-BOYFRIEND!!! AHAHAHAHAHAH!!! But actually, he didn’t even have a name or face until today… I procrastinated on his character because he only has like two whole conversations… And it was between an obscure Attack on Titan character or an OC with some vague name. Eventually I just decided on Farlan. Seemed plausible. And don’t worry, Eren NEVER had any plans of actually believing Edith! :3 And I know a few of you guys actually guessed correctly in saying that you thought Levi was the prize! SO CONGRATS!! You get bragging rights! :D But nothing else because I’m broke…

This was one of those parts in a story that you have where you’ve just been dying to write it ever since you thought of the idea. So I’m so glad it’s finished!

I hope you guys enjoyed reading this as much as I had fun writing it! :D
This is Our Future

Chapter Notes

This epilogue is cheesy and clichéd and I won’t apologize for it.

I hope you enjoy this last chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Late, late, late.

Oh… he was so fucking late…

Armin would understand though, right?

Right?

Luckily, when Eren arrived at their usual café, Armin was still there. Though the half eaten sandwich in front of him suggested he’d been waiting there for longer than he should have. Eren ran over sheepishly, avoiding the annoyed glares his friend was sending him over the pages of his book. As Eren closed in, Armin placed his bookmark in and set the book down.

“Well, it’s about time,” Armin teased.

“I know, I know! I’m sorry!” Eren chanted as he sat down across from Armin. His usual sandwich in front of him, that Armin must have ordered for him. Eagerly, Eren began digging in. “The signing lasted longer than I thought it would. There were kids in line that were just so cute!”

“There are kids reading Attack on Titan?” Armin wasn’t sure to be amused to horrified, and his mixed expression showed it.

“Their faces were too cute to question.” Eren shrugged, then frowned. “But now that I’m free of their adorable stares I’m starting to question it too…”

“Well, at least it was a hit, so you can’t complain too much.” Corrupted kids were the parent’s problem, not theirs. “Other than that how did the book signing go?”

“Surprisingly well despite the amount of time it took. Although I do think my wrist is broken.” Eren twisted his hand around, rolling his wrist. “I think you can hear it cracking…”

“Is Hanji still thinking about that book tour?”

Mild horror left Eren cradling his wrist carefully. “Dear God I hope not. At least not anytime in the near future. My wrist wouldn’t be able to handle it! She still has to get it through Erwin, anyway, so as long as I remember how Erwin works, he’ll want to wait until the official full length game comes out until any tours happen.” Eren returned to his food, now that the horror had past. “How is he, by the way? I’m always stuck with Hanji so I never see him.”

Armin shrugged. “He’s doing good. Much better now that sales are picking up, thanks to you. Or… at least from what I see he’s doing well.”

“Not really. My internship is just taking up all of my time so I can’t really do much else. Any time I do see him, it’s usually because I’ve snuck over to sleep because his bed is so much more comfortable than mine and closer to work,” Armin confessed guiltily.

“But everything relationship wise is going good?” Come on, spill those dirty details.

“Well…” Armin bit his lip, but the grin showed through. He unfolded his hands and spread his fingers to properly show off the ring.

Eren gasped so loudly he attracted the attention of half the café and nearly fell off his chair. “OH MY GOD! Armin! How could you not open with that! Don’t talk to me about my book signing when you’re fucking engaged how could you keep this from me?!?!” Hastily, Eren yanked Armin’s hand forward, getting a closer look.

“Calm down!” Armin whispered, the stares slowly looking away making his a little more than self-conscious. “It’s not… a big thing.”

Eren didn’t get the hint, though, as he continued to yell. “Not a big thing?! You’re engaged! That’s fucking huge! Do you guys have a date picked out yet?”

“Eren, stop!” Armin laughed and pulled his hand away, staring at the ring thoughtfully. “Seriously, it’s not as big as you think. We don’t have a date picked out because it’s more of a… precaution.”

“A precaution?” Eren wasn’t convinced.

“Yeah. Erwin gave me this ring saying he knew he’d want to marry me eventually, but we don’t know what’ll happen in the future and we’re far too busy now so… We’re just going to see where this goes, and if circumstances allow it, we’ll marry.” Really, in Armin’s opinion, it was just an over glorified way of saying they were dating, but he’d be lying if he’d said that he didn’t like it.

