No Business Like Show Business

by Kmomodf

Summary

Let me start by setting the record straight. I didn't want to do this at all. I am not interested in fame or glory, and I sure as hell don't need strangers to tell me I'm no good at this type of thing. Yet here I am, sitting in the world’s most uncomfortable chair, shaking like a fucking maraca in a room full of some of the worst kind of people.

In a world where Eren Jaeger has not only the looks, but the talent to be the next big in the industry, he's forced into a mentorship with the one person in the world he's most reluctant to work with. Levi Ackerman. "Hollywood's Most Mystifying Man" is better known to Eren as "The World Biggest Prick".

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Currently being rewritten as "No Business I Know"
So, be kind this is my first posted fic. That being said I would very very much love any and all opinions you're willing to share on my characterization, plot, etc...

Also it should be known that I do not in any way whatsoever take any credit for either the written monologue (The Unwanted by Walter Wkyes) or the song (It Must Be Love by Madness). A link for which will be provided when the time comes, in case you want to listen.

This first one is a long chapter. I honestly can't say yet whether or not each chapter will be as long, it just depends on when it feels right to end. If that makes any sense. Anyway I am planning on updating each week, but between two full time jobs and school coming up, we'll see. Just know I will post ASAP.

Thank you all for reading, and I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the work for more notes.
Let me start by setting the record straight. I didn’t want to do this at all. I am not interested in fame or glory, and I sure as hell don’t need strangers to tell me I’m no good at this type of thing. Yet here I am, sitting in the world’s most uncomfortable chair, shaking like a fucking maraca in a room full of some of the worst kind of people. Fuck you mushroom head, if it had been anyone else asking me to do this I would have laughed mercilessly and walked the fuck away. God knows why, but I can’t really say no to that little asshole. Not after the shit we’ve been through. I’d do anything for him. Well almost. He could ask me to jump off the empire state building, and though I’d argue till I was blue in the face against it, at the end of the day I would take a swan dive.

This is why this whole thing happened in the first place. When he told me about it two weeks ago after busting down my bedroom door, I spent each day arguing with him but he wouldn’t budge. At first I had agreed in a sleep deprived state and once you agree, he doesn’t let you back out. I haven’t acted (on purpose) since junior high school. There never was a point to doing it again; I had to focus on real life and I don’t really regret doing so. Like I said, I don’t want fame or glory and the idea of having to compete day in and day out just for work sounds exhausting. Not to mention the stress of keeping up your appearance. No thank you. I’m perfectly content with staying in my demanding management position at the 7-11 down the street. Even if I’m miserable, even if I hate the idea of being in the same spot forever, I know that job and I am good at it, but none of that matters. When Armin wants something, he gets it. For whatever reason, he’s not as willing to accept my life of mediocrity. God knows why, but he thinks I can do better. To put it in his words, I haven’t had a real passion since I stopped theater. Which is true, but like I said I willing gave it up because shit happened. I don’t need passion; I just need to be able to pay the bills. Besides I’m not even good at it. Like I said it’s been over 6 years. All valid points in my stand, but as I said before, Armin always wins. So here I am, in my Sunday best, reconsidering the importance of friendship with the little blonde mushroom.

“Tch-tcha. Tchooowww. Yo listen up here’s a story-“ think of the devil and he shall call. Whoa, apparently an eruption of a classic 90’s pop song in the silent waiting room is frowned upon among my current crowd as their glares have me fumbling my thumb across the screen at record speed.

“Green speaking.” I answer in a hushed voice.

“Will you ever answer the phone like a normal person?” Armin squeaks in mock annoyance.

“I’m sorry this is a private number,” I begin. Because why shouldn’t I be a little shit right now? After all it’s because of him I’m stuck waiting in snob central. “For the sake of national security I need to know how you got this number.”

My ear is filled with a heavy sigh and my God I can fucking hear him rolling his eyes. Well little mushroom-man you should be used to my telecommunicating antics by now. Neither of us says anything. I can picture him clearly; eyes wide nodding slowly waiting for me to break the silence. Not gonna happen. This is the almost in the do anything analogy I mentioned before. I will not budge on my admitted weird phone quirk. Damn it his ringtone is Blue for a reason! That reason being his obsession with blue man group when we were beginning junior high. We went to one God damn show and for the better part of a year he spent his free time banging on pickle jugs with blue paint smeared on his skin. He even got Mikasa and me to parade around with him as blue skinned
ninjas on Halloween. The ninja part was compromised by Mikasa, and I thanked her for that. Until of course a neurotic old lady called the cops on us for looking like a “gang of no good thugs.” Ah the look on Hanne’s face was priceless. Anyway, throughout that faze he insisted on the use of code names whenever we communicated out of person. He gave me hell until I promised, pinky promised, and swore to it, and I’ll be damned if I ever break a promise.

“Oh my God, fine!” ha I knew he’d give. “Agent blue speaking.” He grumbles.

“Ahh that wasn’t so bad, was it?” I laugh. “What’s up?”

“I just wanted to know how everything was going. Have you gone yet?”

“Armin,” I sigh. “If I had I would have called for you to pick me the hell up.”

“Right, well are you ready?”

“Nope.”

“Are you nervous?”

“Bingo.”

“Just breath okay, you’re going to be great! They’ll love you! I mean based on some of the people Pixis talks about in the program, you really should be golden. Besides he’s one of the judges.” Shit. If there was anything I needed to calm my nerves, it was not that. “So you kind of already have a shoe in!”

“Okay Armin. First off how could that possibly help? Do you not remember that he only met me after I was detained by security?”

“That was a misunderstanding. Besides he laughed about it afterwards.” Gee that makes me feel so much better, thanks pal. “He said he liked your spunk.”

“The hell does that mean?” I quip. Is spunk even a good thing? Probably not, sounds like something a teacher uses to describe a trouble child to their parent without stepping on toes. Nope spunk can’t be good. Fuck my leg is shaking my entire body now. I have no desire to go through with this. Why the fuck am I here?

“Eren, it’ll be fine.” The assurance in his voice actually manages to quell some of the nerves in my chest. I close my eyes and let out a deep breath.

“Yeah?” I croak into the phone. I can feel people’s eyes on me, but I don’t care what they think. For the first time in a long time I feel vulnerable and I just need some comfort from my best friend before I crack and run out of this building.

“Yes.”

And there it is. That strength and assertion I was looking for. I snap my eyes open with renewed confidence. I straighten up in my seat and nod. Not because he can see me, obviously, but because doing so is my way of accepting his word. Yes he's right, it will be fine. No matter what happens, no matter how I do, it will be fine because I tried. Because I am Eren fucking Jaeger and I won’t be brought down by a fucking audition.

“Hello everybody!” A young woman’s voice breaks through the room, grabbing everyone’s attention.
“Shit, gotta go!” I whisper frantically. As I ended the call, I heard a rushed “Good Luck!” and hastily slid the phone back into my pocket.

“My name is Petra Ral, and this is Auruo Bossard,” the woman said gesturing to the self-righteous looking man beside her. “We are going to split you up and go through the audition process a little more thoroughly before actually beginning.”

Please God let me be in her group. The strawberry blonde’s gentle demeanor is far more appealing than the guy who is totally not eying himself in the lobby windows. Instantly most of the people have gathered closer to the pair asking dozen of questions at once. In fact, as I look around, the only other person still seated is a tiny blonde girl who looks like a lost fawn in a field full of wolves. She’s appears as confused as I feel as her big blue eyes roam over the crowd in front of us both, moving directly to me. Shit I am unprepared for this situation. My lips twitch into what must be a god awful attempt at a smile because her doe eyes furrow in response.

“Are you ok?” She asks quietly across the small distance, leaning slightly over the two chairs between us.

“Ummm, yes?” Well I thought I was, but now I’m not so sure. Fuck I can’t even fake a friendly smile, how can I go onto a stage and convince a panel of seasoned judges to let me into their program? This was stupid. I shouldn’t be here. Armin was wrong, things won’t be fine. I’m stupid for thinking they would. I should just leave.

Giggling brings my attention from what was sure to be a promising pity party, and now it’s my turn to look concerned. Well at least I think I look concerned, but who the fuck knows as I apparently have no control over my facial expressions.

“Christa.” She offers, scooting closer and extending her hand. Even though I’m confused by the sudden gesture, I take it. At this proximity I am struck by how much she reminds me of Armin. Could be the blond hair and ridiculous blue eyes, or possibly her slightly jumpy manner, whatever it is it’s comforting.

“Eren.” I reply. My lips curve and I hope the smile I’m wearing now is more effective than its predecessor. The room gets quiet suddenly, reminding me of the impending doom.

“Nice to meet you Eren.” She whispers as we let go of each other’s hand. We exchange smiles again and turn our attention to the two in the front as the woman begins speaking.

“As I was saying before we will better answer your questions in the smaller groups. So please find your name on the paper I’ve just pinned, and follow either Mr. Bossard or I.” Her voice resounds across the room. It holds an air of authority and absolution and it’s not long before everyone is sorted. As it so happens God must not have heard my plea seeing as I am stuck in the group with Mr. Bossard.

“Hey, shitty brats!” He calls, gesturing for us to follow.

Well that’s one way to get our attention. A simple ‘Over here guys’ would have done, but whatever I’m not the boss here. We all shuffle after him as he leads us out of the atrocious waiting room. The hall is slate white, no windows, grey and black patterned carpet, paneled ceiling with a door on either side every 15 feet or so. It’s large enough for our group to maneuver with ease and the lighting is surprisingly warm. Still, I can’t help but feel like I’m walking through a cross between a university and a mental ward. The doors we pass even have the little windows above their handles and title panels to their side.
“Ok brats, this whole process is incredibly simple. You go in, you preform, and the judges decide whether or not your sorry ass is worth training.” Thanks jerk, I’m pretty sure we all knew that much. “Specifically, you will walk onto the stage. God willing none of you trip. Then you slate, and preform your first monologue.” I’m sorry first? As in more than one? “Then you will do your next piece. Does everyone here know how to slate?” That was the one thing I did know how to do, but there were a few shaken heads and Auruo let out an exasperated sigh. “Oi, you!” he snaps, I look around to see the poor sap he’s calling out only to follow the point of his finger directly back to myself. Shit. “You know how to slate?”

“Er,” I start. My mouth has gone dry and I have to clear my throat before I answer. “Yes.”

“Do it.”

“Uh,” My eyes are wide with surprise at being out on the spot, but I won’t let myself be made a fool. I take a breath, let myself relax into a confident poise, and I smile. “My name is Eren Jaeger, I am 20 years old and I will be preforming a monologue from The Unwanted by Walter Wykes.”

“And?”

“huh?” My tongue feels like dead weight. I know what he means, but I don’t want to admit that I don’t have a second piece. He just rolls his eyes and addresses the rest of our group.

“When you are out there, be sure to introduce both pieces so that you don’t have to between them. Otherwise, Mr. Jaeger here gave you all a pretty good example of how to do a slate.”

My cheeks grow hot under all the eyes that are on me now. Some people look encouraging, but most look like they want to skin me alive. I gulp and give them all a nervous smile.

We spend a short time going over the order, which is alphabetical. He has the first 13 letters, and poor Petra was left with the rest. Apparently I have the honor of being the second last to go, right before a Lenz. Which is good and bad because that means mine will either be easily remembered or
completely forgotten depending on the effectiveness of not only my performance, but everyone before me as well. The rest of the time is ours to do with as we please. Most everyone breaks off and practices. The rest, myself included, look around silently. Maybe they’re also looking for the best escape route, maybe we could all run together. Maybe they also didn’t know about the second piece. The second piece. Fuck, fuck, fuck, shit, motherfucker! What am I going to do about that? I need to get out of here now before I make a complete joke out of myself!

I get up from my spot on the top tier of the floor, and turn for the door behind me. I’m weaving myself through the small crowd, and nobody pays me any mind. Good. Almost there, my hand is extended in anticipation, but as my finger curl around the metal handle a small cough grabs my attention. I look to the side and find a pair of giant blue eyes narrowed ever so slightly.

“Eren, where are you going?” Christa asked sweetly, and even though it’s an innocent question, I can’t help but feel she knows exactly what I’m trying to do.

“Um, the bathroom?”

“Oh, you know where it is?” She swats my hand from the door only to open it herself. “I’ve needed to go since I got here, but I didn’t want to get lost alone. Mind showing me?”

Sneaking little bitch. Alright fine I give up. Besides I do remember passing one on the way here, I’ll take her to it then hightail it when she goes in. Solid plan Jaeger. I roll my eyes inward, but smile and nod to Christa as I lead the way out.

“So,” She begins as we head down the hall. “You weren’t actually going to the bathroom, were you?”

I stop. My eyes are squinted in curiosity and I am looking for answers in this little blond. How did she know?

“Your face went white the moment Auruo mentioned two pieces.” Oh. Wait, am I that transparent? If so then that’s all the grounds I need to just leave now. “You don’t have anything else prepared do you?”

“No.” I sigh in response. She smiles and grabs my hand. Before I can protest, I’m being pulled into one of the practice rooms to our right.

“Well then, we have a little over 15 minutes to think of something.” She smiles at me, and it helps a bit, but I’m still fifty shades of discouraged.

“How?” I ask throwing my hands in defeat. “How am I supposed to come up with something if 15 minutes? God I’m already preying I won’t fuck up the piece I do know, I can’t imagine trying to cram something else entirely!”

“Well, is there anything you already know? A monologue, a scene, a song?” Song? My ears perk when she mentions it and I look at her with a small flicker of hope dancing in my eyes. “So a song it is.”

“I don’t have the music though.” Whatever flicker of hope I had is snuffed out at that realization. I’m screwed.

“Do it acapella”

“It would sound right.”
“Well, maybe you can ask the pianist if they know it.” Now it’s obvious she’s spitting things out to make me feel better. Poor girl, wasting her time on a hopeless case like me. Wait a second, pianist?

“Do you think they’d let me play something myself?”

“I don’t see why they wouldn’t. You play?”

“Yeah, but…”

“Eren that would be amazing! If you could do it, I’m sure the judges would be really impressed.”

“I haven’t played in a while”

“Well, then, what else are you going to do?” She asks while assuming a not-taking-any-of-your-shit position. One hip is cocked, her arms are crossed over her chest and her eyes are glowing slits now. She reminds me of a mother about to scold her child. Or a perfect cross between Mikasa and Armin. Scary. “Because I’m not going to let you leave. Even if I have to drag you on that stage, you are going up there.”

And I honestly have no response to that. We just met and already she seems to have me pegged. So I shrug and look awkwardly to the whiteboard on the wall. A hand slides into mine and I am again being dragged across the room. When I look at her she’s smiling widely. She whips me in front of her as she takes a seat.

“Sing.” What?

“What?”

“Sing. C’mon you need to practice. The voice is like any other muscle. If you don’t keep working on it, it will lose tone. Now if you haven’t sung for—as you put it— a while, then you need to warm up before going out there.”

“Oh.” Yeah that makes sense, but I still have no idea what I’m going to sing. In all honesty I don’t think I’m even very good at it, but as Christa said, what other choice do I have? “Yeah ok.”

I clear my throat and start humming. I’m warming up my vocal chords a bit, but mainly I’m still trying to figure out what the fuck to sing. It has to be something I not only know the words to but know how to play. Sadly, outside of Christmas carols and nursery rhymes, that list extremely small. Even more so when you consider full lyrics instead of hums. That narrows it down to like 6. One of which isn’t even an option, so five. Two are boring so I start with one that is fucking depressing, but really fun to play. By the end of it Christa is in tears, which we decide isn’t a good pairing with my chosen monologue. The next one I try is not sad, but when I attempt to hit some of the notes, Christa cuts me off encouraging me to the next one. Which leaves option numero siese. I clear my throat again, and place my hands in front of me, like I’ve done for the last two. My fingers silently move in the intro of the song, and I begin to sing.

I get maybe halfway before Christa gasps.

“Oh my God, Eren, we have to go now!” I look to the clock above the door and realize that, shit she’s right. We’ve been in here for about 20 minutes, brain storming, which means they’ve already started. I don’t know where Christa sits on the queue, but I don’t want her missing out because of me. We run out of the practice room, back into Room B. When we enter, the room is silent. Eyes snap to us as we shuffle awkwardly to find a seat on the floor. Only 3 have gone, which leaves the other 20 or so of us waiting. Everyone looks scared. I turn to Christa and it amazes me that she looks so calm, so stoic, as if all of this is the most natural thing in the world. It’s the exact opposite of when
I first saw her not an hour ago, when she looked like a poor deer caught in headlights. She looks at me and smiles gently.

“When do you go?” I ask quietly.

“Last, actually.”

“Really? I’m right before you then.” I say a little louder than needed, but those who are giving me evil glares can go stuff it because I’m suddenly very aware of the shadow I’ll be cast into once she follows my act.

“Don’t worry about it, Eren. You’ll do great.”

“No! I didn’t mean—” Well actually I did because, yeah she’s gonna be remembered, but still she’s my sort of friend now and I need to stop being so selfish. Of course I want her to do well, and I have no doubt that she will, but until now I blissfully forgot that she was competition. “I mean that’s great! You’ll be easy to remember!”

I smile, trying to reassure her of my faith.

“Thanks.” She barely whispers. She’s smiling, but her face is turned to the ground and her cheeks are dusted pink. “I really liked the last one you were singing by the way. I think you should go with that.”

“Oh.” I almost forgot about that. “Okay, thanks I’ll do that.”

We sat in silence the rest of the time. Names were called, and the room emptied. My lips kept moving silently through my monologue, and my fingers kept moving over nonexistent keys. Before long, there were only we two.

“Jaeger!”

Both our head shot up, and we exchanged nervous glances.

“Good luck, Eren.” She said as I got up and I smiled back at her.

“You too.”

I went down the levels of floor to Auruo and he led me through a door at the bottom I hadn’t noticed. It was dark. Really dark I realized as almost fell into the man leading me through this narrow hall. He’s about 6 feet from me and when he starts to get taller, I see the stairs. My hand grips the rail because my eyes are still adjusting to the change in lighting. We make it up the stairs in silence, and when we are level again, I can see the light reflecting off the dark wooden floor below our feet. I’m standing in stage left. The heavy black curtains section off the depth of the stage so that all that is left is a ten or so foot space to perform in. A spotlight in focused on the center, and a single chair sits to the edge of the light.

“Stay here till they call you, kid.” And with that I’m left fending for myself as I hear his footsteps echo back down the stairs.

I edge myself as close to the edge of the curtain as I dare, but even then the most I can make out it the corner of the judges table. I don’t even know how many there are. 5 I think Armin said. I know one is Pixis, which already I wish I had forgotten that because I’m shaking again. Damn it I really need to get it the fuck together. I’m concentrating so hard on my breathing; I hardly hear my name being called. The voice is familiar, warm and inviting, Petra. Shit, I hope that doesn’t mean Auruo is up
there. Is that why he left? I walk onto the stage, my eyes fleet over the judges table. It’s too dark to really make them out, but I instantly recognize Petra on one end of the table. I guess it’s better this way. At least if I can’t see them, I can’t psych myself out too much. I can pretend they aren’t even there. I take another deep breath and let my face twist into my attempt at the world’s brightest smile. I hear giggling, so maybe my attempt is working.

“Thank you all for having me here.” I begin. It’s not the normal way to start a slate, but for some reason it feels right. “My name is Eren Jaeger, I am 20 years old and I will be preforming a monologue from Walter Wykes’s play *The Unwanted*. After which I will be singing *Into the Fire* by The Thirteen Senses.”

When I finish speaking, I take a seat in the chair provided. I take one more breath as Eren Jaeger. My eyes have fluttered shut, and when I open them I know I will be Dan. I will be the man who is desperately seeking solace weeks after finding his wife dead by her own hand. I open my eyes and I feel it. *Guilt*. So much guilt that it is literally choking me. My head comes down to rest in my hands. I shake it there before running a hand through my hair and looking up. I take a desperate breath, because if I don’t I’m going to be crushed by it.