Eren shook his head at his naïve, adorable friend. “He’s staking a claim ‘cause he knew all those other interns would be crushing on you.”

Armin closed his eyes, trying to block out the truth. “Eren…”

Eren shrugged and grinned. “The man knows what he wants, and wanted everyone else to know what he wanted was you.”

“You’re taking all the romance out of it…” Armin groaned, slumping in his seat.

“Mildly possessive boyfriends can be romantic. Just admit it. You’re engaged. It’s okay to be engaged. I should know.” Hell, he’d been engaged for damn near 20 years. If anything, Eren was the expert on being engaged.

Armin gave a grumpy sigh, but the smile hinted that he wasn’t as upset as he pretended. “Fine… I’m engaged.”

“Be sure to tell all your coworkers that too.”

“Eren!”

Eren laughed, then grew gravely serious. “By the way, I’m demanding to be your best man. I don’t care when it happens or where I am. You could tell me the day before while I’m on the other side
of the world, but it won’t matter. I’ll fly up to your wedding, and Levi will let me. You know that.”

“Of course!” Armin rolled his eyes. “I could tell you an hour before and you’d probably end up inventing teleportation via pure anger alone…”

Eren should not have been so smug after hearing that, but he was. “You know me too well. I like your ring, too,” he added, poking at the ring. “It’s much better than mine, anyway.”

Armin merely shook his head. “Only you could have an engagement ring worth hundreds of millions of dollars made nearly entirely out of diamond and think mine is better.”

“It’s simpler! I like simple!”

“Speaking of engagements and domestic life, how’s house hunting?”

“Ugh!” Eren’s head dropped face first on the table with a reasonably loud thud, just barely missing the mostly empty plate.

Armin raise an eyebrow. “That good?”

Eren lifted his head back up, but the frustration remained. “When Levi said we would finally be moving out of that fucking mansion, I leapt for joy! Now I’m just crawling back because staying there just seems a hell of a lot easier.”

“What’s wrong with it?”

“If I let Levi pick a house, it never ends up being a house. It’s always a fucking castle! Like seriously? We do not need that much space! Stop looking at MansionsForSale.com already! But every time I pick a house, it’s always ‘too small’ or ‘a hobbit hole’ or any other variation of those two. I don’t understand it! He hardly ever uses any other rooms besides the bedroom and study, so why all the extra space?” Eren gave another loud groan, then sipped angrily at his drink.

“He did grow up in a mansion, you know.”

“And yet,” Eren started as if he was explaining some strange conspiracy, “in the 30 odd years he’s lived there, I bet he’s never actually seen all of the rooms. His closet was so big, the most I’ve ever seen it filled was at half full! When I moved in! And they had like… six spare rooms that were never used! He probably never would have gone into the spare room I used had I never shown up there at all. And it was right across the hall!”

Armin stared at Eren as he ranted, only half listening. After a moment, and Eren had paused to breath, he blurted out, “How badly does it weird you out that you and Levi just had your two year anniversary and you’re still living in his grandparents’ house?”

All emotion fled from Eren’s face, and he responded in a deadened voice. “More than I want to think about right now.” There was something incredibly awkward about being married and living with your in-laws. The walls were supposed to be mostly soundproof, and yet every time it was like they just knew. “Ugh… And we’re supposed to be moving out but all we’re doing is bickering over space… We don’t even have that much stuff yet!”

Armin laughed, then swore as he glanced at his phone. “Oh shit… I gotta run. My lunch break is almost over.” He started gathering up his stuff.

Eren waved, but stayed where he was, picking at the last of his fries. “That’s fine. I’m meeting up with Levi in a bit, anyway. He says he has to show me something but refuses to tell me what it is.
Fuck… if it’s another mega mansion castle, just know that the screams you might hear at work are me.

Armin smiled sympathetically. “Good luck!”

Eren just groaned.

“Levi… You know I like surprises and blindfolds, but do you really need to go all out for this? You’re just going to take it off once we get to the house.”

“You don’t know what I’m going to show you,” Levi’s calm voice reached Eren’s ears, and Eren could only assume he was smiling.