“She left a note. Did you know that?” I ask the space that would be my friend. My voice came out strained; I can imagine his face twisted in confusion. I clear my throat before continuing, so that he would understand. “She left a note that she was doing it for me.” The last word come out strangled as my throat has decided to close again. Tears are stinging the back of my eyes, but I won’t cry. Not now, so I look up, trying in vain to will them back. I let out a humorless laugh before returning my gaze to the empty space that would be him. Anger has filled me now. At her, at myself, and at the fucking man who won’t stop me from speaking. When I speak again it’s with venom. “For me. Because she knew I didn’t want her anymore.” I choke a bit on my breath, and sigh. My eyes fall to the ground and I know that if I keep going like this I’m going to break and we’ve already established that I can’t do that. So I sit like that, in silence while I get my breathing under control. “What’s horrible,” I begin quietly because I’m afraid of admitting to it. But if I don’t, then this guilt is going to kill me. “Is that it was true.” As the words leave my lips I feel simultaneously better and a thousand times worse. “I didn’t want her. I was ready to walk away and she knew it.” I look back up now, to the invisible man expecting disgust, but seeing only understanding. It prompts me to continue. Honestly, I don’t think I could even stop if I tried at this point. “I was gonna wash my hands of the whole fucking thing-” I move my hands around to emphasize my point. “-I was gonna find some sane girl and start over.” My hand is running over my face and my blood is once again starting to boil as I remember why. “Someone who didn’t play mind games all the fucking time-” I’m on my feet now, I don’t remember getting up but at the moment I couldn’t care less. “-someone who didn’t question my every motive-” I’ve taken to pacing to keep up with my rising heartrate. “-someone who didn’t scare the hell out of me!” I’m looking at him now, pleading with him to understand the extent of how utterly fucked up the woman was. It was true she fucking terrified me. Even now, she’s traumatizing me with her memory. *Which must have been exactly what she wanted.* This epitome hits me hard, and when I speak again it’s to myself more than anyone else. “You know, there were times I was actually afraid she might kill me. My own wife! I was afraid she might poison the milk or stick me with a steak knife in the middle of the night. Honest to God. I was afraid to go to sleep.” My voice ended in a squeak because, yes, I’m trying to convince this person that the woman who just killed herself over me was the evil one. “Sometimes I think the only reason she didn’t is she knew this would hurt more.” A few tears shamelessly roll down my cheek; I take a deep breath, bite my lip and sit back down. My eyes have dropped back to the floor and I try to blink back my tears. My voice resumes its original barely audible whimper when I say the last line. “This would stay with me.”

A very audible “Whoa” echoes through the auditorium. I take a second to fade out of my character. My eyes sting from Dan’s tears, but the weight he bore has lifted. I look back to the table and smile.
before standing.

I am about to start my song, but I can’t find the critical piece of equipment I need. The piano. That blond decepticon set me up. Ah I should have known nobody’s that nice right off! Stupid, stupid, stupid!

“So is there something you need?” a booming voice asks from the darkened table.

“Um,” I feel so stupid. I am so stupid, even the judges have taken note of my stupidity. “The piano?”

“Just hand the accompanist your music, and she’ll take it from there.”

A friendly looking woman waves in my peripheral vision. In my lower peripheral to be precise, she is in the pit. Fuck, this is not going well. I walk to the edge of the pit and the woman holds out her hand expectantly. I crouch down to address her.

“Well you see…” I start, my hand is rubbing the back of my neck, making sure only she can hear me. “I was really hoping to play it myself.”

Sheepishly I look at her, and her expression is anything but harsh. In fact she looks enthused.

“Well, now that is something.” She says brightly. “We’ll have to do something about this stage then, hm?” She winks then disappears below the stage. She’s left me, what the hell? Do I just jump down? I began to swing my feet over, but stop as I hear a loud grinding noise. The pit is rising; I spring back on my hands and kick my legs back so that my knees are up. I lean myself on my elbow, look around my knees to watch a black grand piano make a dramatic ascend. Only when the grinding stops and the floor’s still do I push myself to my feet. I place a hesitant step on the pit stage and when I’m sure it won’t crash back down, I stride to the magnificent instrument. The judges are a lot closer now, actually right on the edge of the extended stage. I gulp and take a seat on the bench. They’re close enough to hear. I pick up on a “Well this is interesting.”, a barely contained squeal, and a mildly interested hum.

Breathe. Right I forgot about that. The cover is already lifted so that the shiny keys stare up at me. Inviting me to touch them; so I do. I can’t help the smile that crosses my face. It’s been so long since I’ve sat behind a piano. So long since my fingers have danced across monochromatic keys. The effect as I settle my fingers into position is instantaneous. I enter a calm that only comes when sitting on one kind of bench. My fingers pound down the first chord, and I’m gone; blissfully unaware of exactly what song it is I’ve started. Only that it is not in fact Into the Fire.

I never thought I’d miss you. Half as much as I do.

My voice doesn’t sound like my normal scratchy one. With the sweet melody accompanying it, it flows over each note, through each word.

And I never thought I’d feel this way. The way that I feel about you.

As soon as I wake up- every night, every day.

I know that it’s you I need. To take the blues away.

It must be love. Love, love.

It must be love. Love. Love.

Nothing more, nothing less, love is the best.
I’ve closed my eyes. I’m smiling like a fool, like I always did when I played this. Behind my eyelids I can see her next to me, smiling through each word. Her voice rings in my ears as I sing. The ghost of rose petals and jasmine tea fill my nostrils.

*How can it be that we can, say so much without words?*

*Bless you and bless me. Bless the bees and the birds.*

*I’ve got to be near you every night, every day.*

*I couldn’t be happy any other way.*

My fingers are bouncing across the piano. And I can hear the other half of this piano duet. I can feel her arms move around me as I play between them. I’m only slightly aware that I’m playing her part. The harmony she would sing surrounds my own voice.

*It must be love, love, love.*

*It must be love, love, love.*

*Nothing more, nothing less, love is the best.*

When the piano solo comes, I can’t help but play so much more than what’s needed. I have to keep my fingers moving because right now I’m with her, and I don’t want to be anywhere else.

*As soon as I wake up- every night, every day.*

*I know that it’s you I need, to take my blues away.*

*It must be love, love, love.*

*It must be love, love, love.*

*It must be love, love, love.*

*Nothing more, nothing less, love is the best.*

*It must be love, love, love.*

*It must be love, love, love.*

*It must be—* my eyes open, the fog has lifted, and I am fully aware of what I am singing. I can’t finish the lyrics. Tears warm my cheek, but my fingers refuse to stop moving until the song is done. Mom would have hated it if I stopped now. I force the smile to stay on my face, because nobody has the right to see the pain this song causes me. I don’t know why I’m doing this; nobody has the right to listen to me play. *Then why are you?*

The last note echoes through the auditorium, and I allow my false smile to fade a little. My fingers are still hovering over the keys as my mind tries to catch up with what just happened. Because what in the *hell* just happened?

Applause erupts from the table beside me. It’s followed up by a “whoop! Whoop! Ouch, Erwin!” I look to the direction of the noise. From here I can make them out much better. No Auruo, thank you God. Rather, in the middle is a large muscular blond man wearing a welcoming smile? To his right is a woman with a messy brown ponytail and glasses, she’s waving enthusiastically at me, so I wave half-heartedly back. If I had to guess, I’d say the whooping came from her. Beside her is Petra, sweet
and smiling as always. Pixis is easy to spot with his gleaming bald head, and he is seated on the other side of the massive blond. Beside him is a small man with raven hair and an impossibly impassive face.

I know him instantly.

My face has gone white, but all I see now is red.

That fucking asshole.

Levi fucking Ackerman in the flesh.

There are words being thrown at me, compliments maybe, but my entire focus is on not jumping off the stage and strangling the man, that I can’t make them out. I’m shaking, I am physically enraged. All I can do is root myself to the spot and stare. He’s small, like seriously petite, I could take him. Then his eyes snap to mine and I am momentary taken aback by the severity of his gaze. Maybe he would be more of a challenge.

What would Armin say? Easy, he’d say I need to chill. He’d tell me to be reasonable because I have worked really hard and the last thing I need is to throw it all away for a good swing. And, okay, he’d be right, but I can’t help it. I can’t help it because there’s one other question running through my mind.

What would Mikasa say?

As her name crosses my thoughts I have to bite the inside of my cheek to keep from screaming at the man. Fuck is that blood? I move the warm liquid that has erupted in my mouth over my tongue. Yup definitely blood. I still haven’t moved, opting instead to stare daggers into the stone cold grey eyes that haven’t broken my gaze.

He doesn’t know me, oh but do I know him. Not that every other person in world doesn’t know of him, but I my familiarity has absolutely nothing to do with his fame. It has everything to do with my sister. The one he abandoned. The one he let down. The one he whispered broken promises to. The one he hurt. Mikasa. In our first home together, when we met, she would go on and on about her big brother. About how he was the biggest bravest kid she knew, and how he was going to save us. About how he was the biggest bravest kid she knew, and how he was going to save us. How he would never leave her behind. “He’s coming back, he promised.” She at first would repeat those words with conviction, but as time went by the mantra lost its strength and eventually those words were removed from her vocabulary. When the years passed she came to think he was dead. She didn’t say it, but the finality in her voice when she spoke of him (which was rare enough already) confirmed it. Then a few years back we were in a theater to see some shitty action movie, when the trailer for Levi’s first film debuted. We were all huddled over Armin discussing the epic-ness of the trailer when the tub of popcorn fell unceremoniously to the floor and Mikasa hightailed out of the room, slamming the door in her wake. We found her in the curled against the wall in the corner stall of the bathroom. Ignoring the scoffs and glares for having the nerve to enter the lady’s room, I dropped to my back and shimmied my way through the tiny gap between the floor and the bottom of the locked stall door. It was the first time since Mr. Arlet’s funeral that I had seen her cry, and right then and there I vowed to kill the motherfucker who hurt her like that.

And here he is. Sitting not ten feet from me, arms crossed, face expressionless, judging me. And I want to hurt him; I want to feel his fucking face swell under my fists. Mikasa’s broken expression flashes in my mind, and I want to watch the light leave his fucking arrogant eyes.

“Eren?” a booming voice finally pulls me out of my violent thoughts. Get ahold of yourself, Jaeger, now’s not the time. Right. I turn my head to the owner of the voice which happens to be a familiar
bald man sporting a grey walrus moustache. “You alright there son?”

Well I’d like nothing more than to gouge the eyes out of “Hollywood’s Most Mystifying Man”, other than that, yeah, I’m good.

“Y-yes, sir.” I stammer because I’m still trying to control the rage that is only growing under that grey scrutiny. My answer seems to have quelled his curiosity because he merely smiles warmly and gives a curt nod. Huh, maybe he doesn’t hate me. The small gesture seems to have dampened some of my anger too because I am no longer shaking. My blood is still boiling, and there’s a ringing in my ear, but as long as I keep my eyes averted I think I can keep it together.

“As I was saying, Eren,” Petra says, apparently continuing from a one-sided conversation we had in the moments I used to imagine Levi’s death. “There’s only one other audition. After which we’ll go through and choose the finalist. So feel free to take that time to relax and eat. There’s a small buffet downstairs if you’d like. In the meantime we will deliberate. An announcement will be made when the final list has been posted.”

“Okay sounds good,” I manage to get out. I shimmy my way off of the piano bench. I decide to offer the rest of the table my best attempt at a warm, optimistic smile and sincerely hope I’m a good enough actor to have at least pulled that off. “Thank you all for your time and consideration!”

I make a small, awkward bow and follow through the stage to the door on the opposite side I entered on. As I go I can’t help but feel stormy grey eyes burning into my back. When I go to open the door I realize my hands have made themselves into fists, and as I grab the handle I realize I am once again shaking. Fuck.

The stillness of the hallway is far too welcomed. The moment I click the door shut, I lean my back against it. Breathe, I tell myself, breathe. I lean my head back and sink to the floor. What do I tell Mikasa? I let out a long shaking breath as I ruffle my hands through my hair. Fuck what now? I want to go back in there. I want to grab him by that insanely wrinkly-free and too tight shirt that, for the record I totally did not notice and throw him against a brick wall. I want to beat him senseless. I want to hurt him like he hurt her. I want to make him question his worth; to feel forgotten.

I want to break him.

I also want to know what the fuck happened with the piano. Why did that, of all things, come out? That wasn’t the plan.

None of this was the plan. There wasn’t supposed to be a second piece, or a piano, or a fucking Levi. Like I said before, I didn’t want to do any of this.

I blame Armin.

Chapter End Notes

This is a link to a cover of It Must Be Love and I imagine it to be the way he and his mom would play the duet
Chapter Summary

Eren meet Hanji briefly before heading home and facing Mikasa.

Christa finds me three jelly donuts, one and a half sandwiches, and a bag of chips into the buffet not 15 minutes later. I’m nose deep in a chocolate covered long john when she clears her throat and gives me a half-disgusted, half-concerned once over.

“What?” I ask, as soon as the bite clears my esophagus. “I eat when I’m stressed.” I’m not even kidding; see surprisingly enough I’m not the best at handling my emotions, particularly anger. When I’m not allowed to give into the rage that overtakes me, I always try to cope through physical activities like Mikasa told me, but more often than not I end up eating. Perhaps my subconscious knows that by putting me into a food coma I’m not nearly as willing to or capable of fighting. Whatever the reason there’s food here and as far as I can see, no treadmill.

“You must be seriously stressed.”

I shrug and take another bite, because yes, yes I am. She simply sighs and joins me at the small circular table I’ve chosen because it is conveniently tucked away from the buzz of snob-central.

“So, how’d it go?” it’s a predictable and completely innocent question, but Levi’s face fills my mind and my mom’s song fills my ears so I finish stuffing the donut in my mouth to avoid answering. “Well whatever you did had them talking for a while. I waited in the wing forever before they called me.”

“Probably just talking about what a fool I made of myself.” I murmur remembering too clearly each stumble and mumble I made.

“I seriously doubt that, Eren.”

I shrug and resume eating. “Wut ‘bout- choo?” I ask with my mouth half full.

“I really don’t know,” she starts while crossing an arm over her chest to grab the opposite bicep. “I mean, I think I did well enough.”

“You did.” I say with finality because there is no way in hell that she didn’t. Even if she sucked, I can’t imagine anybody saying no to those big sapphire eyes. “Better than enough, I bet you were the best of us all.”

“I don’t know about that,” her gaze has adverted from mine to the floor, and her cheeks are dusted pink. I roll my eyes.

“Just take the compliment, you know it’s true.”

“How would you know? We just met and you haven’t even seen me preform.” There’s a small bite to her voice that anyone else would have been surprised at, but I remember the tone she adapted in the practice room so I don’t skip so much as a beat with my reply.
“I don’t, you’re right, but I just have a feeling you’re not the type of person to go into something like this without being prepared. And something else tells me that you don’t waste your time being second best.” I end with a smile. I could be completely wrong, I mean I did just meet the chick, but I really don’t think I am. I’m pretty good at reading people; it’s near the top of my tiny list of strengths.

“Well, I don’t think you should sell yourself short, Eren, you could have easily bested me. If you act half as well as you sing I’m sure you’re golden.”

Wait, what? I really don’t know how to respond to that beyond my current gaping fish impression.

“Just take the compliment.” She echoes sarcastically as she nudges my knee under the table.

Now, I use the term nudges loosely because the force she used has my knee nearly knocking the table over. All eyes snap to our little corner. A few people merely shrug and go about their business, but the majority gift us with ugly glares. An innocent smile takes up residence on her face when I silently try to blame her for the disruption, but rolled eyes and loud scoffs are all we get in reply to our adverted disaster.

I reiterate-snob fucking central.

Waiting takes longer than any of us had imagined. Christa and I were able to finish lunch (and desert on my part) before digging out a pack of playing cards she had in her purse. We started with the basics. Slap jack (I lost both games), garbage (which we gave up half way through), and speed (I’ve won five rounds, Christa four, and it’s neck and neck in round ten.)

“Speed!” Christa shouts as a matching pair surfaces. I swear under my breath before adding the piles to my own. We stopped caring about our volume in the room three rounds ago and haven’t been kicked out yet. In fact, oddly enough we’ve managed to attract a small crowd. I’ve got a couple behind me, but I can’t help but notice there are more people standing behind Christa to cheer her on. Cards blur between us, each intently focused on the battle. Then the cheering stops abruptly and our fans disappear completely.

“Huh?” When I look up I see the population of the room crowded around the bulletin board down the hall. The list. My heart drops. This is exactly what we’ve been waiting for, literally, but I’m not ready to face the rejection hanging on that wall.

“Eren, c’mon.” Christa says. She’s already standing in front of me, and it’s obvious by her understanding smile and extended hand that she’s not moving till I do. Standing, I let out a sigh and follow her lead.

As we weave our way to the board, I see a great deal of tears. That knot in my chest pulls tighter for the reason that in just a few moments that will be me. Well maybe not the crying, I’m not emotionally attached enough for that, still what kind of person actually looks forward to elimination?

The list is small. Like really small, 25 names tops out of the 70 or so people here. Christa’s name is distinguishable near the top, of course. I look down at her and she looks back at me with wide eyes and a matching grin.

“Told you you’d get it.” I say through an encouraging smile and my shoulders move up and down to emphasize my point. Instead of the excitement I’m expecting, however, she cocks her head confused. I mirror her expression and her eyes roll so far back I’m almost positive she can see her brain. With an exasperated sigh she grabs my chin and roughly manipulates my head so that I am nose to paper with the list. Only then do I see familiar letters on the foreign list of approval.
I look back at Christa, wide eyed and utterly confused. She takes me in with a beaming expression before nodding behind me.

“Better go, it’s already 2:10” Her words wash over me, but I’m still processing everything. What? Did I read that right, they want me? A firm push on my chest prompts me in the indicated direction. “Go.”

So I do. I walk in a daze down the crowded hallway. Passing angry, sad, and utterly defeated people in my wake I must blend right in because none of them jump me for making the cut.

Making the cut.

I can’t quite seem to compute. How? Why? Who?

You, dumbass.

Thanks conscious, you fucking prick. I meant who the hell would choose me? I’m still 87.6% certain that Pixis hates me. The Brunette and Petra seem nice enough, but I couldn’t get a read on blondie. Levi? Nope. No. Didn’t happen.

But what if? Ok if we’re playing that game, I wouldn’t want to be on the stupid list if it was him who put on it. End of story. Next question please.

Where are the stairs? Thanks- wait uh shit, where are the stairs? I swing my head left and right at the dead end of the hallway. I’m pretty sure I used stairs to get down here, but I was in such a rigid state I didn’t actually pay attention. Typical Jaeger. Yeah, yeah.

I’m still eying the walls desperately, as if they’re the ones playing this cruel joke when I spot the door a few paces back. I know I’m in the lower level. Below the lobby floor, which means I have two floors to climb instead of just one. Not a problem since my freakishly long legs allow me to take stairs at least two at a time. I reach the second floor in what I’m going to go ahead and say was a record time. I double over to catch my breath before beginning my search for practice room 12. I find it on the other side of the floor, of course. I look at my phone for the time- 2:17. Shit I’m late. My legs are shaking, but I refuse to be nervous, must be from the stairs. Sure, stairs. I roll my eyes inward again and take a deep breath. I close my eyes for a moment to compose myself. I am completely unprepared. It’s actually kind of pathetic. However, despite my better judgment, I open my eyes and place my hand of the handle. I’m certain whoever’s behind this door doesn’t want to wait for my sorry ass any longer so I step in and close the door behind me.

Empty. Save a couple chairs and a white board, the small room is completely empty. Did they get tired of waiting for me? It was only a couple of minutes. Were they really this strict? Leave it to me to throw away the opportunity of a lifetime over a few minutes of being tardy.

I let out a sigh and decide to leave once and for all. Before I can reach the door, however, it springs open to reveal the crazed brunet from the judges table.

“Oh Eren! Sorry I’m late.” The woman begins loudly before gesturing to one of the chairs. “Please take a seat.”

I silently obey, and while I do I take the time to look her over. It’s the lady from the judges table, the one who whooped. She’s wearing a dark blue button down blouse that hangs loosely over tight black slacks. Her ponytail is pulled high on her head, but several strands lay haphazardly around her face. She is wearing brown rimmed glasses that currently are sliding down her nose as she gazes
down at me. A friendly enough smile is plastered on her face, but I can’t help but notice a maniacal
glint in her eyes. I gulp.

“So, Eren,” she pushes her glasses back up her nose and holds up a clipboard to fit her gaze. “I
wanted to ask you a few questions, is that ok?” her eyes flick over the clipboard to mine, I nod.
“Good. Now, why are you here? Why choose the Scout Regime?”

A talking vegetable tricked me here by claiming to be my best friend.

“Well, uh,” I stammer. My hand has resumed its position on the back of my neck as I search for an
answer. “I, uh, well I like to act?”

She lets out a bellowing laugh that has me jump a couple inches off my chair. “You don’t sound too
sure about that.” The other chair is dragged until its right in front of my own and the woman falls
unceremoniously into it.

“Oh, no! I mean I am! Sure, that is.” my hands are extended toward her as I try to remove the foot I
just placed in my mouth. She looks amused, snickering behind her hand. I clear my throat. “My
friend actually told me about your scouting program and encouraged me to audition.”

“I see.” She started scribbling notes onto the clip board. My mouth has gone dry again, and I swear I
can feel a bead of sweat roll down my forehead. What is she writing? Curiosity has me craning my
neck ever so slightly so that maybe I can make out some of her notes. But my attempt is thwarted due
to the hand extended right underneath my nose. I awkwardly reach my hand up to meet it only to
have it seized in a bone-crushing grip. “Hanji Zoe. Set supervisor for Regime studios.”

“Pleasure to meet you.”

“Pleasure’s all mine boy-o! I absolutely adored your performance! The monologue was well
adapted, and your voice.” She squealed a bit and I felt heat fill my face. I tried offering a grateful
smile, but I’ve never been good at taking compliments. They just make me feel uncomfortable and,
like now, they’re often unwarranted. “I mean, don’t get me wrong, you need polishing, but overall
what raw talent!” Suddenly her hands smashed my cheeks, holding me in place as she brings her
face closer to mine. “And what the hell kind of eyes are those!? Are they blue, are the green? I don’t
know, but they looked like sparkling emeralds full of fire when you were on stage. Wolf eyes.”

“Um, thanks-” I mutter through the fish lips the pressure on my cheeks have given me. We stay like
that for two ticks past too long in silence. When she finally releases me, I message my jaw a little to
get some feeling back.

“Anyway, Eren, we’re very interested in adding you to our scouting program. Like I said before,
you’ve got talent, but there’s still a long way for you to go before you’d be able to really break into
the industry. Am I right in assuming your knowledge of our program is very little?”

I nod sheepishly. I really should have paid more attention to what Armin said when he told me about
all of this, but I honestly didn’t think I’d ever be sitting here.

“Well,” she begins by straightening her back and readjusting her glasses. “The Scouting Regime is a
talent seeking branch of Regime Studios. Basically, we offer classes, training, mentorships,
nutritionists, auditions, workshops, and a thousand smaller things that will polish each gem in the
program until they shine like the stars they’re meant to be! We individualize the training for each,
well, trainee so that they really get what they need out of the program.” Her hand flies to her chin
and she takes a moment to thoughtfully look me over. I feel like an ant under a magnifying glass, the
heat in my cheeks offering further validation to the analogy. “For you, I’m thinking starting in a
mentorship. You seem like a ‘hands on’ kind of learner. It’s usually the one of the final steps in the program, but something tells me it’s the best route. Besides I already have the best mentor in mind.” She ends with a wicked grin spread across her face. For what feels like the thousandth time in her presence, I gulp.

“And, can I ask who that will be?” As I ask in a small voice, a flock of butterflies make their presence known in the pit of my stomach.

“All in good time, Eren, all in good time.” She touches the tip of her nose with her index finger and winks, replacing the small flock in my stomach with the entire migration of monarchs. My eyes flick over to the door, which unfortunately is semi-blocked by Hanji’s chair. There’s no clear escape route. “Now, before we get you enrolled, we unfortunately need to test you. There are only 9 slots available and 23 finalist to fill them. You seem like you can handle the competition though, eh boy-o?” She sends me an exaggerated wink, and I can only smile doubtfully back at her.

“Er, I don’t really have anything else prepar-” Before I can get out the last word a small packet is slapped onto my lap. I pick it up skeptically. It’s a scene. I skim through it a bit, but by the second page I’m completely discouraged because it seems to be a romance.

“Not a problem. All you need to do is memorize this scene, and come back in a week ready to put on a show.” She’s making her way to the door now.

“But-” I go to stop her, hand extended toward her back.

“But, what?” her body has turned back to me, giving me her full attention.

“Who-?”

“Oh, now what fun would that be!? Like I said, Eren, this is a test so be ready for anything.” She says ominously and opens the door. Before she leaves, though, she looks back over her shoulder and adds, “Or anyone.”

What? I’m staring, wide eyed at the space Hanji was mere moments ago. Um that was, weird. I’m a thousand times more confused now than when I entered. I look back at the small pack of papers for encouragement. A scene, huh? I sigh and exit the room.

As I saunter down the steps to the lobby, I immediately notice an infamous head of yellow hair waiting for me.

“Eren!” Armin yells. He runs from the couch he was leaning against to meet me at the bottom of the stairs. “How’d it go? I didn’t think it’d take so long, I’ve been waiting for like 20 minutes.”

“Sorry, I didn’t know you were here.”

“So?” he looks at me expectantly.

“So?” I reply, because yes, I am five and I still blame him for everything that has happened today.

“Seriously, Eren.” Armin rolls his eyes as we walk outside toward his 2003 Honda Civic. “How’d it go?”

I sigh. I still don’t really know how to answer that. “Good? I think.”

“You think?” He asks while opening his door, I do the same on the passenger side and we both duck into our designated seats. “Well, what happened?”
“It’s a long story. Like, seriously Armin, I don’t even know where to start with the fucked-up-ness that has been this day.”

“Good thing it’s a long drive.”

“It is not. We’re like 5 minutes away.”

“Well it is when you stop by Avogadro’s Number for dinner.” My stomach twists a little at the mention of food, but who can say no to that? A stronger man, perhaps, but not me.

“Oh, so after I hung up on you, this woman came in to explain the process to us…” I start my story. I tell him all of it, trying to go into as much detail as possible. Petra, Christa, Aurou, the snots that were my competition. Armin lets me talk, adding a small chuckle or grunt here and there to acknowledge that he’s listening. By the time I’ve gotten to the part about my mom’s song, we had placed our orders at the counter and settled into a booth in the dim dining room. “I don’t even know what happened. It was like; one second I have my fingers in position to start *Into the Fire*, the next I’m choking back tears finishing—you know—that song.”

“Wow, Eren, that’s…I’m sorry.” He knows. He just does. He knows exactly what that song means to me, he knows exactly how I must have felt, how I do feel. When his blue eyes find mine, I know he does.

“Yeah.” I clear my throat in anticipation for the next part of my tale. The part I’ve been least looking forward to. The part with Levi. “So, um, after that, I saw Pixis.”

“Really? Did he say anything?”

“Yeah, he did.” My nervous tick reappears and the nape of my neck is warmed by my hand once more today. “Actually, he asked if I was alright.”

“From the song? Were you- I mean, did you-” Aw he’s trying so hard not to say it.

“No Armin, I mean yeah I cried a little, but I doubt the judges could’ve seen it behind my stage smile.”

“Then why-”

“Levi Ackerman was there.” Just saying his name out loud is enough to get my blood boiling.

“Oh.” The tone in his voice catches me off guard. *Oh*? Is that it?

“Did you know-?” There’s an edge to my voice, warning Armin to choose his words wisely.

“Well-” he starts with his hand rubbing the back of his head as he eyes the exit nervously. “I heard he *might* be there, but I never imagined you’d see him.”

“And you didn’t tell me!?” In a world where people wore socks for hats and braided their underarm hair daily, I still would never have expected this.

“Eren, keep it down.”

“No, Armin, what the hell? You knew he might be there, and you still made me go!?”

“Eren, you didn’t do anything stupid did you?”

“No but I fucking should have!” I’m still mad at him, so I look anywhere but his direction. Deep
“I’m sorry I didn’t tell you, but you wouldn’t have gone.”

“Damn right I wouldn’t have.” Finally I look back at him. He looks sorry, but not as sorry as he could look which tells me he’s anything but. I roll my eyes because there’s no use crying over spilt soda. “But, since you made me go anyway…I got my name a stupid list, and now I have to go back in a week to do a scene or some shit like that.”

“Wait, what?” I smirk a bit as he gasps in awe. “That’s amazing! What do you mean a scene? With whom?”

“Actually, I have no idea.” I answered with a shrug of my shoulders. “The, um, lady I met with was clinically insane and didn’t tell me much. Only to come back in a week ready to do this scene” I flick the papers onto the table between us. Without missing a beat, Armin scoops them up and eagerly flips through.

“Oh my goodness, Eren, this is a-”

“I know, I know!” I say while waving my hands to cut him off. I don’t need reminding of what it is. Because if I think about what then I’ll think about who it could be with which really would only cause more of a headache since I won’t know until I show up.

“So, are you going to tell Mikasa?”

“What do you mean? Which part?”

“Any of it.”

I let out a heavy sigh. “I really don’t think I can. The acting thing would just make her mad, and I don’t even want to know what she’d do if she knew about Levi.”

“She’s going to find out eventually.”

“Let it be after I know for certain whether or not I’m in.”

“And Levi?”

“I don’t know Armin. I don’t want to see her hurt like that again.”

“Yeah. Just don’t keep it from her forever, because like I said, she’ll find out eventually and for the sake of both our lives it had better be from you.”

Our numbers are called then, providing the perfect end to that conversation. We eat in relative silence interlaced with shallow conversation. All the time I’m wallowing in conjured images of Mikasa’s face, hurt and angry, because of me. She’s never liked the idea of me pursuing acting as an actual career. She always refers to it as a “hobby” that she agreed might be a good outlet for me, but she’d rather me put my effort in becoming a drone in an office. Well a drone with her as an intern at the law firm she’s been at for years, but that’s just a small detail. The point is, when Armin first roped me into the audition, she wholeheartedly agreed with him. Then she found out the program would be full time, and she told me flat out not to go. So ok, maybe there was more than one reason for me following through with the audition today. What can I say, I’m a rebel.

Anyway, until I know indefinitely whether or not I made it, she can’t know or I never will. I’d never know what would have happen if I got in. I’d never know if I could have gone all the way, and
that’s something I can’t accept without regret. So she stays in the dark until there’s nothing she can
do to stop me.

God, she’s going to be pissed. Like, really, really pissed. Maybe Hannes will let me move back in if
she decides to kick me out.

“Ready to go?” Armin asks over his empty plate and the empty glass I’m still in denial over. My
mouth is still on the straw and I’m desperately trying to make more of the milkshake appear, but to
no avail I look to Armin and shrug.

“Have to go home eventually.” He gives me a small smile and we head out.

I’m walking up the steps to the door landing with Armin in my wake. Neither of us saw Mikasa’s car
in the driveway or on the street, so she must still be at the office- probably to return with a large box
of files to go through. Poor girl. I take my keychain from my pocket, and grimace at the pathetic
sight. Three keys on a boring blue ring are all I have. There’s one for the house, one for Hanne’s
house, and one for the convenient store. Sadly my car key was removed shortly after my car was
toted, and though I still have the need for the key ring, it just hasn’t felt the same.

The smell of stale pizza and cheap air freshener greets us as we cross through the foyer. Armin locks
the door behind us as I begin peeling off my shoes on the mat.

Our place is a modest, two bedroom house. It’s painted yellow with white trim and has a 6.5 by 13
foot fenced yard on the side, behind the garage. Both the bedrooms are on the first floor at the end of
the house. Armin and I laid claim to them so that Mikasa could have the small basement to herself.
She gets her own bathroom, but we get sunlight. Which I’m told is a plus, but my windows are
always covered in thick blankets anyway. Hardwood floors run throughout the house, stopping at the
stairs to the basement which is carpeted and the edge of the cheap linoleum that dignifies the kitchen.
The entryway has a half wall/book shelf that acts as a divider to the living room. There’s an old
wooden park bench we placed in that space with mismatched baskets underneath for hats and such
that sits on a dusty maroon oval rug. Directly across from it is a small coat closet. Small as in three
clothes max. Then adjacent to the bench and across from the half wall is an unorganized shoe rack
which stands beneath a large window. It doesn’t really do a great job at fulfilling its title as shoes
litter the floor around it, making it difficult not to trip. The living room opens up to the right of the
entryway, the small kitchen to the left. A spotlight directly onto our coffee table is cast from the small
circular window directly above our door. The black chipped table sits between the beat up brown
leather couch and the fairly new TV. There’s a matching armchair against the wall before the
hallway, and a bean bag across from that below the bookshelf- thing.

That’s right I said bean bag. Be jealous, be very jealous. The obnoxious color of the exterior
thankfully does not follow through here. Instead we settled on a light mocha with dark chocolate trim
in the main living space. Our bed and bathrooms are boring eggshell white.

I untuck my shirt completely and unbutton the first two from the top. After grabbing a coke from the
60’s deco fridge, I hop over the back of the couch and plop into the cozy corner of the armrest and
throw pillows. With my left arm draped over the back of the couch, I cross my ankles on top of the
coffee table and take a drink. A few moments later, Armin has joined me on the couch with a glass
of iced tea clutched between both hands. He’s sitting like a fighter pilot, back straight knees bent
perfectly in front of him; it earns a chuckle from me.

“What?” He asks, cocking his head to one side.

“It’s nothing.” I say through a smile as I bring the soda can back to my lips. He just shrugs and grabs
the remote.
We get through four and a half episodes of Dexter before Mikasa walks through the door, balancing two brown filing boxes on one arm, closing the door with the other.

“Hey.” She calls from behind her tower. She tips the boxes carefully onto the bench, kicks off her shoes, and removes her blazer before looping the corner and falling into the bean bag.

“Hey. Rough day?” I reply. She rolls her eyes and growls in response. Armin’s already on his way over to her, coke in one hand, remote in the other. He hands the coke to Mikasa who takes it with a nod of gratitude.

“Rico sent me home with everything she ‘didn’t get to’ before leaving on her vacation.”

“What a bitch.”

The corners of her mouth twitch before she takes a sip, showing approval in my statement.

“Eren and I ate a little bit ago, but there’s still some pizza or mac and cheese in the fridge if you’re hungry.” Armin states from his resumed position on the couch.

“Thanks, but I better just get to work.”

“Mikasa-” I start because that’s not healthy. I know she doesn’t eat breakfast, opting out for a large cup of coffee, and for all I know she doesn’t eat more than a salad for lunch. I know it’s not on purpose she just gets way too wrapped up in her work that she forgets to take care of herself.

“Eren, it’s fine, I actually went to lunch with Rico and a few clients earlier.”

“You should eat a bowl of mac at least. In case you skip breakfast again.”

“Fine.” She gives, I smile, but it is a short lived victory as a tightly wound rubber band becomes acquainted with my calf.

“Ow!”

“Punk.” The corners of her mouth are upturned again so I categorize the bee-sting pain as worth it.

By the time I’m ready to head to bed Mikasa has bid us goodnight, and Armin has conked out on the couch. Again. So I throw a blanket over him, turn off the TV and pad down the hall to a long overdue meeting with my mattress.

The next six days pass uneventfully. I have worked every single one of them for 9 hour shifts. Thankfully today is the first of three of my days off. Thus far, I have celebrated by sleeping till 3 in the afternoon, chilling in last night’s pj’s, eating a bag of Doritos, and am making my way through the fifth season of Criminal Minds. Since it’s my me-day, I haven’t even bothered with my contacts, sporting instead my black rimmed glasses held together by a cleverly wound piece of packing tape at one corner. My oversized grey Nine Inch Nails tee is riddled in tiny holes and stains, but it’s my favorite and most comfortable shirt. I can’t help but be perfectly content curled where I am in the gigantic chair with my legs draped over one of the arms and a blanket thrown over my lap. Even if I desperately need a shower and a shave before I go in tomorrow, I’m just fine whe-tomorrow!? Shit!

I’m up, moving, and, faster than my mind can follow, back in the living room with the script I’ve barely looked at clutched between my hands.

“Fuck.” I let out a shaking breath as my eyes wonder over the page. I have some of it memorized, but not all of it.
You’re so screwed.

Oddly enough, that’s not helping, conscious.

I pace my house, pretty sure that by the time I’m finished there will be a distinguishable path engraved into the hardwood. However, that is the least of my worries, Hannes can kill me later, but now I need to focus. My lips read over my lines, responding to the silent banter. I go through the scene once, twice, thrice, so on and so forth, and am about to start my twelfth round when the front door is thrown open. My attention is called to the glowering woman in the doorway. She slams the door behind her and removes her shoes, never letting her black eyes waver from mine.

“Eren,” she begins in a dangerously low and steady voice. “Mind explaining to me why I got a call from some deranged lady at Regime Studios, reminding an Eren Jaeger that his call-back is at noon tomorrow?”

Oh no. That’s what this is about. I’m not too surprised since Mikasa and my cell phones have literally only one number deviance. Mine ends in - 2493 hers- 2453. Armin always gets them mixed up, and he was the one who submitted my paperwork for me. Noon, huh? Well it helps knowing when I was to be there; maybe I could get Armin to drop off invitations to my funeral.

“Er, how should I know!?” I start my defense with the classic claim to ignorance. My arms are thrown out toward her in attempt to further prove my innocence. “Like you said, she must be deranged.”

Her eyes only narrow, all the better to see through my lies. Her jaw is clenched, arms crossed, hip cocked, a single deadly eyebrow rises, giving me one chance to recant.

“Mikasa,” I sigh in defeat and look away. “I know you don’t understand it, but I had to try. And actually I did really well! That’s what the woman was talking about! I got a call-back and she told me that if I do well tomorrow I have a real shot of getting in.”

“So you’re not actually in the program now?”

I bite my lip before I answer and finally look at her sheepishly. “No.”

“See Eren!?” she says, one arm flung out in the air for emphasis. “This is what I mean. You don’t even know, all the work you’ve already done, and the work you’re doing now, for what? A one and a hundred shot of getting in. And even if you do get in, it’s just a program. It’s not a job. What happens if you change your mind, or can’t make it? All that time, all that effort will be wasted!”

“One and Twenty-three actually.” I bite back. It’s lame, but it’s all I’ve got to shut her up.

“Oh because that’s better!”

“What’s the big deal? It’s my life, why does it matter to you so much what I do with it?”

“The big deal is that you didn’t tell me. You even tried lying about it! The big deal is that I told you not to go because it’s a waste of time and now you have your hopes up for a completely baseless career path!”

“You know what Mikasa, just because I don’t want to end up sorting through someone else’s paperwork all night, doesn’t mean what I want to do is wrong!” I begin, I know I’m crossing lines, but fuck it. “Unlike you, I’m not ok with being someone else’s bitch.”

“At least I’m going somewhere, Eren! What about you? With the way you’re going, you’ll end up
staying here the rest of your life, unable to do any better than the 7-11, bumming rent off Hannes.”

Ouch. My jaw has dropped, I’ve stopped breathing, and tears sting at the backs of my wide eyes. I can’t look at her anymore so I direct my gaze to the side of the fridge.

“Eren, I didn’t mean-”

“Don’t give me that shit, Mikasa, you meant every word. You’ll make a great lawyer, you’ve got the soullessness down, the only thing you need is a briefcase.”

With that I turned on my heel, leaving her wide eyed and offended. Before she can come to her senses and yell at me some more, I enter my room and slam the door behind me.

She’s already gone when I wake up.
Just My Luck

Chapter Summary

Call-back day and the forecast is cloudy.

Chapter Notes

Ok guys I'm sorry this is so freaking late! My computer last week and I had to get a new one. Meanwhile I waited a week to get all my data off of it, this story included. So please don't hate me. And again thank you all so so much for the kudos and comments! I love you all!