Eren sighed. “Levi. The last three times you did this, you were showing me a house. Or rather, a fucking mansion.”

“I just want you to be completely surprised by it.”

“So it is a mansion.”

A pause. “Just a small one.”

“Levi, we both know your definition of small and mine are two completely different things.”

“Trust me, I really think you’re going to like this one.”

“You said that about the last one.”

“No, I said you might like it. This one I’m almost positive you will.”

“Almost? Why almost?”

“Just… just trust me.”

No. Eren would not trust him. At least not without complaining the rest of the way there. He’d heard the same thing too many times for this time to be any different, so Eren grumbled quietly as he tried to peek discretely from under the blindfold. Just a little peek…

But a pinch on his arm reminded Eren that he wasn’t exactly subtle about anything.

After what felt like forever, Eren could finally feel the car slowing down. They took a turn onto what Eren assumed was the driveway, paused at what Eren assumed was some kind of coded gate (another feature Levi so desperately wanted), then pulled in all the way. Eren crossed his arms over his chest as Levi parked and waited impatiently to see this new mansion Levi had picked out. Maybe next time, Eren would pick out one of those tiny homes people were so obsessed with nowadays, then blindfold Levi and tell him it was the greatest thing ever before showing him.

Maybe that’ll teach him.

Reluctantly getting maneuvered out of the car, Eren felt himself being positioned in what Levi probably thought was the best place. The blindfold came undone and fell off. Eren opened his eyes and…
“Oh…”

Eren didn’t even have to look at Levi to know he was smirking.

Trees and vines and bricks with wood left the house feeling like a large cottage in the forest. Rugged and open, it was reminiscent of the cottage the Voclain already owned, but somehow entirely different. The trees lined the edges of the yard in a manner that felt more like a forest than planted. They were too sporadic for that. But even so, it left the front yard mostly empty save for the plush green grass currently under his feet.

Instantly and without even having to step inside, Eren could feel the house accept him, drawing him in closer. It felt warm and safe…

Like home.

And even though it showed, and Eren knew that it showed, he crossed his arms and put on a cynical expression. He didn’t want Levi to have the satisfaction so soon.

“I don’t know…” Eren drawled. He gestured vaguely towards one side of the house. “That part of the house looks a little weird. Is it a-”

“Staircase. I thought it was weird at first, too, but it leads up to a fairly large upstairs patio. It overlooks the entire front yard.” Shit. That cynical thing would be a whole lot harder to keep on than Eren thought. Levi, smirked smugly, holding his hand out to lead Eren forward. “Come on. I’ll show you inside as well.”

Eren pouted as he took Levi’s hand.

Levi had been right, at least. It was a fairly small mansion. At least half the size of the Voclain mansion. But it was a mansion nonetheless, and Eren was sure there would be at least one downside.

There had to be.

Anything to wipe the infuriatingly smugness off Levi’s face.

Levi explained everything as they walked, up the few steps of the porch and through the front doors. “So since you hated all of my choices because they were too big, and since I hated all of your choices because they were too small, I decided to pick a place that was too small for me and too big for you so neither of us were happy.”

When they stepped into the foyer, Eren stifled a cry of joy. The lack of fancy polished marble was a very, very, very welcomed change as far as mansions went. Rather, the foyer and hallway was a tasteful mix of tiled stone and ceramic. Casual but classy. Even if a rug was thrown over it. Perfect.

The other rooms that Eren could see, however, had a dark wood flooring. He’d have to ask what it was.

According to Levi, who pointed out the rooms as they walked, the two rooms on opposite sides of the foyer were the dining room and study. Straight ahead was the living room. The hallway split there, and off to the left was the kitchen and family room (or as Eren like to call it, the fancy living room). But they didn’t go over there. Instead they veered to the right, right past the-

“Of course,” Eren grumbled, glaring at the offending room. “Can’t have a mansion without a ballroom.”
“It makes it easier to throw all those fancy parties we’ll be forced to throw later,” Levi reminded, heading over to a pair of doors off to the side, his steps echoing in the room.

“Uugh……” At least it was more hardwood rather than marble.

“We can call it the party room if you’d rather,” Levi teased.

“Shut up…”

“Although, the library is right through the ballroom.” Levi opened the double doors, showing off the rows and rows of empty shelves built into the room. “So it’s not all bad.”