The drive to the studio has been filled with tense silence. True we only live a hop skip and maybe a 40 meter jump away, but in rush hour it might as well be across the city. So I figure I’ve got another good 5 minutes or so of this before we pull up to the curb. Content enough though I am sitting in silence, the nervous glances Armin keeps throwing me tells me he’s anything but.

“What?” I ask after about the fiftieth shifty gaze he’s vexed me with. Grip tightening on the wheel he fixes his widened eyes on the gridlocked road.

“What happened with Mikasa?” his voice comes out mousy, but is filled with determination.

I sigh. I really don’t want to talk about it. Fuck I really don’t want to think about it, but so far this morning it’s been the only thing on my mind. I even nicked myself shaving because I decided to keep replaying every syllable of disappointment she uttered to me last night.

“I don’t want to talk about it.” I lean my head against the cool window, not really looking at anything in particular yet desperately hoping to find a distraction. “Not right now at least.”

“Oh, just-” he begins, and I can feel his eyes on me. Can feel the concern etched into his face, but I can’t make myself meet it. “Just don’t worry about it. Please, Eren, whatever happened don’t forget that Mikasa loves you and only wants the best for you.”

At least I’m going somewhere, Eren! What about you?

I snort in disbelief. Right, ok buddy…sure she does.

“Armin, please just drop it.” I mutter into the window. Watching the fog of my breath seems to provide that distraction I was looking for. I breathe against it again, this time drawing a little mushroom with big eyes. The dark clouds that have settled right over the city provides cool enough air allowing the picture to linger on the glass.

“Is that supposed to be me?”

“Well, it does capture your likeness.” I say while holding my hand underneath the crude portrait as if on display. He rolls his eyes and lets out a breath I could tell he’d been holding in since we left. The
tension seems to dissolve easily after that. I keep drawing on the inside of the window, Armin keeps the car rolling at a steady 3 mph, and we talk about nothing important.

As we turn the last corner, the studio comes into full view. It’s the largest building on the block. Scratch that, it’s the only building on the block. Large, fifteen story buildings branch off from one 20 story one in the middle. They each sit further from the road than the main building as well. Aside from the corners, which are ordained with what looks like dark granite, the buildings are covered in black tinted windows. Two large glass doors of the front lobby sit perfectly beneath smooth silver letters spelling out Regime Studios.

It looks so much more intimidating this time. Especially under the heavy grey clouds, looking up at the towering building feels nothing but ominous. As Armin pulls to the curb I can’t help but shutter.

“I think they said it’s supposed to rain today.” Armin says, craning his head over the dashboard to look to the sky.

“I doubt it. It’s the dry season. It gets humid sometimes, but I doubt it will do more than sprinkle.”

“I hope you’re right. Do you want to take an umbrella just in case?” he offers me a little black stub that I’m assuming is none other than that. I smile because of course Armin would have a little umbrella at the ready for any given moment. I put my hand up in response.

“No thanks, I won’t need it.”

“You sure? Because don’t forget that I can’t pick you up today, and you’ll have to walk.”

“Armin, I’ll be fine.”

“Okay, but don’t come crying to me when you’re walking home in wet socks.”

I shake my head in exasperation and move my hand to open the door. I’m about to duck my head out and stand when I feel a small hand on my arm. I look back to Armin who’s looking at me with the exact optimism I wish I felt.

“Eren, good luck.” With that he gives my arm a small squeeze and I give him an assuring nod.

The sound of him pulling away lulls me out of whatever bubble of security I felt moments ago. I gulp heavily and push my way through the gigantic glass doors into the lobby. A small girl with curly black hair is looking curiously at me from across the check-in counter, so I give her a small smile as I approach.

“Eren Jaeger.” My voice comes out cracked. So I clear my throat before trying again. “Um, for Hanji Zoe.”

“Oh, yes. The call-back at noon.” She says while typing something in her computer. She then looks up at me and smiles. “Someone should be on their way to get you. If you want to take a seat.” She gestures to the chairs behind me, but I’m pretty sure I have lingering bruises on my ass from last time I sat in those so I simply smile and lean against a wall. “Do you want anything? Water? Coffee?”

“Water would be wonderful actually.” I reply through dry vocal chords. She nods and disappears around the corner. I’m left alone in the lobby. It looks so much bigger without the herd of snobs filling it out. The ceiling runs really high and a wall of windows connect it with the large black tiled floor running with the sidewalk outside. The red carpeted staircase I met Armin on last week meets the corner of the wall of windows and disappears behind a perpendicular white one. On which are two large framed Ansel Adams prints of California; one of the Red Wood forest, the other of an
empty desert road but I can only see half of that one. The rest of it continues down a hall that is cut
from my line of vision by the edge of the wall behind the check-in desk. On it are the same cool
metal letters that stand outside, only these ones are jet black.

The lady returns with a large bottle of water, which I gratefully accept. It’s not until the cool liquid
touches my lips that I realize how fucking thirsty I actually am. I down two thirds of it immediately.

After waiting patiently for a full 4 minutes, I begin pacing the lobby floor. The girl’s eyes follow me
curiously, but I don’t stop because I can’t stay still. It’s one of my many weaknesses. I can’t make
myself sit still for more than, apparently in this scenario, 4 minutes. Oh well at least I got to see the
other half of that photograph before turning around and pacing the other direction. I make it a good 9
laps before I hear a familiar voice resonating the halls in my direction. I stop in place and casually
lean against the wall once more. The receptionist giggles behind her hand as I run my hand through
my hair quickly. Well, um, rude. Not that I can really blame her, I must look pretty ridiculous.
Actually I know I look pretty ridiculous. Armin had to help me with my wardrobe again today so at
least I look better than I would if I were left to my own devices. Still, khaki shorts and navy blue
polo shirts were never really my style. Nor are the grey corduroys I got for Christmas two years ago.
This marks the second day in that time I’ve worn them so I can officially say they weren’t a total
waste of Hanne’s money. I sigh in defeat, I can’t very well do anything about my outfit now.

Hanji’s voice only gets louder, and before I know it she’s rounding the corner with a stringy looking
man beside her.

“Ah, Eren!” Her voice echoes through the lobby. Her arms fall open in front of her and she spreads
open her hands, gesturing to all of me. “Good to have you back again!”

“Uh-thanks? It’s good to be back.” Ba-dum ba choo. Crickets. I feel like I just dropped a line from a
bad nineties stand up show. I grimace at my own words, but Hanji actually doubles over in laughter.
I smile, taken aback. Thank you, thank you, I’ll be here all week.

Will you?

Shut up conscious. I might be here all week as long as you and your friends like me enough, better?

“Oh, Eren-” she begins, finishing up her spurt of laughter and straightening herself once more.
“Keep that up and you won’t even need a call-back.” Really? Because that would be great! I’ve got
plenty more horrible jokes up my sleeve, just say the word! “Well not really, rules are rules, but oh
well.” Literally none of those were the word. I sigh into a smile because there’s no point in showing
any sort of disappointment. I mean I did come here to do the scene, might as well get it over with.
“So, boy-o, if you just want to follow me, we’ll get you into clothes and makeup.”

“Makeup?” I ask her back as she turns to lead me out of the lobby.

“Yup, didn’t I tell you?” she asks over one shoulder, still keeping pace. I shake my head. “Oh, that’s
my fault, sorry. For your call-back we’re filming you in full wardrobe on set. This way we can judge
you in real action so to speak.”

Oh that makes sense. I guess. I nod, but it goes unseen as her head has returned forward. We pass the
great hall with the white walls and dark carpet that I was shuffled into last week, and continue down
the dark tiles to the back of the building. Hanji stops us as we get to a large metal door that requires a
key pass to open. She swipes hers and we step outside.

The energy outside is positively buzzing. Golf carts are weaving through the crewmembers walking
every direction. Some are holding small props, others are tag teaming larger ones. There are large
warehouses lining the roads back. It’s as if behind the studio building is a small town positively
thrumming with life. It fills me with excitement, and for the first time I feel completely at home here.
I let my enthusiasm take over so that I’m nearly shoulder to shoulder with Hanji as we walk.

“We’re back in warehouse 7.” Hanji says, gesturing to a building further up on the left. Sure enough,
a large number 7 is printed on the side. I can’t help it. I really am excited. More so with each step
toward the warehouse. I can’t wait to see what’s hiding behind those huge metal doors. Can’t wait to
be under real studio light, behind real studio cameras. I can’t fucking wait to meet my partner for the
scene. I only hope they’re excited as I am.

Just as we’re about to walk through the small gap between the gigantic metal doors, my phone
vibrates in my pocket. Instantly, I look at Hanji to see if she heard it. It doesn’t appear she did, phew.
I’ll have to ignore it for now. I probably should have turned it off, but oh well.

The moment we’re inside, my breath is taken away. People are buzzing around here even more so
than those outside. They’re in the rafters setting the lights, on the set queuing props, and just
generally moving around us. Hanji pushes me off in one direction, guiding me into a director’s chair
set in front of a mirror outlined in bright lightbulbs. A woman with bobbed dirty blond hair with ice
blue tips joins her side to look me over.

“Eren, this is Nanaba. She’s the best makeup artist ever!”

“It’s nice to meet you, Eren.” Nanaba says, extending her hand politely. I take it immediately and
smile gratefully at her.

“Nice to meet you too!” She gives me a warm smile at that, then gives me a thorough once over.
There’s that ant under a magnifying glass feeling again. What fun. “Hmm, I’m going to need to get
you into your wardrobe first since you’re not in a button down.”

I frown a little. I should have known to wear a button down. I don’t know how I should have known
but I should have. So I stammer out, “Sorry.”

“It’s perfectly fine. I’m guessing nobody told you.” She looks at Hanji accusingly.

“I forgot!” Hanji shrugs. Nanaba sighs and taps my shoulder indicating I get up and follow her. I do,
and in a few silent moments we make our way over to wardrobe. Which is literally right behind the
mirrors. The clothes are packed tightly on portable racks, I watch Nanaba flip through each of them
like files in a cabinet. It reminds me of Mikasa looks when she’s flipping through the papers in those
boxes. Guilt sucker punches me in the stomach. I shake my head. I don’t want to think about that.

“Here!” Nanaba declares. She turns to me holding a stiff white button up, grey slacks, a matching
blazer, and a green tie looped around the shirt’s hanger. “The fit’s not going to be exact, it doesn’t
have to be, but I’m sure I’ve got your sizes correct. Throw these on and I’ll meet you back in your
chair.”

“Thanks.” I manage as I take the suit from her. She smiles and leaves. Wait, am I supposed to like
change here? I look around and it seems secluded enough, but still. I scan the room for any area that
may provide some privacy, and I find it behind a small curtain in the corner.

The clothes fit remarkably well. The pants are a touch too short, but everything else it spot on.
Nanaba is really great at her job, and I have to admit I look damn good in this suit. The green tie
matches the green in my eyes perfectly. The shirt hugs my frame while the blazer broadens my
shoulders.
I gather my own clothes in my arms. As I cross the room to place them in the corner my phone slips out of my shorts.

“Shit.” I mutter as I hastily drop my clothes in the corner and pick up my phone. As I do I notice the blue light flashing in the upper corner. Right it went off earlier. I look around, making sure nobody was watching I open the message. Then proceed to drop my phone in disbelief.

**MIKASA: Dinner’s on me tonight. Good luck.**

It might not sound like much, but that’s the closest I have ever, EVER heard to an apology from her. The notion fills me with pride and guilt and complete bewilderment.

“Eren?” Nanaba calls from the other side of the mirrors. I quickly shake myself out of shock, scoop up my phone to add to my pile and loop the corner to my chair. “Good, I thought maybe something was wrong with the fit.”

“No! Actually it fits fine!”

“I can see that.” She smiles a little and begins circling me with her hand to her chin, then stops behind me to push a hand through my hair. “Eren, how do you feel about a haircut?”

I gulp. “A-a haircut?”

“Free of charge course. Not that your hair isn’t acceptable, but I’ve got the perfect style in mind if you’ll give me permission.”

I look at myself in the mirror. My hair is standing in every direction, falling just above my shoulders. Even in this suit I look like a child. Don’t get me wrong, I rock the look, but maybe it was time for a change. A free change at that. A free change by ‘the best makeup artist ever’ as Hanji put it. “Go for it.”

She smiles brightly back at me through the mirror before pulling out a pair of sheers from her apron. I gulp and give myself a reassuring nod in the mirror. I can do this.

In all honesty she didn’t do much, but the change was drastic. I look at myself dumbfounded and run my fingers through it starting at the base of my skull. Wow, I probably wouldn’t have chosen this look on my own, but it fits. My hair is short at my neck, but seamlessly gets longer as it moves up my head. The strands around my face fall to the tops of my eyes, the shaggy look but with sophistication. She proceeds to style it in such a way that the slightly longer hair on top of my head is in a permanent bedhead state while the rest of it is crisp and clean. It’s a look I will have no luck duplicating ever. At least I have it now.

“How do you like it?”

“I love it!”

“Good. Now close your eyes, I have to do your makeup.”

Right, makeup. I obey, closing my eyes while she wipes, brushes, and pats my face. She taps my shoulder when’s she’s done so that I may look at her handiwork. Again I am struck by the changes. Like my hair, I can tell she didn’t do that much, but as I look at myself I look like myself but different. Older-no that’s not it-I look *timeless*. Not a pore in sight, my complexion is perfect. There’s a shade of brown on my eyelids behind dark brown mascara. Making my already bright eyes even brighter. I want to pack this woman in a suitcase and carry her with me so that I can always look this good.
“Thank you!” I smile brightly at her, hoping that I’m conveying how grateful I am for her help with it.

“You’re welcome. Now run to the set, I think that haircut set you behind a bit.”

I nod and, obedient as ever, walk to the set. Hanji is standing with a girl in front of someone sitting in a director’s chair, the girl talking excitedly to whomever that someone is. When Hanji sees me from across the distance she lets out a low whistle. I blush and focus my eyes away from her, to the head of black hair in the chair. Which naturally turns out to be a horrible idea. The heat in my face takes a new purpose as the man turns around to look at me.

Steel eyes, raven hair, and a ‘hate the world glare’- he must be an Ackerman.

“Not bad.” He says in an uninterested voice while giving me a once over. I only glower in response. I feel every nerve is on end, but I refuse to look away. Refuse to give him any sort of satisfaction.

“Eren! You look phenomenal!” Hanji says, pushing past Levi and dragging the girl behind her. The girl’s eyes stay on Levi as they move, and Levi’s eyes stay on me. “This is Hitch Dreyse. You’ll be doing your call-backs together!”

Hitch eyes me with disgust. She wears a tight tee-shirt stained to look wet with sweat and running pants. Her short hazelnut hair is pulled back into a bushy ponytail. Honestly if it weren’t for the flawlessness of her makeup I would have guessed she hadn’t been through costuming yet. Well her makeup paired with the strong sense that she’s the type of girl who’d never leave her house without ten layers of liner on. I don’t like her. I don’t like the way she’s looking at me, I don’t like her superior demeanor, and I fucking hate her for looking at Levi like he was some fucking super star! Well he kind of is. Touché. Still.

Despite all that I smile and offer her my hand. “Eren Jaeger, nice to meet you.”

She looks at it for a moment before loosely folding the tips of her fingers around mine and shaking them once before letting go. That was it. No ‘nice to meet you too’ no ‘can’t wait to work with you’ hell she didn’t even grace me with a proper fucking handshake. Ah, so this must be one of the snobs.

Well he kind of is. Touché. Still.

“ACTION!”

I pull myself through the door. There’s a camera in my peripheral vision, but I don’t pay it any mind. Instead I focus on my blocking. As planned I run into my mark, Jessi my neighbor who I have a serious crush on. My coffee spills on her and she shrieks. I drop to the ground to pick up my cup, apologizing with every breath only to be met with rolled eyes and a sneer.

“I’m sorry.” I say pitifully. Because I am and she’s making me feel worse than I already do. Shit I didn’t mean to run into her.

“You mentioned that.” She says snaps. “A couple times actually.”
I smile, hoping it will make things better. Smooth things over, or something...

“CUT!” Hanji calls, effectively bursting Steven’s persona from my mind. “Hitch, can you ease up on your tone a bit? You’re supposed to be falling in love not starting a cat fight.”

Hitch glares her way for an instant before slapping on a fake smile and nodding. Well then I guess here goes round two….

“CUT!”

Round three…

“CUT!”

Round four…

By round 6 it’s getting harder for me to get into character. I want to slap Hitch for being so remarkably difficult to work with.

“CUT!” Hinji calls. She’s pinching the bridge of her nose in exasperation, and I have so much empathy for her. “Hitch, please tell me what the problem is.”

“It’s this loser’s fault.” She drawls, throwing me a whiny glare. I roll my eyes. “He can’t keep up with me! If I was with an experienced actor,” at this she turns her head to Levi, dramatically batting her eyes while I suppress a gag. “Then everything would be perfect and-“

“Before you continue your incessant yapping, let’s get one thing very clear.” Levi says coolly, effectively cutting her off. “It’s you. You’re the one wasting film. Everyone here can see that this poor kid has tried every way he can to compensate for your lack of talent. It’s exhausting to watch the effort he’s putting out.” Both Hitch and I stare at the man wide eyed and gapping. His face is classically impassive, eyes roaming over the set bored. Hitch takes in a breath next to me, ready in defense, but it gets caught in her throat at the icy glare he settles on her. “And, if you were implying that I do the scene with you,” he starts in a warning tone. “Then I’m afraid we’d only run into the same trouble, except I have far less tolerance than Jaeger for those who waste my time.”

“Say, Levi that’s an idea!” Hanji interjects, commanding our attention. The woman’s grimace has been replaced with a menacing guise. It’s a look that has me feeling as though this was the exact opportunity she’d been waiting for. It’s also a look that makes me want to hightail it in the opposite direction.

“What are you talking about, shitty glasses?”

“Why don’t you do the scene?”

Excuse me?

“Come again?”

“You film the scene with Eren.” Levi’s eyes snap to mine and hold them as Hanji continues to speak. I gulp. “Go ahead and show Miss Dreyse how it’s done.”

Neither of us breaks eye contact. His eyes are cool blades slicing through my own emerald gems without effort. My jaw clenches itself when my mind finally catches up with Hanji’s suggestion and my eyes narrow, hardening against the steel of his stare. Hell no.
I move my head defiantly from side to side, a gesture so small I’m sure neither Hanji nor Hitch pick up on it. I’m not even sure Levi does until he raises an eyebrow and slowly curves his lips into a smug smirk. He slides out of his chair and starts walking toward makeup.

“Fine.” He says, without looking back to Hanji who lets out a squeal. Prick. He’s only doing this to fuck with me. Seems like it’s working, then.

“Oh Levi this will be great!” Hanji calls after him. He simply waves her off and disappears around the corner. Surprisingly, Hitch is the only one who looks as horrified as I am.

“Ahem!” Hitch interjects. “What about me? What am I supposed to do, exactly?”

“Well my dear, you’ll do just as I say.” Hanji answers in a dangerously sweet tone. “Step off the set, stand back here with me, watch, and maybe try to learn something.”

Hitch looks as though she’s about to protest, but obviously thinks better of it and stomps off the set. Leaving me standing here like an idiot waiting to do a scene in which I’m expected to not only get along with Levi, but like flirt with him? Heat rushes to my face as a side effect of the blood boiling in my stomach.

What the fuck am I going to do? Is it not enough that I’ve restrained myself so far? How am I supposed to keep from doing something stupid when there’s no observation gap? People bustle around me, setting up the different cameras, reorganizing the props, doing everything to get ready. I need to do something, I need to say something.

“Ah, Hanji?” I begin asking the first question that pops in my head. “How does he- I mean does he just like know all the lines already?”

“Seeing how I was in the fucking movie this scene is from, yes I do.” Strange, Hanji sounds a lot like a homicidal midget. I look in direction of the response and find that either she’s magically transformed or Levi rudely answered for her. Dick. Setting my eyes to ‘maim’ I direct them at said man making his way onto the set in full costume consisting of a grey form fitting tee and dark blue sweatpants. The stage makeup he’s in is subtle compared to Hitch’s. Save the thin black liner and thick mascara that serve only to make the steel of his eyes sharper. “Though originally, I was Steven.”

Of course you were.

“Oh?” I ask, trying to pack as much of a punch into my words to keep from actually throwing one. “Is that why you’re here?”

“As a matter of fact it is.” He replies, matching the tone of his voice to the chill of his eyes that are once again locked with mine. Mine narrow further.

I hate you.

Ok boys, save it for the film!” Hanji calls to us, ruining our staring contest.

Levi sighs; he runs a hand through his hair, and looks up at me through heavy lidded eyes that show no trace of the venom they held moments ago. The sudden change throws me off. “You ready, kid?”

No I’m not ready, but what choice do I have. Biting down on the inside of my cheek, I shrug. Taking deep breathes, I settle my shaking fists to my side. We get into position, he’s a little further down the hall and I’m back behind my door. By closing my eyes I attempt to reign in my focus.
I'm Steven, I'm Steven. Forget Levi, he’s not even here. Deep Breathes. It’s Jessi, the woman-er man- who keeps catching my eye from across the hall. The one who makes me smile. The one I can’t help but act like a fool in front of.

“Ready in five…” it’s been a busy day. “Four…” hard to focus on any one thing, I just need to get back to the office. “Three…”my hand is on the door knob. “Two…” The other scoops up the prop mug filled with cooled coffee. “One…” I’m running late, I have to go NOW!

“ACTION!”

The knob turns under my hand and the door is jerked back enough for me to slide through before pulling it to a slam that echoes the hallway.

“Shit!” I wince as ‘hot’ coffee sloshes onto my hand. I wave it a few times as I turn, and take off down the hall at full speed. My eyes are focused on my feet, but make it only a few paces before I slam directly into someone. As I do, my coffee cup practically explodes on the poor person, and, being graceful as I am, I drop it. The sound of breaking porcelain resonates in the otherwise empty hall.

A sharp wince comes from the person as I fall to my knees after my shattered coffee mug. I’m stammering out apologies as I pick up the shards, but fall silent when I finally look up.

It’s him.

“I-uh-I’m sorry.” I offer sheepishly, still on my knees. I’m eye to eye with the ugly coffee stain I just put on his otherwise rather flattering grey tee shirt. As I look closer, I can’t help but to notice how the wet coffee spot seems to have melted the cloth to his body. Heat fills my cheeks and I avert my gaze to the mess at my knees.

“You mentioned that.” He replies through a small, chuckle? “A couple times actually.” I stop to gape at him. That can’t be right, Levi doesn’t chuckle. But he’s not Levi, remember? “Are you going to be down there all day, or do you have somewhere you need to be?”

“Shit, yes!” I reply, putting a hand to my face, allowing the pieces of mug to slide back to the floor. I wince further into my hand out of shame.

He snorts.

My God, I’m such an idiot! Not only have I probably just lost my job, now I’ve probably lost any chance I had with him. I hear movement, but I refuse to watch him walk away so I keep my hand where it is. Suddenly, my nose is filled with the sweet scent of mint, sandalwood, and the smallest hint of cigarettes. I remove my hand and look at the man crouched on the floor, picking up the pieces I dropped.

“Thanks.” I say looking into his eyes. Like sunshine through rain storms.

“You’d do the same for me, right?” he asks, washing me away in those tempests. A corner of my mouth twitches up in reply. He busies himself on the mess. His raven hair falls over his face as he bends his head to the ground. I want nothing more than to run my fingers through it. To brush it back and pull him close.

“Did I hurt you?” I ask, using my hands in front of me as a bridge to cross the space between us. Needing more of his scent with each inhale, I get within inches of his face. Though his eyes remain on the floor, he gives me a small smile.
“Nah, nothing too serious.”

“Really? Cause I just got some on my hand and it was fucking hot!”

“I guess I have a high pain tolerance.” He looks at me through his thick lashes before finishing. “Well… higher than yours anyway.”

His breath ghosts over my lips and I lick them on instinct. He bites his and gives a small chuckle when I don’t reply. I have the feeling I’m supposed to say something but can’t remember because, holy shit, he looks so good when he does that. I’ve forgotten how to breathe.

“Ere-” *Shit.* “I mean- Steven.” I stammer.

“I know.” He says lowly. My face falls into a lopsided grin at that because *he knows my name.* He pushes himself back to his feet with one hand on his knee, while carefully balancing shards of my mug in the other. “Jessi.”

“I know.” I mimic, both in reply and getting to my feet. We’re standing further apart than we were moments ago, but somehow we feel even closer.

“So, do you want me to throw this away for you?” He asks dipping his head toward his hand.

“I can do it.”

“I’m sure you can, but didn’t you say you had somewhere to be? Don’t want to be late for that hot date of yours”

“I don’t have a hot date.”

“Oh?”

“But I’d like one.” He’s doing it again, biting his lip, only it’s a thousand time better because he’s paired it with a smile. *Sexy as fuck.*

“I thought you’d never ask.” He replies in a low voice.

“Wow, conceded.” I say holding my hands up in mock offense. “What makes you think I was talking about you?”

He rolls his eyes and leans his shoulder against his doorframe. “Don’t you have somewhere to be?”

Panic boils in my stomach. Work now, hot date later. “*Shit!*” I run past him toward the elevator. I get as far as pushing the down button when it hits me. I’m such an idiot! I turn around and sprint back to the man currently fitting a key into his door. He looks at me and smiles.

“Sev-en?” I ask through my pants.

“Seven sounds great.” He says in the same low voice an inch, maybe two from my mouth. Then as
quickly as he came, he’s gone- the click of his door signaling the end of the scene.

“CUT!” Hanji calls, but it’s not enough to pull me out of my shock.

I’m stuck against the wall. *What the fuck was that? WHAT THE FUCK WAS THAT?*

That wasn’t scripted.

“Great job guys!” she calls again, snapping me to attention. Levi emerges through the door he just closed, and glances my way. His eyes are stone cold again, and his face shows no traces that he has ever smiled.

I feel fooled. I feel embarrassed. I feel betrayed.

*By him or yourself?*

Rage fills me and I have to look away. God, why was I even here? What was I even doing? Mikasa was right, this whole thing is stupid. I can’t do this. If I could, I wouldn’t feel ready to boil over at any moment. I would have a better handle on my emotions instead of allowing my whole body to shake by them. I could turn it all off so easily, like Levi. Of course turning emotions off shouldn’t be a problem for someone who so easily turned his back on his family. I clench my jaw. Fuck it, I don’t care if I’m not any good. At least I’m not like him. I made it this far being my clumsy, stupid self.

I look back to Hanji who’s excitedly talking with one of the camera men.

I realize now that I truly did not even notice any of the camera’s in my face this time around. I didn’t even see them. I was too wrapped up in… the scene.

“I think it was a good start!” she says, returning her attention to us, positively beaming with pride.

“But it wasn’t perfect. Eren you missed a few lines, don’t get me wrong it worked well enough, but I think we should try it one more time.” What? No. No. Please don’t make me do that again. “EVERY ONE FROM THE TOP!” Hanji’s voice booms through the studio set. What’s wrong with my vocal chords? I’m looking around at the crewmen, eyes wide with terror. “I NEED COSTUMING TO GET LEVI A NEW SHIRT!” Somebody help me. “Eren, try your best to say each line, but otherwise great characterization, keep it up!” Stop. “And Levi, nice adaptation.” She says with a wink. My heart is pounding in my ears as the memory of mint, sandalwood, and cigarettes slams my senses.

“I have to go!” I find my voice with finality. I’ve done everything, *everything* she’s asked of me today, but I draw my line at redoing that scene. Hell I’m drawing it in the sand with red fucking paint. “I-um-” I begin with the first words that come to my mind. “I promised to pick my sister up from her doctor’s appointment. I wasn’t expecting this to take so long when I did, sorry-” the lie spills out easily enough, and I side glance to Levi as the inspiration to lock it all together hits me. “But she’s got nobody else.”

Of all the things, all the excuses I could have made, I had to use Mikasa. Shame has me moving my glare to the floor. The guilt I feel now helps neutralize some of the rage in my stomach, but not enough to uncurl the fists I have formed at my sides.

Hanji looks taken aback by my response, and out of the corner of my eye I see Levi quirk an eyebrow. Hitch looks positively outraged at us all.

“Oh- Okay. I’m sorry I didn’t know you had somewhere else to be.” Hanji replies through furrowed brows. She looks as though she’s about to question the authenticity of my excuse, but thankfully she claps her hands together instead and slaps on an enthusiastic smile. “CANCEL ALL THAT,
“SORRY BUT THAT’S A WRAP EVERYONE!”

“Wait, NO!” Hitch stomps toward Hanji until she’s directly in front of her, looking up. “What. About. Me?”

“What about you?” Hanji beams down at her. Hitch looks ready to explode, and she does.

“I wasn’t even able to finish my scene, and this jerk- no this-” she interjects her own rampage to glare at me until she can find a more suitable word for me. “amateur-” I roll my eyes, I mean really? “Not only gets to film a scene with an award winning actor, but now you’re letting him get away with speaking to you like he runs the place! I’m outraged! What about me? Where’s my scene with Levi, where’s my kiss? How come he gets it all? What makes him so special?”

“For starters, I haven’t seen him throw a tantrum once today.” Levi’s voice snaps my attention to him. I narrow my eyes. Stop defending me, asshole.

He flicks his gaze to meet my glare, holding it a beat too long before he blinks and looks back to Hitch.

The expression on her face has me looking at her cheeks for a red handprint. With a small whine, she turns on her heal and storms out of the studio.

Both Hanji and Levi let out exasperated sighs.

“That’s gonna come back to bite us. She’s one of Dok’s favorites.” Hanji says defeated. Dok? Why does that name ring a bell?

“Then let him keep her. I don’t understand why he sent her this way in the first place.”

She shrugs in response, and sighs again before settling her attention back to me.

“Sorry about all that, Eren. She’s a part of the Regime’s other program, Music Production. I had hoped she’d be a good fit for your scene, but...” she let her sentence trail off with a shrug of her shoulders.

“Personally, I think he just didn’t want to deal with her so he tried pawning her off. Now that he has Kirstein and all.”

Wait a second, back the fuck up. Fate wouldn’t throw him into this roller-coaster of a day too. I mean no higher power could be that cruel, right?

“As in Jean Kirstein?” I ask, directing my question to Hanji because I’m attempting to forget Levi is here.

“Why?” Levi scoffs. So much for that. “You’re not a fan are you?”

I bite my tongue. Literally, I am biting my tongue between my front teeth and it hurts enough to stop me from swinging my fist in his direction. A fan? Are you fucking serious?

I look into those steel eyes of his with every ounce of venom I can muster. No I am not a fucking fan, you incomparable asshat.

“Oh? Did I strike a nerve?”

Just the contempt in his voice is enough to make me hate him all over again. What’s wrong with being a fan? I’m fucking not, but what the fuck gives him the right to scoff at those who are. Jean’s a
good guy. He can be an asshole, but he’s a talented asshole. He deserves his fan, and Levi doesn’t even know him. He has no right to hold that kind of contempt toward him.

And another thing, how is it that he has time out of his busy schedule to film scenes with scouting recruits, but no time to even try to find his sister. The one who live 3 fucking miles away.

As if by fate, my silence prompts Levi to continue asking things that piss me off.

“Don’t you have to go get your sister?”

All right asshole you asked for it. I fill my lungs with all the air they can take and coil my body to strike. Levi takes in my change in body language, once again raising an eyebrow as a challenge. I’m about to swing, about to acquaint his smug face with my fist when Hanji recalls my attention by letting a loud whine echo throughout the warehouse. I look at her standing between the doors of the warehouse, and looking beyond her, I see it. Rain. Not sprinkles, not fucking pitter pattering rain either, but fucking pouring rain.

Just my luck.
When It Rains It Pours

Chapter Summary

A storm seems like just thing to keep things moving along. It causes uncomfortable shoes, stained blouses, and is known for bringing out confrontations.

Chapter Notes

Oh my, mother of Zeus, I am so sorry for the delay in this update. What can I say, life got real busy real quick. I was so happy when I wrote this, a lot happens, and I hope you all will like it!

As always thank you so much for reading, the kudos, and your wonderful comments! I love you all!

There are a lot of things I’ve come to regret in my life. The time Mikasa convinced me that I looked good in hot pink skinny jeans. Which, in fact, I did not. My entire high school experience. The last words I spoke to my mom, full of petty slander that have forever scarred my self-image. Hell, I end up regretting something every day. From not holding back a snide comment to forgetting to brew coffee in the morning, it seems I’m doomed to wallow in remorse.

Though today’s quickly making its way in becoming one giant mistake after another. Starting when I woke up, I’ve been swimming, nearly drowning in self-hatred and anger with each passing minute. A metaphor which is becoming a reality with each tiny splash on the pavement outside.

It’s as if God is sitting atop one of those grey clouds swollen with rain, throwing problems in my face and laughing. In fact, until proven otherwise, I’m inclined to believe that’s exactly what’s happening up there.

There’s a heavy sigh beside me, and I turn to see Levi’s back growing further and further away. A welcoming sight indeed!

“Oh!” He calls over his shoulder, so much for that. He jerks his head as implication to follow him. As fucking if. When I make no move, his steps falter so that he can turn to his side, arms crossed, and look me up and down. I feel violated somehow. I mean, is he checking me out? The thought alone sets my nerves on edge. For one, no. Two, I can’t really blame him because I know I look good. Three, no. Four, he doesn’t look so bad himself. You know, for a Satan incarnate. *Wait, what?* “I’ll have glasses send you the bill if you’re planning on keeping those.”

I follow his lead and look down at my clothes. Ah, no they are not mine. Not seeing any other choice, I swallow my pride and follow him, while being as conscious as possible to maintain a comfortable distance between us. Well, I say comfortable, but to achieve that would be to put him in Antarctica, still I stay quite a few paces back.

I follow him behind the curtain for wardrobe, and make a B-line for my untidy pile of clothes in the
corner. As I catch a glance of myself in the mirror I sigh. Unfortunately I don’t know if I’ll ever be in the position to buy a suit quite like this one. I mean ideally I will, someday, assuming this whole acting thing pans out. That of course depends on if this call back was okay enough to get me in the program. Which, thanks to my useless excuse for a partner, I doubt. Not to mention my disaster of a scene with Levi. Speaking of whom, clearly has no regard for the tiny changing room! As I turn with my bundle of clothes in my arms, I find myself with an all access pass to Levi’s strip show. His arms are pulling the shirt over his head, leaving his chiseled chest perfectly exposed.

Now I’m not a weak guy. I’ve got muscles, like the kind that aren’t super obvious, but they’re there. Seeing Levi standing here, shirtless, makes me feel utterly puny. Don’t get me wrong, he doesn’t look like a heavy weight lifter by any means, but, small as he is, he seems to be nothing but muscle. A regular 5 foot something rock. His thumbs fold themselves under the waistband of his sweatpants, and in one swift movement… I practically run into the tiny changing room. What the fuck dude? Are there no lines with him? Obviously not.

“Really, kid?” he huffs in annoyance. Well I’m sorry I’m not as comfortable stripping down with my mortal enemy. “Never been in a locker room? Or were you the weird kid that changed in the stalls?”

“No, I changed with everyone else, thanks.” I retort lamely. I really need to work on my comebacks.

“Tch. Whatever, no judgment.” I roll my eyes. Right, that’s why you said anything in the first place.

I take my time changing, hoping that he’s gone when I come out. Thankfully he is. As I step out, I notice a neatly folded pile of his clothes on the chair. Really? Who folds dirty clothes? Wait, am I supposed to fold these?

“Oh, just throw them in the hamper behind you.” At that I curiously gaze at Levi’s tidy folded pile. As if reading my mind she adds, “Yeah, don’t worry about that, he’s neurotic.”

That explains a lot. I nod and throw my clothes, rightfully, in the hamper before making my way back to Hanji. She’s standing underneath a black umbrella with her sandy blond assistant.

“Eren! I bet this really puts a damper on your day, eh?” She exclaims as I get closer. It earns a chuckle. What can I say, I’m a sucker for bad puns. Levi comes to my side from literally nowhere. Is this guy part ninja? Well, he is related to Mikasa so it’s not unlikely. Underneath a classy black jacket with buttons lining both sides down the front, he’s back in his grey button down and dark jeans. Stop being so attractive, you ass. Attractive, huh? No, I didn’t mean that. Whatever. Shut up me.

He unfolds his umbrella, and adjusts his hold so that it covers us both.

Of course, I should have expected as much based on everything else that’s happened today. I bite back a protest because it’s only a short walk to the studio, and I don’t want to come across as a whiny brat. So we step in pace behind Hanji and her assistant. His arm keeps brushing mine, an obvious hazard in such close proximity, but still I edge myself as close to the line of coverage to avoid it. As a result my left shoulder gets damp. Ah well, I would actually rather run in the downpour, splashing in puddles, trying to catch the drops in my mouth, but I’ll have plenty of time to do that on my way home. For now, I should keep up my appearance of being a functioning, mature
adult.

We quickly walk in silence. Fortunately making it to the door just as I began feeling a cool presence making its way through my shoe. The moment we’re inside, I move as far away from Levi as possible. He doesn’t seem to notice, though, being too preoccupied with shaking out the umbrella and dusting off his impossibly clean jacket. What a weird guy.

“Ah, I usually love the rain, but it had to be on the day I wore my new blouse!” Hanji complains in a sing songy voice. I look over to find her looking at her shirt and sighing at the dark watermarks that had made their way past the shield of the umbrella. She sighs and looks up at me with a smile. We start walking down the hall toward the lobby. “So, Eren, I expect you’ve got to hurry out of here to get your sister.”

What? Oh right, I lied about Mikasa to get out of redoing the scene. Nice going.

“Um yeah, I suppose so.” I reply quietly. I have the feeling that one of them is probably going to notice my very obvious lack of automotive vehicle, and I bet I know who. I glance at Levi, and the look he’s fixing me with makes me think he can see through my lies just as easily as Mikasa does. Damn their similarities.

“Well, don’t worry, we’ll let you know AQAP whether or not you made it.” She winks and leans closer to me as we walk, covering the view of her lips with her hand before whispering. “You definitely made it.”

What? I did? I smile skeptically and I feel like a weight’s been lifted from my shoulder.

“Don’t go getting the kid’s hopes up, shitty glasses.” Levi drawls in an irritated tone behind us.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” She replies over her shoulder innocently before sending me an exaggerated wink. Levi rolls his eyes.

“AQAP?” I interject trying to change the topic.

“As Quick As Possible. I find ASAP far too common, besides Q is much more fun to say.”

I chuckle again. She has a point. This woman is really something. I can honestly say I haven’t ever met anyone like her. Half the time I’m terrified of what she’ll ask of me, the other half I’m completely thrown off by how childish and fun she is. It’s a nice change to the drones of whiny and angry people I usually deal with.

As we round the corner, a small girl comes into view. Draped over her arm is a rain streaked purple parka. She’s wearing short overalls, a bright orange shirt, and her flaming hair is pulled into pigtails. The way she leans over the check-in counter casually gossiping with the receptionist, makes me think she must be pretty popular here. Who’s she here with? Out of the corner of my eye I see Levi roll his and let out a sigh. Ah, of course, must be his girlfriend. She lets out small squeak when our posy catches her eye and runs to throw herself on him. Yup definitely gotta be a girlfriend. Except, Levi doesn’t hold her back. He only rolls his eyes and pries himself out of her arms. Problems in paradise, eh?

“What are you doing here, Iz?” He drawls. She’s moved a reasonable distance from him now and crosses her arms over her chest.

“What I can’t visit my big bro at work?”

My heart stops and my mouth falls open despite the clench in my jaw.
Levi has a moment to look at me, eyes widening barely as I swing. Knuckles meet jaw with a sick pop and the force of it throws him onto the tile floor. There’s a collective gasp, Levi tentatively rubs his jaw while sending me a deadly glare. I don’t fucking care though. Let him try to kill me, this confrontation is long overdue. I’m about to throw myself on him, about to carry out this fight, when two pairs of giant hands grab my biceps effectively holding me back.