Something else caught Eren’s attention, though. Leaning over, Eren pointed past Levi’s shoulder. “Is that a door leading to the backyard?”

“Yup,” Levi nodded, then ushered them out of the rooms and back into the hallway. “But we’ll look at that later. Now come on, let’s go look at the rest of the house.”

Next to the stairs was what was officially called the den, but Levi figured it could do well as Eren’s personal study. To which Eren laughed. So Levi rolled his eyes and reminded him that he would in fact need a place to write, whether it was called a study or not. So Eren shut up.

Just before they were about to walk upstairs, Eren caught sight of something else.

“What about this door?” he asked, reaching out for the handle, but Levi grabbed his hand and began pulling him back upstairs. Eren raised an eyebrow. “A closet?”

“We’ll get to it in a bit,” Levi assured.

Eren grinned. “You just don’t want me to see them ‘cause you know I’ll hate them. That’s the downside isn’t it? The almost? Is the backyard the size of a closet? The closet you won’t show me is full of dead bodies?”

“Save your imagination for writing, you little shit. Now, upstairs is all bedrooms, including ours.” Levi led them to the double doors on their right.

The entire second floor was carpet, including the master bedroom. It was a pretty large room with a slanted wall, just perfect enough for a bed.

“Ooh!” Eren wandered around the empty space. “I’m guessing the bed would go there?” He gestured towards the slanted wall and twisted around to the wall paralleling it, where the windows were. “So we could wake up each morning and get the best view of the backyard that… we can’t see because you’ve closed the blinds?” Eren glared over at Levi who seemed unaffected by it.

“I told you, I’ll show you the backyard later.” That’s when Levi led them out into the hallway. “There’s also seven other guest rooms up here-”

“Seven?!?” Eren stopped, horrified. Was that more than the spare bedrooms at the mansion? It might be… “Why the hell do we need seven spare bedrooms?”

“Why the hell do you need so many friends?” Levi countered.

Eren couldn’t argue with that.

Levi sighed. “I just figured it was best to have enough rooms for them all considering how much they’ll probably want to stay here.”
“Why would they want to stay here?” Eren tilted his head curiously, before deadpanning. “Or, wait. Is this another ‘I’ll tell you in a bit’ things?”

Levi smirked. “You’re learning.”

“Levi!”

Levi waved his hand at the area down the hall. “At the end of the hallway down there is the front balcony. Oh, and there’s also a balcony in the master bedroom. And… I know I shouldn’t tell you this, because you’ll abuse the hell out of it, but the balcony is right next to the roof of the veranda, so you could actually sit on the roof if you like.”

Eren stared wide eyed at Levi, and, seeing his plans in Eren’s eyes, Levi held fast onto Eren’s arm just as he was about to sprint back into the bedroom.

“Not yet.”

“Levi!”

“I thought you wanted to see the closet.”

Damn that man was good. “Fine…” Eren agreed, allowing himself to be led back down the stairs.

They reached the door just at the bottom of the stairs and Eren waited impatiently for Levi to open the door.

“I figured… this would be your favorite room.” Levi smirked smugly as he threw the door open. Eren’s jaw dropped.

“Is this…”

“A home theater. With enough seating for all of our friends. I was also thinking you could probably hook up your game stations in here too. The walls are soundproof. Completely. So just as long as I can’t feel the vibrations through the walls, you can be as loud as you want.”

“You couldn’t have started out with this?! Fuck! This is the second time someone’s held out important information from me today!”

The room itself was huge. It looked just like a movie theater would, with an entire wall empty for the screen or projection. Rows of couches and reclining chairs filled the rest of the room, and velvety curtains lined the other walls. Eren ran his hands carefully over the curtains, the chairs. Anything within reach. Completely awestruck.

“Haven’t you ever heard of saving the best for last?” Levi chuckled. “Although… had I known you’d be this enthusiastic, I probably could have gone for a larger house.”

“This is fine, thank you!”

“But there is one more thing we need to look at.”