“The fuck was that for?” He snaps at me, slowly rising to his feet. My eyes are narrowed venomously, my teeth are bared like a fucking animal. A wolf ready to tear its prey apart. “Oi! I asked you a fucking question.” His fingers snap impatiently in front of my face and I can’t help but lurch toward them. Though the iron grip of these two security guards hold me in place.

“What of it?” He asks dangerously, while protectively pushing ‘Iz’ behind himself.

“You fucking bastard!” I yell, squirming like the wiggliest of worms to get out of their hold. I sadly find that, no, their grips have not loosened. “You already have a sister.” I snap at him. “Or did you forget?”

“What are you on about?”

I’m going to smash his fucking face on this floor. I’m going to hurt him so he’ll never be able to forget her again. Tears have sprung to my eyes from the extent of my rage as I utter her name with finality. “Mikasa.”

His eyes widen for a moment before he turns them into dangerous slits. “Excuse me?”

“Mikasa.” I say louder this time, rising my chin, daring him to play dumb.

“Where did you get that name?” His voice is low and sharp, lips barely moving as he speaks.

“Why does it matter?” I scoff. Smirking slightly from finally getting him to admit something. In two steps, and a sharp gasp from the red-head behind him, Levi crosses the gap between us. Holding our lethal eye contact, he doesn’t stop until we’re nose to nose and his fingers are wound in my shirt.

“Where did you get that name, brat?” His voice is quiet, but dangerously calculating.

I meet his challenge, never looking away, and slightly cock my head to the side. “From the little girl you left behind.” My voice is quiet. This conversation is between us, and I know he’s hanging on to my every word. His eyes widen and he backs off on an exhale. Just the fuel I need to keep pushing him with the guilt he deserves to be feeling. “The little girl I met in foster care. The one whose parents were killed, the one was treated like a fucking dog, but still held so much hope that one day—”

I curl my lip in disgust at the memory. “One day her big brother would come back for her. One day he’d come and save us. But you never did, did you?”

“Shut up.” He snaps at me.

“Why? Don’t like being reminded what a horrible person you are!”

“You don’t know shit.”

“No you don’t know shit!” I scream, shaking myself in their grasp again. “You don’t know the hell we went through. You don’t know how broken she was! You weren’t there to save her from those
fucking perverts!” His eyes narrow, but his irises are swimming with fear and guilt. Good, he fucking deserves it. “You weren’t there as we were bounced from house to house, school to fucking school! Every birthday, every Christmas, every soccer game, graduation, law school! You missed all of it you fucking bastard!” I can see him shaking with rage. I know it’s directed at me. Know he’s ready to snap my neck. But I don’t fucking care. “What gets me most is that you never even tried looking for her! All the resources you must have and you’ve never fucking tried. We literally live around the fucking corner, five minutes away! Still you didn’t even bother looking! Instead you pretend she doesn’t exist. You even went and replaced her! Why, Levi? Was she not good enou-

Stars and white noise. That is all I can focus on. I shake my head, vaguely aware of the screaming voices around me. I open my mouth as far as I can and move my jaw around, already feeling the swelling in my cheek. My vision’s swimming back to me, albeit like a fucking whirlpool, but still it’s good to know I’m not blind. A single pair of hands on my arm hold me up now instead of holding me back I can’t help but wonder-where’s the other pair? As the room stops spinning I get my answer. One of the security guards abandoned me to hold back Levi. Hanji stands in no man’s land, arms spread wide at each of us. The large man has one arm wound around Levi’s chest. He’s moving, trying so hard to get out of the man’s grip but is fruitless, instead he just looks like he rocking himself on a giant tree limb. Like a fucking child. The sight would be comical if it weren’t for the pounding in my head and the buzz in my ears. I can’t help but glare daggers back at him.

“Levi!” Hanji snaps. He turns his attention to her, teeth bared, eyes ready to burn a hole through her head. Does it faze her? Not one bit. She matches his gaze with a raised eyebrow. His movement seizing, but his face snaps back to me and I can’t help but recall the phrase ‘if looks could kill’.

“I was, though.” I start again lowly. Determined to finish this. My eyes find his filled with resentment. I’ve stopped struggling. Stopped trying to fight him because he’s not worth that much effort. Maybe that’s why Mikasa never sought him out. She knew he wasn’t worth her tears. “For all of it. I stuck by her side when she had nobody.” I don’t even know why I’m still talking. To find some sort of closure, I guess? Be it for Mikasa’s sake or mine I really don’t know. I shake the hands off me easily, the man recognizing the calm I’ve taken. I continue in the same steady low voice. “I became the rock you were supposed to be.” As I’m hit with a realization, I let out a huff. “Funny, I guess she replaced you too.”

Before I turn to leave, I look down at him. His eyes are set to the floor, his features ice cold and hardened. My gaze lingers for less than a moment before I storm past Hanji, through the glass doors, and into the pouring rain.

With each step, each small splash, I’m pulled further and further from thought. Though that all could be because the actual feeling of rain slowly soaking into every inch of fabric provides the same amount of comfort as walking in clothes prematurely pulled from the dryer. Except it’s coupled with cold, dirty rainwater dripping down my neck and a fogginess in my vision. That has more to do with the tears that I sprang at the studio than the rain; still it doesn’t exactly help. The worst feeling I’m dealing with, though, are my shoes that have unsurprisingly soaked completely through. Summoning forth my greatest nemesis- wet socks. There you go Armin, you called it.

“Hey, You!” A voice calls from behind me. I stop and turn to see Levi’s precious sister running me down. Why? What could she possible have to say? I have no beef with her, so I merely wait for her to slow her pace as she catches me. “Eren, right?”

“Yeah…” Why? What does she want? Why is she smiling like that?

“I’m Isabel!” She exclaims while turning up her chin with a smile and a small wave. “I haven’t seen anyone even try to hit big bro since Farlan the Christmas of 2011. Nice right hook!”
“Um, thanks.” My response is curt. I mean what do I even say to that? Yeah, your ‘brother’ is a fucking prick and deserved so much more than a bruised jaw? For lack of conversation skills in general, none the less with the in-direct cause of my anger, I turn away from the girl in order to continue shuffling down the block. I hear movement behind me, and moments later I see the bob of a purple hood beside me. Turning my head to her, she looks back up at me and smiles warmly. Weird. This girl is weird. Didn’t I just hit her ‘big bro’? Who is also weird, might I add. Why isn’t she tending his bruised ego? I shake my head, water flinging in all directions before being replaced by fresh drops, and we continue in silence.

We make it about a block and a half before she slows her pace. I do the same and look back at her. Amber eyes stare at mine, wide with anticipation. What now? I can feel my brow furrow while she bites her lower lip nervously.

“Hey, Eren?” She begins timidly. Her waterproof purple hood shadows over her face as she looks at her feet. I hum in response. “Can we talk?”

She lifts her chin so that we make eye contact, and though her face is etched with anxiety, she manages a sweet smile. Shit, how can I say no to that? She looks genuinely concerned, and it doesn’t take an Armin to figure out what she wants to talk about. I sigh and move my head around in search for dryer place for this conversation. I spot a small café on the corner across the street. I’m actually surprised there’s not one on this side since there’s always some sort of diner on every corner, but I guess there’s an exception to every generalization. Isabel seems to catch my drift because her face relaxes a bit and she heads toward the crosswalk. I follow and before I know it we’re inside what’s got to be the poster child for generic coffee shops if I’ve ever seen one.

Small, perfectly squared tables run along a continuous booth on the wall. Chairs couple each. Across from which is the order counter, cluttered with off brand candy and promotional mugs. On the walls are minimalist photos of coffee, coffee beans, coffee mugs, the actual word ‘coffee’, and so forth. I want to roll my eyes at the originality, but decide instead to shake myself off like a wet dog. Isabel does the same. She crumples the wet parka in her hand before throwing it over the back of the nearest chair.

“Hi! How are you two doing today?” A small guy, my age I guess, with buzzed dirty blond hair asks from across the counter.

“We’re great, thanks!” Isabel answers while approaching the counter. His name tag says ‘Connie’, not really a common name for a dude, but neither is Eren I guess. “Could I get a medium Chia, please?”

“Sure thing! And you?”

“I’m good, thanks.” I reply. I would rather just get this over with. Also I have no money.

“Eren, please get something! My treat!” Isabel whines.

“Really, I’m fine.”

“Please! Really whatever you want!”

“A small hazelnut mocha, please.” I sigh in defeat. She wasn’t going to budge anyway, and beside a hot drink sounds really great right now.

“Sash, drinks!” Connie calls to the back after cashing out our order. “We’ll have that right out for you.”
I nod and take a seat after Isabel. She looks anxious again. I advert my gaze to the scene behind the counter.

“You don’t have shout!” a messy brunette says as she pushes through the doors from the small kitchen the in the back. I’m assuming this is Sash. She busies herself at the barista station, and they continue to bicker, but my attention is called to the fingers tapping nervously on the table as we sit in silence. I would break it, but I honestly don’t even know where to begin.

“Honestly, Eren, I don’t even know where to begin.”

Wow, mind reader this one. “Um, me neither.”

She laughs dryly before turning her gaze to the distance. “The thing is, it’s not my story to tell. I mean, I don’t even know all of it, but I think you need to know something.”

“Yeah.” Me too lady, that’s all I want. Just, to know. She takes another deep breath and looks back into my eyes.

“Levi hasn’t had it easy, okay?”

I can’t help but snort. Okay? Well, sure the grass is never greener, but I doubt he had to deal with the same shit we did growing up. Sure we got Hannes, eventually, but those years before him were pure fucking hell.

“Look, I don’t mean to sound insensitive, but I really don’t want to hear a pity story about how he wasn’t hugged enough as a child.”

“What the fuck do you think, Eren? That he just left his sister behind for no reason?”

“Well, yeah. What reason could possibly be enough to leave behind your family?”

“If he hadn’t, they would have killed her.” As the words leave her lips she puts her hand to them as if to stop herself from saying more. I, on the other hand, widen my eyes and lean forward as an indication for her to keep going. You can’t just say something like that then stop.

“What are you talking about? Who?”

“I shouldn’t have said that.”

“Yeah, but you did, so fucking keep talking!”

“One Medium Chia, one small Hazelnut Mocha!” The girl called Sash interrupts cheerily. Isabel and I don’t break eye contact, though. I’m willing her to keep going, she’s urging me to drop it. “Um…. I’ll just put these here then.”

Sash leaves without much notice, and Isabel lets out another deep breath. Hopefully one of defeat. Then she takes a small sip of her drink. I do the same, though I hardly notice how it tastes since I’m too wrapped up in this conversation.

“Like I said, Levi didn’t have it easy. I can’t tell you exactly what that means, but he only ever did what he thought was in Mikasa’s best interest.”

“Well, yeah I suppose not getting her killed would have been in her best interest. Let’s go back to that. Who wanted to kill her?”

“Eren, I can’t talk about that!” Luckily, save Connie and Sash, we were the only ones in the cafe.
“Okay. So he had to leave her? But why didn’t he come back? Why didn’t he try? Why did he go and find a new sister?”

“Well, I met him when I was living on the street.” She begins defensively. “He and Far took me in after I got busted for nabbing a Twix from a newsstand. I kinda ran from the cops directly into their house and, well, they never kicked me out.” She brings the hot tea to her mouth, and keeps her hands wrapped around the cup when it is brought back to the table. “That was, what, 8 years ago now? Man, time really flies. Anyway, I think it’s because of Mikasa that he took me in. I mean I think he missed being an older brother. I know he missed her, and I guess I helped him cope with that. He didn’t really talk about it much, and when he did he’d get this look in his eyes, like he was remembering the good days. The days that will always be better than any day since.” There’s a sadness in her eyes I can’t quite place. It makes my heart ache hearing this. Hearing about her shitty past, but it doesn’t make me like him anymore. Okay, maybe I’ve gained a smidge more respect for him, but that’s it. Isabel lets out a long sigh before she continues. “Eren, you need to understand something.” I look up from my own cup of coffee to meet her eyes, wide and pleading. “He loves her more than anything. Okay?” There’s that look again, but I recognize it now. Pain. After all, it must be hard knowing you’re only a stand in for the real thing. “Despite the distance he’s kept, she’s still the most important person to him. I guess, even after the fame and everything, he figured she’d never want to see him again.”

“Well he’s right about that. She wants nothing to do with him now. He missed his chance the moment she saw his face on the big screen. I mean if he had just fucking tried…” Somewhere in the distance a small bell rings, but I pay it no mind and continue my rant. “I don’t care about whatever kept him away. Maybe he couldn’t come back for a while, but he should have been at our door the moment whatever threat ran its course. Guilt isn’t an excuse for staying away. I don’t care if he thought she was better off, he should have tried!”

“You’re right I should have, but as you said it’s too late now.” Isabel and I both turn toward the increasingly familiar deep voice. Levi’s just inside the shop door, hair and coat dripping from the ongoing storm. The red mark on his jaw already mixing with an ugly blue.

“Holy shit, Connie, its Levi Ackerman!” Sash exclaims through the sudden silence of the cafe.

“Oh my GOD Sasha, I can see that! Now shut up!” Connie frantically whispers while he ushers himself and her to the back.

Ah Sasha. That makes more sense than Sash. More since than the motherfucker standing in front of me too. What the fuck is he doing here?

“What the fuck are you doing here?”

“You have my sister, dipshit.”

“Your sister? Sorry, I naturally assumed you’d continue going on without her. Never look back and all that. Oh wait that’s the other one.”

“Drop it, brat. We’ve already established you don’t know what the hell you’re talking about.”

“Funny, for not knowing what I’m talking about, you’ve already validated that I’m right.”

Our eyes narrow almost in unison.
“Fellas stop. You’re not getting into it again, do you hear me!?” Isabel says as she moves between us, assuming the same position Hanji had earlier. “Levi!”

“I won’t start anything, Iz. But you know if he does, I won’t hesitate to put him in his place.”

“You don’t think I could take you?”

“Kid, I don’t think you could take a stuffed bear.”

“Tell that to a mirror, asshole.”

“You caught me off guard. I hope you liked it because I guarantee it won’t happen again.”

“Enough!” Isabel interjects. “Levi, what are you doing here?”

Yes, I’d like to know that too.

“I came to save you from this lunatic.”

“Okay, and the real reason?”

Shit. She really knows how to cut through his bullshit. His eyes sharpen a bit, but she matches it with raised eyebrows and a cock of her head.

“Not now, Iz, we’re going.”

“What about Eren?”

“Yes, what about Eren?” He repeats her darkly and looks down at me. I gulp. “I thought you had to get your sister from the doctor’s. Because, quote-’she’s got nobody else’?”

Oh, nice one buddy. You, ah got me there.

“Oh stop it, Levi. Obviously he was lying.”

My cheeks grow increasingly hot and I gulp again. Shit, I knew it’d be him that called me out on that particular lie. Ironic, though, him calling me out on a lie.

“Now why would he go and do a thing like that?” Um…because I hate you. Because I was mad at myself for doing the scene with you. Because your lips felt really nice, and they can’t feel nice because I hate you. What was that, Jaeger? You liked it? SHUT UP SUBCONCIOS! I, completely unintentionally, lick my own lips at that thought before bringing my lower one between my teeth. “Oh. I see.”

“What?” I snap, returning my narrowed eyes to him. “You see what?”

“Nothing, kid.” He says with a shake of his head. I can’t help but notice his tone has softened without explanation. “Iz, we’re going. We’ve got that dinner thing in a couple hours and I’m going to need to take care of this.” He gestures to the darkening mark on his chin and throws me a threatening look. I smirk with pride. That’s right, I did that.

“Oh, but Eren needs a ride home.” She hums casually, dropping her arms to her side. I look at her like she’s crazy. I mean, she’s got to be crazy, right? Why the hell would I get a ride from him? I look at Levi, expecting to see some sort of similar response, but all I find is slight annoyance. “Oh come on, Eren. You don’t think I’d actually let you walk all the way home in this, do you?”
“Seriously, I’m good.” I say strictly. “I’m practically around the corner.”

“So 5 miles is around the corner now-a-days?” Levi takes it upon himself to keep calling me out.

“How do you know how far I am?”

“It was among the many things you yelled at me.”

Oh, right. “Well, thanks, but no thanks.”

“I never offered. Iz did.”

“Fine, asshole, guess it worked out then.”

“I guess it did.”

“Levi!” Isabel whines, turning away from me to give him her full pout. He rolls his eyes.

“Come on, kid, we’re leaving.”

“I said I’m good.” I hiss. I don’t care if he’s a push over, I am not.

“I swear to God, brat, if you’re not in my car in the next 30 seconds...”

“You’ll what?” I challenge. His eyes flick over my blackening eye and he smirks.

“I’ll think of something.” Isabel has moved to the door now. Parka back over her head, ready to go. She offers me a concerned smile before she goes out, presumably, to the car. Thanks for abandoning me! Man I thought we were becoming friends-ish. Still, the only move I make is sinking myself lower into the chair and crossing my arms defiantly. A flash of rage goes through his eyes and before I know it, he’s leaning over me, hand resting on the chair directly above my shoulder, face once again inches from my own. My eyes widen with shock. What is he doing? I gulp. He’s not going to...no why would he do that? He won’t. Will he? Do you want him to? “Get in the fucking car, Jaeger.”

My name. He said my name. Huh, I assumed he kept calling me ‘kid’ and ‘brat’ because he forgot it, but no he’s just an asshole who can’t use people’s names. He pushes himself back up and walks directly out of the shop, knowing I’m going to follow. I let out a groan of frustration and push myself on my feet. A low whistle sounds behind me, and I turn to find a pair of heads poking out of the kitchen doors.

“Good luck with that, buddy.” Connie says sympathetically. Sasha just nods her head underneath his.

“Thanks.” I reply dryly before following suit. I feel kind of bad, I mean I hardly drank any of the hazelnut mocha Isabel bought for me. Then again, she’s the reason I’m currently walking toward a jet black Mercedes AMG so I don’t feel as bad. Shit this is a nice car. Not that I expected any different. Not that I have really ever thought about what kind of car he drives anyway, but this would have been the exact car I’d picture if I had. All of the doors are closed providing me with a perfect chance to escape. I really had planned on getting in the car, truly, but what kind of rebel would I be if I did? So I run. I hear his car shift into gear behind me, but I keep running. Keep holding on to the hope that, maybe he’ll let me go. Or maybe I really can outrun a sport’s car. Delusional as always.

I’m about to cross the street to the next block when the black Mercedes swerves in front of me, sending me ass-first into a puddle. I shake my head in my hand to gather myself, and a few moments
later the passenger door is flying up to reveal a positively fuming Levi. Isabel must be in the back.
Weird.

“Car, Jaeger, now!” he enunciations each word with warning.

Grudgingly, I obey his command and push myself off the ground. I’m sopping wet now, and if I
thought wet socks were uncomfortable, I clearly have been living a life of luxury. For now I am not
only dealing with that arch nemesis, but I have made another. Soaked boxers. I feel, for lack of better
word, swampy. It certainly doesn’t help that as the puddle water drips out of my shorts, the fabric
clings tighter to my skin. The only benefit to this I take pride in as I go to sit myself onto the pristine
blue and black leather.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing?” He asks over his cold gaze. He leans to the back and
rummages through a duffle bag on the floor. When he sits back up, he’s holding a towel in one hand.
He raises his eyebrows expectantly for me to move.

My ass is literally inches over the seat, debating whether or not to heed the warning in his brows. I
hover a few moments longer before embracing the suicidal bastard within. I keep his eyes in my own
as a deliberately sink as far as I can into the seat. Fire flashes in his eyes, and I smirk knowing, but
unable to care that I am moments from death. I break my gaze to bring the door down to close at my
side.

“You’re the one who told me to get in.” I say sardonically before he can rip out my throat.

“You’ll pay for that, fucking brat.” He simply states. Turning his attention to the road, he puts the car
in gear and flips a bitch. Tires squeal against the rain soaked pavement as he hangs a right and drives
continuing the direction I was running in. “Where am I going anyway?”

“Hell.” I murmur.

“What was that?”

“Nothing.”

“Hmm.”

“Take a left at the third light down.” I say louder, pointing for emphasis. Isabel leans on her arms
between our seats in the front. “Why are you back there?”

“Well, you’re getting out first, and anyway, you’re the guest so…” She says rushing through her
answer.

“Um…thanks. I guess.” Why is she being so weird? And is she just being extra strange now, or is
this just a part of her overall oddness? I shake my head in confusion. Whatever the reason, I don’t
think I want to know.

Levi takes the left at the third light. Then the second right, the first left after that, two miles down that
road before taking another right into our neighborhood. I spot our house a block ahead when I tell
him to pull over. I don’t want him to know exactly where I live.

“Here?” He asks skeptically eyeing the boarded up house we’ve stopped in front of.

“Yeah, here is fine.”

“Don’t tell me you live in this dump.”
“Maybe we do, maybe we don’t.”

“Fair enough.”

I open the door and step out. Very much aware of the fabric sticking to my legs like wet tissue paper.

“It was nice to meet you, Eren!” Isabel calls from the backseat.

“Um… you too?” I offer. Yeah it was nice to meet her, she’s a nice girl, but the circumstances of that
meeting weren’t exactly pleasant. Levi spares not even a glance at me before I close the door. I cross
the street in front of them and start walking home. They’re still there, I haven’t heard them move at
all. Right on cue I hear the gears shift, and the car slowly splashing through the puddles as they
move…closer? On instinct, my head moves to the splashing sound that grows louder to find that, yes
they are following me. The driver’s window’s rolled down and I see Levi smirking at me.

“Nice boxers, kid.” He calls before rolling up his window and speeding away. My face feels
immediately flush. And I frantically look down at my very noticeable grey boxers peeking through
the very soaked and very white fabric of my shorts.

Ah fuck! I run as fast as I can home.

Unsurprisingly, I find the driveway and the house empty. Both Armin and Mikasa are working, and
thankfully I am not. No, I have the rest of today and all of tomorrow to soak up my freedom before
going back in. After I step out of my spongy shoes, I go ahead and strip out of my soaked clothes.
I’m stark naked and so glad we’re anti-social people who never open the curtains. Gingerly, I tip-toe
across the hardwood floor, careful not to leave wet footprints in my wake, and make my way to the
bathroom down the hall. When I see my reflection, I wince. Which of course promptly summons a
dull ache to my cheek. Man, he got me good. As I lean closer to my black and blue reflection, I make
out the faintest cut on the top on my cheek bone. I should probably ice this. You know what sounds
better? Sleep. That’s the best thing I’ve thought all day! I was thinking about taking another shower,
but fuck it. It’s just water, I’ll dry. Besides I’m tired and my bed is calling me so I just towel myself
down, throw some dry clothes on, and answer it with the unbruised side of my face on the pillow.

“Eren?” Mikasa’s echoing voices lulls me out of my nap hours later. I blink to help the room spin
into focus, but end up wincing instead. As I sit up I realize that my left eye has swelled dramatically;
I can hardly see out of it. Shit I really should have iced it. Now Mikasa’s definitely going to notice.
Not that she wouldn’t have before, but I might have been able to convince her it was nothing more
than a clumsy trip. However, the black eye I’m sporting now is obviously from a fight. A fight with
the brother we don’t talk about, ever. I groan in frustration, and moments later Mikasa’s poking her
head in my room. “Eren, are you up?”

I sigh and sit up. No sense in postponing the inevitable. The small squeak of my bed as I move
proves to be enough of an invitation.

“What’s up?” I ask as casually as possible. The lights are still off, hopefully obscuring her vision in
my favor.

“I just wanted to check in on you. See how everything went today.” She says while sitting by my
side on the edge of the bed.

“Um, I think it went well.” I lie. As I do I make the mistake of turning my head to look at the closet. I
realize my mistake instantly, but before I can do anything else, Mikasa has my chin in an iron grip,
keeping my head in the same direction. She leans past me, still holding my chin, and flicks on the
lamp on top of my nightstand. Right now that lamp is the bane of my existence.
“Eren, think real carefully before you try and lie to me…” She begins, jerking my chin to force eye contact. Shit. Fuck. Shit. I don’t know what to say. I can’t think of any plausible lies. “What happened to your eye?”

“What do you mean?” I retort innocently, desperately vying for time to come up with something. Her fingers dig further into my chin and I, in vain, try to yank it out of her grasp.

“Eren…” she begins warningly.

“I got into a fight, okay?”

“I can see that. With whom?”

“Why does it matter? It’s fine, I’m fine just drop it.” I plead.

“Who did this, Eren?” She asks dangerously. I sigh in defeat. Perhaps if I had been given more time, and more consciousness I could think of something to say. Something to offer her, without totally lying. Or totally lying if the story was convincing enough. Alas, right now I’ve been ambush fresh out of an afternoon nap and I’ve got nothing.

“Levi.” I say with shame, my eyes averted as best they can be in my current hold.

“Levi? As in…”

“Yes.” Her grip falls from my face, and I look up to see fierce determination in her eyes.

“I see.” She stand and heads for the door.

“Mikasa,” I start, jumping up after her. “Where are you going?”

“Don’t worry about it Eren. I just need some time to myself. Besides I left a box of casefiles back at the office.” With that she swiftly exits my room, and within seconds I hear the front door click shut.

Guilt overtakes me. I am a horrible human being. I never should have told her the truth. Obviously she’s pissed off all over again and once again it’s my fault. Didn’t we just get over our last fight? Didn’t she just sort of apologize?

Fuck, how could this day get any worse?

That was a rhetorical question, by the way, Universe.
Plans

Chapter Summary

People make plans, and sometimes they fall through. Life never turns out quite how its expected, but that's not always a bad thing, right?

Chapter Notes

HELLO! So this chapter was really hard for me to write. For starters it’s in Levi’s perspective which took a while to adapt, then I had to work in some flashbacks and such. Idk it just took longer than usual to get in the zone. Though, I feel it was necessary for the story. Hopefully it will make it easier in moving the plot along. Besides I think its about time we hear what’s going on in Levi’s little head. Plus the formatting is super weird so sorry about that.

****TRIGGER WARNING FOR EMOTIONAL/CHILD ABUSE****

As always, comments/kudos are so very much appreciated! You guys truly inspire me and push me to follow through with each chapter. And I am sorry for the inconsistencies in my posts, but like I said before life gets busy. I have a full time job, a part time job, and am a full time student so believe me when I say I write as often as I physically can.

Thank you all so so so much for reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Spill.” An irritating ginger squeaks after taking over residence of my passenger seat. “Why did really you hunt us down? And don’t give that ‘rescuing me from a maniac’ thing again.”

I blink slowing in the hopes of quelling my ever increasing headache. I realize the futility of my efforts when Iz sounds impatiently beside me. Relinquishing my pride I huff.

“I was worried about you. You just ran off.”

“Ah-huh. Sure.” I shrug because it’s the truth. I kind of panicked when I realized she was gone. Alone in the city, in the pouring rain. Not that she couldn’t handle herself, I trust that much from her but I still don’t like it. Though I suppose, if I’m being honest, that wasn’t the only reason. I wanted a chance to say something to the kid. What exactly? My intentions? My regret? I don’t know, and, as I entered on the last part of his rousing speech on the inexcusability of my actions, I realized whatever it was would fall on deaf ears. Iz knows this. The expression on her face and the tone in her voice is all I need to fall into the relief of having someone who knows me so well. With such knowledge she doesn’t push the topic, and I appreciate that. “Sooo, Levi?” Iz starts inquisitively. I don’t much like the tone she’s adapted; it’s her ‘I’m going to be fucking annoying’ tone.
“What?” I drawl. My eyes don’t leave the road.

“What do you, uh, think of him?”

“Him?” I know she’s talking about the kid. Hell, I’m sure everyone does.

“Eren.”

See? Still, what an interesting question.

Well, he’s a bit of a fire-head. He’s talented, but not very bright. At least he’s pretty slow on the uptake. He’s messy, his clothes weren’t even ironed, which is barbaric. I sigh. The kid’s shaping up to be a regular pain in the ass, and I’ve only known him a day. But, he’s fiercely loyal, proof enough of that is the state of my jaw.

“I think he has a nice ass.”

“Seriously, Levi!” She whines.

“Oh, I’m being serious, Iz.” At the memory of those soaked shorts, the corner of my lips twitch up, and I grace her with a sideways glance. She rolls her eyes and snorts.

“He got you pretty good, though.” She mumbles. I roll my eyes. Knowing Iz, and I do, she won’t let that go. She still brings up the swing Farlan took at me over 3 years ago. It’s one of her favorite stories at parties, though I’m guessing this will replace that now. “Really, though, he’s pretty cute, huh?”

I reply with a hum, while my mind conjures up a clear image of those blue and green eyes. Yes, I suppose he is.

Wait a second.

“What’s your point, Iz?”

“Nothing! I just was sharing my opinion.” She says defensively. “Plus you seem to agree with me….”

“Iz, no.”

“What?”

Oh that innocent tone doesn’t fool me. I look at her once more and find far too sweet an expression on her face.

“No. The last time you had that look on your face I ended up on the world’s most awkward date.”

“Come on, Levi. It wasn’t that bad!”

“He was straight.”

“Well, you’re besties now so it all worked out!” I roll my eyes and hope that silence will swallow up this whole conversation.

I mean is she serious? Of course she is, she is always dangerously so when it comes to my love lie. Hell if I know why, but this time, just no. I mean its bad enough that he’s essentially my little sister’s little brother, but he’s almost a decade younger than me. Not that young is bad. I mean I wouldn’t
exactly complain if I found him bent on -no. This train of thought need to end because it can’t happen. It won’t happen. The entirety of this bizarre situation should be enough to derail any lingering notions. Right?

After a few minutes of nothing but the squeak of windshield wipers and the inconsistence drum of rain she sighs loudly. “Okay, so dinner?”

“Dinner with Farlan at 7.” I answer, glad for the refuge from my thoughts.

“What?”

“I’m not sure, I won’t be going.”

“What? Why not?” At this I grace her with a sideways glance before rolling my eyes and eloquently pointing to my swelling jaw. “Seriously? Since when are you all self-conscious over a bruise?”

“Since pest control let a few rats slip through our gates and get pictures of my back.”

“Oh. It’s not like they were ever published.”

“No, but if I go out like this, I wouldn’t be able to stop these ones. Not without starting a scene, and as much as I’m sure Erwin would love covering my ass again, I don’t want to risk it. I’m already in deep shit for what happened earlier.”

Or at least I will be when he finds out. I have yet to get any sort of anything from him, so maybe Hanji didn’t tell him. Yet.

“Well, we could always eat in.” She has a point. My kitchen is fully equipped to handle a simple dinner. I think I have some beef tenderloin in the freezer. Maybe some potatoes? Do we have potatoes? “How about Hu Nan’s?”


I pull into the driveway, through the security gates, and park in the three car garage. By this time, Iz has taken it upon herself to inform Farlan of his contribution to dinner by being our delivery boy. The reaction of which I miss as I race out of my car to the shower beckoning me.

Our house isn’t the largest on the block by any means, but compared to where we used to be its Buckingham fucking Palace. Hell, compared to a lot of homes it’s that. It’s what they call, contemporary, which is code for geometric and functional. Don’t get me wrong, traditional styled homes are fine, but after living my entire life looking at them from the outside, I figured why the hell start living in one? Light grey stone stagger the exterior walls from cream colored patio tile up to the dark roof sticking up at all angles. From the front it seems to be a relatively simple two story home; but from the back, it opens up to three with the basement flowing out with the infinity pool. That side is made almost entirely of windows. My master suit, in fact, is ¾ glass over-looking everything from the top floor. The view is fantastic, the house stays well lit, and the maintenance bill is outrageous. They open up my home to the literal Cliffside, making it exceedingly difficult, but not impossible, for unwanted pests to access. After all, we moved to Hollywood Hills when the paparazzi became too much to handle. At least here I won’t have to worry about finding someone in my shower while I’m taking a shit. Well, not without my knowledge anyway.

I’m proud of my house. I don’t boast it or anything like that, but I am. It’s safe and quiet and mine. Well I guess ours since Iz is still here. She’ll be staying with me until she finishes her studies, though when that actually will be is unclear. Still, its part of our agreement. She can stay here, rent free and all inclusive, but she’s in school while she does. There have been many arguments over this
that mainly consist of her stating the hypocrisy of it all. Sure I never went to college, no I’m not sorry I didn’t. Though to be fair, I just got my GED and that was because Erwin made me.

I dry off in the foyer, hang my things, put my shoes in the designated area, discard my dirty socks in the laundry chute, get a new bundled pair from my designated cubby by the door, and pad my way into the house. What can I say? I have a system. I walk over my dark, almost black, wood floors that see me through the kitchen, under the simple mat at the front door, and to the base of the floating staircase. The steps of which match said wood to the top, where a smooth grey carpet takes its place. If I were to keep walking straight I would hit the railing overlooking the living room. If I were to turn left, I would find myself between two guest rooms and a guest bath. Interested in neither, I go right.

My room resides behind a pair of dark wood doors infused with linear steel designs. They take up most of the entire wall at the end of the short hall. I’m greeted with a familiar sleet grey wall behind an azurite top dresser housing a black vase among various knick-knacks. From here I have the option of turning right, leading to my home office of sorts; or left, to my bedroom. Since either direction gets me to the bathroom I go left. As I do I begin stripping out of my wet clothes.

The hammering rain on the expanse of windows offset by the drum of the shower’s stream provides the perfect soundtrack to unwind. I take a deep breath of the steam heavy air and tilt my head into the hot water.

Funny, I guess she replaced you too.

My jaw clenches reflexively, and I suppress a wince. That damn brat. I didn’t have a fucking choice, and I don’t want to remember this shit right now. Or ever, but as I stand behind the safety of my glass house, I can’t help the memories I wonder into.

“What are ya willing to do?”

“Anything.” A fifteen year old me replies.

“Really?” He scratches at the patchwork scruff along his jaw in thought. Then, with a menacing glint in his eyes, he flips open a steel gripped knife. Offering me the handle, he continues. “How about ya run this along the neck of that purty little sister of yours?” I gulp, eyes widening at the weapon pressing against my chest. When I look up to him, silently pleading, his wicked smile only grows. “Careful what ya say to people, kid. Don’t ever offer more than you’re willing to do.” He folds his knife and slides it back into his pocket. I let out a huff of relief. “If ya’ll weren’t family I would make you do it. Makes ya lucky. Don’t forget that.”

“I won’t, sir.”

“Good. Cause if ya do, I won’t hesitate. I’ll gut that purty little sis of yours, and make you watch. Then I’ll do the same to you.”

“I understand. I won’t forget how lucky we are.” I reply purposefully, looking him in the eyes to prove my sincerity.

“Hmm.” He regards me closely. At first with doubt, then with pride as I maintain eye contact. He smiles crookedly, showing off a few missing teeth, and laughs. “Maria, get your ass over here, we’re leaving.” He calls over his shoulder to the little raven-haired girl on a lone red swing.

I flinch at the his mispronunciation of her name. He did it on purpose, he always does. But, especially after the conversation we just had, I refuse to correct him and Mikasa’s smart enough to follow my lead. Obediently she runs toward us. Her fingers instantly wrap themselves around mine
when she catches up. “How abouts we go get ourselves a burger? What do y’all say to that?”

“Thank you, Uncle Kenny.” We answer in unison. I squeeze her hand, reassuring myself of that’s she’s there. That right now she’s safe.

“Levi, hurry up! The food’s here!” An annoying, yet in this moment angelic voice calls me out of memory lane.

“Hey!”

“Oh right, Far’s here too.”

I let out a shaky breath that loses itself in the steam clouding my vision. I focus on my repeating the process-breath in, breath out. After a few moments my mind catches up with the present. I realize I’m shaking. My left arm is extended fully, supporting my weight on the wall in front of me, while my right is hanging limply at my side. Through the thick steam I see crimson. Dripping consistently from the curled fist at my side, and mixing to a deluded pink as the hot water washes over it. Shit. I match my gaze to the spot on the wall that still has remnants of skin on it. My shower is ¾ walls of tiny grey, blue, and creamy white stones staggering from floor to ceiling. Making for a surface that is anything but smooth. I don’t remember hitting the wall. I don’t remember when I started shaking. All I remember are the thoughts that triggered that specific memory.

Fuck, my knuckles were already bruised, now they’re sliced open. I gingerly raise my hand to the hot stream of water and wince loudly at the burn it causes. I have to be on a set by 7 tomorrow morning, and I’m going to have to show up like this? Nice going, Levi. What the fuck was I thinking?

You weren’t.

Another heavy breath escapes me, and I resolve to finish my shower actively avoiding thought.

I emerge from my room with my knuckles bandaged, my hair wet, and my fucks for the day completely exhausted. I’m in similar clothing to that of my costume earlier, dark sweats and a nine-inch nails tee-shirt. We’re not going anywhere, so why get completely dressed again?

As I pad my way down the stairs, I find comfort in the familiar voices ringing through the house. I barely have to turn my head to see them in the kitchen. Iz is sitting cross-legged in a bar chair while Farlan leans against one of the opposing counters. Each with a white box in one hand and chopped sticks in the other, Iz talks excitedly while Farlan tends to his noodles.

“Then he was all like ‘Car, Jaeger, Now!’” She adapts her voice to a crude octave. Please nobody ever cast her to play me. “and Eren was looking at him like- Oh hey, Levi!”

Iz ever so casually cuts off her epic story when she sees me at the base of the stairs.

“Tell me I don’t actually sound like that.” I comment on my way toward the island. Farlan chuckles into his open box of stir-fry. I raise an eyebrow in his direction, inclining him to say whatever it is he has to say.

“No, Rev, you sound more like this-” He starts before clearing his throat. “‘My name’s Levi, and I hate everything.’”

Iz almost falls out of her chair with laughter. Farlan joins, grabbing the countertop for support. I roll my eyes in annoyance, but still can’t help the twitch of my lips.

“Last I checked I wasn’t Batman.” I retort while picking at my own order of shrimp stir-fry.
“It kind of fits though, big bro.” Iz comments through a fit of giggles. “Next time they remake the movies, you should go for it. You’d be a shoe in!”

“Could you imagine? ‘Robin, take this feather duster. We’re gonna clean up this town!’” Farlan jumps in again. Resuming his impression of me. Iz snickers.

“Iz, you have to scrub the batmobile in small circles. Clockwise 5 times counterclockwise twice!”

Hey now, that’s the only way to clean car. Unless you want a bunch of streaks in the sunlight.

“Next time, dishes before dinner, you scum!” Farlan emphasises with a threatening point of his chopped sticks.

“Okay, okay I get it.” I interject. Not that their impressions weren’t funny, except, wait, they weren’t.

“Don’t get your panties in a twist, Rev.” Farlan laughs before returning to his meal. Iz is still giggling wildly, rocking herself back and forth in her chair.

Why do I deal with these idiots?

“Sorry big bro, but you need to lighten up!” Iz chimes in when she catches a breath.

“Yeah! Speaking of which, that’s a pretty nice shiner you’ve got going.”

“Shiner? What are you 80?” I retort. I mean, who speaks like that anymore?

“Just saying, looks like he has a good right hook.” He shrugs. “I hope you didn’t hurt him too badly, I want to be able to shake his hand.” I roll my eyes and resume my eating. The rain has lightened up slightly, reduced to pattering rather than hammering at the large windows.

After a few more choice jabs between each other, we keep fairly shallow conversation. Discussing work, relationships—or lack there of, and other seemingly revolving topics. It’s nice. Sitting comfortably with the two people closest to me. Just enjoying each other’s company, listening to and watching the shower through tall rain streaked windows. Laughing carelessly. It’s indescribably peaceful.

Eventually, however, Iz begins to nod off, prompting Farlan’s farewell and I’m left with my thoughts once more. Since I’m already dressed for it, I decide to try my hand at sleeping. Before I do so, however, I fill a bag with ice for my jaw. I awkwardly adjust my pillows to keep the bag pressed tightly against it and will myself not to move in my sleep. I need to get rid of this thing as quickly as possible. AQAP as Hanji would say.