Levi almost struggled as he tore Eren from the theater. Oh yes, that addition was well worth the wait for the perfect house. But hopefully, the next thing he showed Eren would seal the deal. Through the ballroom they went. There were doors leading to the backyard in there after all. And just as they set foot outside…

“Oh my…”
Levi grinned. “Gorgeous, right? There’s a pool right over there, a fire pit and grill over there, we could probably build a gazebo over there for thunderstorm watching, too, if you like. But I thought you’d really like—”

“The tree sitting in the center of the backyard?” It was the first thing Eren saw, and he hadn’t looked away. The thick trunk meant that it had been there for years, possibly hundreds. And it called to him.

Levi shrugged, following Eren as he made his way towards the tree. “I’m no expert on climbing trees, but this one looks good. Low, thick branches. A nice big ass tree for you to write under. Or in. Whichever you like.”

Eren continued to smile as his reached the tree. He could feel the bark under his hands, and it pulsed with life. Then he looked past the tree.

“Wait… is that a lake?”

Levi bit his lip. “You’re probably not going to like this, but the entire lake would be ours too. Even the small cabin on the other side would be ours.”

Eren’s jaw dropped. The whole lake? That was a pretty big lake… “Good thinking on the bedrooms there… We’ll never get them to leave…”

A short and soft chuckle left Levi, and he asked quietly. “So what do you think? You like it?”

At first, Eren said nothing. And just as Levi was about to ask again, Eren answered. “Do you ever see something and it feels so…”

“Suffocating?” Levi ventured nervously, though he sincerely hoped it wasn’t.

“Right.” Eren smiled. “It feels so right. I don’t think there’s another place out there that fits us as well as this one.”

Internally, Levi released the breath he was holding. Externally, Levi smirked and headed back up to the back porch. “Good. Because I already bought it.”

“What?!” Eren spun around and ran after Levi. “What do you mean you already bought it?! Levi, we’re supposed to make joint decisions on this! That’s what happens when you’re married!” He wasn’t actually that mad, but still.

Levi shook his head, sitting down on one of the couches surrounding the fire pit. “Relax, I put a bid on it so I’d be able to back out if for some reason you didn’t like it, but considering the bid I placed, it’s essentially ours. There… is one downside though…”


Levi sighed, remorse filling his voice. “The vents are too small for you to climb through.”

“Oh, whatever!” Eren gasped, falling onto Levi’s lap and curling up. “It was one time!”

Levi wrapped his arms around Eren’s waist, keeping him close. “But you do like it?”

“Yes,” Eren stressed, laughing. He rested his forehead against Levi’s and let his arms drape themselves over Levi’s shoulders. “I do. I actually think it’s quite perfect. I can really see us living
“here…” His lips found Levi’s in a chaste kiss. “Just you and me…”

Levi kissed him back, smiling.

“Just us in our kingdom.”

Eren brought his hands up, cradling Levi’s head gently, lips hovering mere centimeters apart….

“Just us in a world of our own.”

And closed the distance.

Chapter End Notes

Wow I… this is the end… this is literally the end of the story… I FINALLY FUCKING FINISHED A MULTICHAPTER FANFIC!!! And to be honest, it was not the story I was expecting to write, or even post. But I’m glad I got this out. To have an idea of mine finally see the light of day in its entirety… there’s nothing more I could have wanted.

Honestly… I couldn’t thank you all enough for taking the time to read this. It’s not the shiniest story out there, but… it’s still mine. And I love it and I love you all for loving it too! You’re comments have always left me feeling happier and happier the more I read them. I really wish that I could… find each and every one of you and just… hug you or bake you cookies or anything that I could just to tell you that I’ve so appreciated you coming with me on this journey. I’m not the best at responding or making small talk either in person or online, so even if I never answered you review, please know that the fact that you kept reviewing, or even reviewed at all, is more than I ever could have hoped for. <3

And now… because I’m awkward and very forgetful, I think that’s all I have to say in the way of the clichéd and sentimental…

So… I hope you enjoyed reading this just as much as I enjoyed writing it. I also hope to see you all in any future stories I’ll post!

If you ever want to keep tabs on me or even ask me questions or stalk me, I do have a tumblr under the username littlegreenpuppy! And I’ll still be tracking the tags for this story!

End Notes

PS my tumblr is littlegreenpuppy if any of you guys want to check me out there. I’m not any cooler there but I do exist. And I sometimes post news about my stories.
Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!