It doesn’t take long for the rhythm of the rain to lull me to a fitful slumber.

I had a plan. I had tickets to another life. What I believed would have been a better life. I had money saved, spent years making connections, even had the damn papers for us both. We were going to go home. To the last place I remember feeling safe. We were going to be happy. I was going to save her. God, I was so naïve.

It was the eve of my 18th birthday, and for the first time in a long time—and the last time since— I was excited for it. I wasn’t even bothered by the obnoxious holiday that occupied it, actually it made the whole thing better. More exciting. Everything was ready, everything was perfect; all I was missing was my partner in crime.
Once the last hues of daylight fade beneath the city’s skyline, I make my move. Leaping from the stoop of one of my more permanent residence, I take off on the cracked surface of the sidewalk. The empty rucksack bounces off my back and through the thin soles of my stolen chucks I can feel the cool of the cement from the winter’s chill. I’ll probably end up swallowing bugs with the shit-eating grin I’m wearing, and for once I don’t mind. This is it. This is what I had been working toward, and I’m so ready. It never even occurs to me that perhaps she isn’t.

It didn’t take long to find her. After all my…excursions… I had made quite a few contacts. I had eyes all over the city, and once I put out an order for an address, it took less than a week before I had a crumpled and used napkin with it. It took less than two minutes before I had a new copy on a fresh, clean piece of paper as the disgusting bastard who shoved the last one in my face used said napkin to tend to his bloody nose.

I checked out the house a couple weeks prior to make sure it was her. It was and I began putting my plans into action.

Twinkling reds, whites, and greens wrapped around lampposts and street planted trees light my way. As I slow my pace, I’m graced with living room views to happy families gathered on couches or around trees. It makes me sick. We will never have that again, and I wouldn’t want it again. It was all so futile and we are better off without it. Without the illusion of innocence.

The side of town I have ventured to is much nicer than her other foster homes. I wonder who she was living with now. Are they nice? Will she miss them? I shake my head, trying to convince myself that it doesn’t matter if she does. Because she’ll get over it. Right?

A scream echoes through the quiet neighborhood from the corner house. The corner house that she’s in… I speed up, ready to attack. When I reached the peaks of a too tall wooden fence, I leap into an old oak in the alleyway behind the small green house. I’m about to jump over, do whatever I need to when I see her. She is standing, in all her awkward preteen glory, with a head of chestnut hair locked in her arm. The scream sounds again as the head tries twisting its way out of her hold. She stickers.

“Mikasa! Let me go!”

“Say it, Eren!”

“No!” Another squeal. “Okay, okay.” The boy grumbles. “You’re the best ninja who has ever been and ever will be.”

“And?”

He heaves in defeat before answering in a small voice. “Imkingwimp.”

“What was that? I couldn’t hear you.”

“I’m king wimp, okay!?”

She lets him go instantly. A smug smile peaks from just above a bright red scarf wrapped around her neck. Her raven hair dances in the small winter’s breeze and her dark eyes shine with triumph. My heart lurches; she looks so much like mom.

The boy straightens and rubs at his neck wearing furrowed brows and an award winning frown. His bright eyes shoot venom at her under his mop head of hair. His fists are curled at his sides. I wait for him to try it, try taking a swing, and he does. But he’s on the ground before I can even move from my perch. Damn she’s fast. I smile with pride. The boy has a face full of dirt and in one swift move,
twists Mikasa off his back and onto the ground. He starts tickling her. She kicks and giggles and finally pushes him off before making a b-line through the sliding door.

"Hannes!" I hear her call a few moments after the boy chases her in. I give a small chuckle before the weight of her new life falls on me like a fuck ton of bricks.

It’s the worst feeling in the world. Looking in and seeing her smile. Watching her laugh until she’s blue in the face. I recognize that kid too. From the times I’ve checked in on her. She was always trailing behind him as he ran around the park. What the fuck am I even doing there? What right do I have to take her away from this? She is happy, really happy. Would she even remember me? I had left so long ago that it was possible she’d forgotten. Or that she hates me. As I sit here, there isn’t an ounce of me that doesn’t want her with me. That doesn’t want to laugh, and wrestle, and quip. Shit I want it so damn bad because I’m fucking selfish. So fucking selfish that I’m ready to take her away from her home just because I don’t have one myself.

Muffled bickering and more laughing breaks my chain of thought. Ultimately, I make my decision to walk away and leave her be. Give her a chance here, with them. But before I can make myself move, I watch. I want to be hostile, want to be jealous or angry as I do, through the sheen of glass, but all I feel is bittersweet heartbreak. I want it to be me, but I also know I didn’t fit. I would never fit in that scene. Just like all of the homes I passed on the way here, only now I realized she does. She does have that innocence, and even if it's paper thin, I need to protect that. It's only when the chill gusts by once more that I realize I'm crying. That my nose is dripping, and my eyes are swollen. The lights inside have long since been extinguished. I don’t even remember when that happened, or how long I’ve been out there. So I jump down from my perch, not even flinching as the rucksack drops unceremoniously from my grasp.

“Goodbye, Mika.” I whisper in the hitch of my breath. Every fiber protesting as I walk forward without seeing. Without feeling anything. I'm numb.

I wake with a start. Thunder shaking the walls moments later.

Fuck. I dry wash my face with my palm. That's not what I need right now. I've propped myself on my left elbow, and it only takes a few moment before I notice an icy liquid sliding down it. My ice bag ruptured. Perfect. Groaning, I change my sheets-all of them for good measure- and remake my bed. Yes I'll be sleeping again, hopefully relatively soon, but for the time being I choose to feed my compulsion.

It's structured. Consistent. A thoughtless task to distract me.

During which I'm reminded of my sliced knuckles, which reminds me of the shower I don't think I cleaned well enough. Better do it again just to be safe. I pull out the appropriate cleaning supplies from the one of the linen closets by my vanity topped with stone swirled with azurite. It's a continuation of the same blues swimming throughout my room. I chose it because it sparked memories of my mother.

She had these earrings of azurite, dad got them for her on one of his trips to Egypt. She loved them, and was never without them after he died. When she went, they passed to Mikasa. Though at the time, she was too young to entrust them to. I took them, and they are the one thing I kept hidden. Kept away from Kenny. They were too valuable, and are all I have left of her. It was easy enough to show them to the interior designer, and voila the master suite was transformed into my master suite.

They belong to Mikasa, and in due time she'll get them.
This stream of thought isn’t helping in calming me, though. So after I vigorously scrub the shower I continue the process with the rest of my bathroom. Then I decide that my den must be filthy. It’s been days since I’ve thoroughly cleaned it.

Trading out cleaning supplies, I use the second door from my bathroom to study. I clean the exposed surfaces quickly, and decide that I could use a drink. There’s a bottle of bourbon calling my name from the mini bar in the dining room. So I quietly pad my way down the stairs. At the bottom I turn left into the formal dining room.

I feel it instantly, the air is tense, almost colder. Deciding not to react, not to make my awareness of the intruder’s presence known, I calmly resume my mission for bourbon. After seeking out a stout tumbler, I straighten. Only to find myself starting at the reflection of the same dark eyes I had woken from.

“Mikasa.” I acknowledge her reflection with a nod.

“Levi.” She replies in the same manner. My God, she’s practically mom’s clone. With her silky hair, eyes deep pools of dark chocolate, and the slight upturn of her nose, like mine. I’m almost jealous by how much she looks like her. Though, she’s tall and skinny like her dad. Her rich ebony hair is pulled back in a loose braid, the bottom half of which falls under a ratty red scarf wound loosely around her neck. It’s the same scarf I think, from that day. What makes it so important?

“How did you get in here?”

“Doesn’t matter.”

“Actually it matters very much.” I begin, focusing back the shimmering amber liquid. I fill the tumbler to the brim. “Tell me, do I need a better security system?”

“How would I know? I didn’t get in any way that would trigger an alarm.” Of course not, I taught her better than that. “Though, if you’re really concerned, you might try actually setting the code.”

I smile into the glass raised at my lips. She still knows me well. I would never set the alarm, I don’t need to, I deal with intruders on my own, and so far no rat has ever squeaked. “I could have you arrested for breaking and entering.”

“You won’t.”

“No. I won’t” I take a seat on the closest chair, and gesture for her to do the same. She settles across from me. I sip my bourbon as we sit in silence. The hall lights break through the dark room, casting long shadows from the corner of the wall. We happen to be sitting in one. I sit in the light that managed to creep into the room, she sits in the shadows. I want to say something. Do something, but the harshness of her gaze stills me. A few moments more and I ask the first question on my mind. “Mikasa, what are you doing here?”

“Why did you hit him?”

Straight to the point then.

“He hit me first. Or did he not mention that to you?”

“That doesn’t matter.”

“I see.” I set my glass on the table before leaning my forearms on the surface and sighing. “And now what?” I begin in an almost teasing voice. “You’ve come to exact revenge on the bastard who hit
“Typically, yes, that’s what I’d do, but I never had been able to beat you before. I doubt that’s changed.” Her dark eyes glow in the almost strategically placed shadows, and I think maybe she could. If she really wanted to, and I don’t know if I’d have the heart to try and stop her.

“So then, what will you do? Certainly not catch up with me?”

“We have nothing to catch up on.”

Ouch. That hurts. I should have expected as much. Eren did say she wanted nothing to do with me.

Foolishly, I thought that maybe he was wrong. When I saw her here a part of me felt like he was, but no, he clearly knows her better. She’s definitely not the little girl I left behind, and that alone cuts deeper. Because I left that little girl to spare her from the cruelties of this world, but they seem to have caught her anyway. Perhaps if I were there I could have stopped whatever it was that hardened her edge. Perhaps then I would be looking in the spark that seems to have left her eyes.

Sighing, I resolve to run my fingers through my hair.

No, I did what was best. If I had taken her with me when I came back, her eyes would be clouded even more so with darkness. She would have had to leave Eren. Probably even school. She would’ve been miserable moving from abandoned lot to abandoned lot. From fighting day in and day out simply to survive. I opted to jump down from my perch and walk away. So that she could keep laughing. So that she’d have a chance, one I could never give her. With a heavy heart I chose to say goodbye, and even though it fucking hurt, I will never regret that decision.

“I’m sorry you feel that way.” I finally reply, breaking the tense silence.

“I’m sorry you made it that way.”

She’s not going to make this easy is she? I put my hands up in defeat as I lean more comfortably in my chair. Reclaiming my glass, I take sip. “Why, pray tell, are you here? Did you have something to say or did you just want to throw more guilt in my face?”

“No.” She answers with an averted gaze. “I came to ask for your help.” Sheepishly she finishes into the ratty red scarf around her neck. Well that’s interesting.

“Continue.” I prompt her with wave of my free hand before settling it beneath my chin. She takes a deep breath and fixes me with a pleading gaze.

“With Eren.”

Why am I not surprised? Does anything in her world not have to do with that bright eyed brat? I sigh once more and shake my head in my hand. “With what exactly.”

“With this whole acting thing.” Her expression turns sour.

Acting thing? “I assume you don’t approve.”

“Of course not, I think it’s impractical and senseless.”

“I’ll try not to be offended.”

“I couldn’t care less if you’re offended.”
“Of course not.” I take another large swig, relishing in the burn it causes. “So you want me to help Eren realize how senseless his passion is?”

Even to me that seems a little harsh. Don’t get me wrong, the brat’s a fucking brat, but he’s a talented brat. A talented brat with a nice ass. Though I should probably shake such thoughts from my head, what with the embodiment of resentment and over protection sitting across from me.

“No. I may not approve, but if he’s serious enough to lie to me about it, then I want you to help him be successful.”

“And why would I do that?” I huff. “We didn’t exactly click.”

“You owe me.”

Low blow, Mika, low blow.

“I suppose I do.” I down the rest of my bourbon because I cannot agree to this with a completely sober mind, and I can’t exactly refuse. When the bitter liqueur clears my burning throat, I inhale through my nose and run my palm down my face. “Fine.”

“Okay.” She says before standing and heading to the front door. Apparently that’s it. That was the end of our conversation. Really? There’s so much to be said, and though I can’t bring myself to start I had hoped maybe she would have. “And Levi?” She starts as she opens the door. I meet her eyes with a hum. “I understand. Why you-well I guess why you did everything. I hate it, and I hate you for it, but I understand.”

With that she ducks out the door into the ever leaking sky.

She understands? But she hates me. I don’t know how I’m supposed to feel about that. On one hand I’m relieved that she understand, but on the other I can’t breath. Seriously I can’t fucking breath! I’m being physically crushed by guilt. Okay, okay I see an ugly center piece, an empty glass, the corner of my kitchen island, my hand and fingers. One, two, three, four. Breath in, breath out.

I sit in the secondhand light for a few minutes longer, still recovering from a near panic attack. At this point, I’ve accepted the fact I’m not sleeping. What the hell? I got a good 3 hours in, its better than nothing. Besides, a small ring of dust revealed itself when I moved the bourbon bottle, and its making my skin crawl.

By sunrise I’ve cleaned the entire first floor, and am about finished re-alphabetizing the movies in the theatre downstairs when I realize I have 2 hours until I have to be on set. Quickly finishing that task, I run to take another shower. I just spent the last 5 hours working up a sweat wiping away grime, and if that doesn’t constitute a need for a shower, I don’t know what does.

When I’ve changed into my usual business casual entire, I head straight to my car, through the gates, and to the set. At 7 on the dot I am seated in my chair for makeup. Punctuality is a virtue after all.

“I guess Hanji wasn’t kidding about the little scrap between you and that cutie from yesterday. Man, look at that bruise!” Nanaba says to my reflection as she approaches.

“What can I say, people get lucky sometimes.”

“I hope you didn’t hurt him too bad, Levi, he was sweet.”

Why the fuck is everyone more concerned for him? He hit me first, I only reciprocated. I roll my eyes as indication to change the fucking topic. Or just stop speaking. She doesn’t disappoint, tsking
before setting to work. By the time she’s done, even the ugliest blue has been covered. I nod appreciatively to Nanaba before heading to costuming.

We film a few scenes, and before I know it its time for lunch. As I’m walking off the set, fully intent on filling my self-cannibaling stomach, I’m intercepted by commander eyebrows himself.

“Ah, Levi! How are you?” He begins, stepping in time with me.

“Fan-fucking-tastic.” I reply maintaining eye contact with the buffet table. I make no plans on stopping.

“And congratulations to your sister!” Wait, come again? I stop, staring right up at him. He does the same, matching my gaze.

“The fuck are you on about?”

“The big news of course!” He smirks. He’s fucking with me I can tell, but about what? “Or did you not read the headlines?”

I snatch the magazine he produces. There I am, caught mid-swing aimed directly for one of those wide, bright eyes. Underneath it possibly the worst headline I’ve ever read:

Black and Blues Brothers to be?

Levi’s violent response to news of his sister’s secret engagement.

pg. 15

You’ve got to be shitting me.

Chapter End Notes

Seriously, anything you have to say, good or bad please tell me! Especially with this chapter since its in a new perspective. I’m not sure yet how beneficial his perspective will be, because there are some plans I have were it could be interesting. What did we already establish about plans though? Right? Haha, seriously though let me know whether or not you like the switch in views. Thank you all again!
Mikasa Aside

Chapter Summary

Mikasa's POV from the last chapter.

Chapter Notes

So I realized that the last chapter was a little confusing regarding Mikasa. How did she get in? Why, after all that time did she say those things? How does she know where he lives?
All wonderful questions that hopefully are answered in this mini chapter I present to you.

As always thank you all for reading! I am so ecstatic to see this fic reach 800 hits! Any feedback/comments/kudos are very much appreciated!

Anyway, I hope you all enjoy!

This is far from the first time I’ve sat in front of this house. His house. Isn’t the first time I’ve been stuck in an internal debate on whether or not I am actually going to do anything. Only this time I have to. For Eren.

As the rain beats down on my blue 03 Accord, part of me wishes I could just put it in reverse and drive away. I’ve been able to let Levi go, let everything go, but this I can’t. Because it wasn’t me he hurt this time, it was Eren. Eren who has been the one consistency in my life. Eren who has loved and supported me when I had a hard time doing it myself. Eren who I need to protect with my life because without him I wouldn’t be here. Without him, I’d have nothing. He’s why I am sitting here, under the beating of the rain, across the street from years of bottled emotions. I have to put aside my own feelings of one brother for the other.

There’s a burning in the back of my eyes that just won’t do. So I take a deep breath, and thrown my head back, willing whatever godforsaken tears have formed to retreat. As I breath out, I place my head in my hands before running them through my hair and resting them on the back of my head. What will I even do? There is a light on upstairs telling me he could be awake, but what if he’s not? Even if he is, what am I going to say? Why do I feel so unprepared? This isn’t right, usually I know exactly what to say and how to say it to get what I want. Is it just because it’s Levi?

Even if it is, I will muscle through. I have to. I will know what to say. I just need to figure out what I want from him.

My first thought is nothing, but I wouldn’t be here if that were entirely accurate. I let my hands fall lazily to my lap and gaze once more at the house across the street. I want to kick his puny face in. To give him a bruise that would outshine Eren’s, but what good would that do? True it would be so so satisfying in many ways, but I also have him in a position of vulnerability. All I need is to find a reason to manipulate that. I mean, it doesn’t take an Armin to figure out how Eren got that black eye.
I know how he feels about Levi. Mix that with his short fuse and his protectiveness of me and the picture paints itself. He probably went off when he saw Levi and that was the consequence.

It’s endearing, actually, because his protectiveness is completely unnecessary. Yet that’s just who he is. I burrow into the red fabric hanging from my neck, as I often do for comfort. It’s not so much the scarf itself, but what it represents that brings it to me.

It belonged to Eren’s mom. That’s what he told me when he wrapped me up one fall day. I tried giving it back once we were inside, but he protested. Insisting that it looked better on me.

“Besides,” he had said. “Family keeps each other warm.”

I’ve scarcely been without it since.

With that memory in mind, it dawns on me. The perfect use for Levi’s vulnerability. Eren.

Muster up what remains of my resolve, pull up my hood, and step into the rain.

The address came from a particularly flirtatious lawyer who claimed to represent the actor, and what do you know, he wasn’t lying. I discovered as much the first time I parked here. It was a little over a year ago, the first summer into the internship at Sina & Rose. Actually, at the time it was Sina, Rose, & Maria, but Maria fell ill soon after and sold her stock between the other two partners. That was a very unusual transition, but another story for another day.

Back then, I wanted to seek him out. I had a plan to confront him. To relish in the shock on his face from seeing me. It turned out being quite the opposite. I saw him walk outside, and I choked. I was the one in shock. Petrified as tears rolled down my cheeks, I watched him. The next time I was so sure of myself. So sure I was going to knock down his door, but again found myself freeze up. Each time, I would come here on a mission; each time I would leave feeling diffused. To the point where I would come up here just to sit and watch. It was therapeutic for me, I think. Over time I found myself getting to know him all over again. Sure he’s changed, we both have, but there were times I recognized him. When he would scold the redhead on the peculiarities of how to wash a car, or the windows, or the doors. When he was visible through the top right window, pacing with what I’m assuming was a script in his hand. The way he ruffled his hair in frustration. It was comforting. Seeing him like that. It humanized him, and once it did that I started letting go of all my anger. The last time I was here, it was his birthday. I had built myself up so much, this time I was going to do it. I even got as far as the front door. The gates were open, cars filled up the large driveway, laughter rang through the night, and I stood on the doorstep with a small package in my hand. Obviously I didn’t confront him then. Eren happened to call, asking where I was and why I was late, and, God, I was so relieved. I ended up leaving the small package on his stoop and made my way to Hannes’s for dinner.

A rippling crack of thunder shakes the sky just as I’m about to jump the fence. Putting that extra pep in my step I clear it with ease, but end up tumbling onto the wet lawn. If I wasn’t too wet before I most definitely am now. I duck under the overlapping roof at the side of the house and shake myself off as best as I can. From the few times my curiosity got the best of me and I ended up essentially scouring the place out, I remember to go around to the back. Before I even turn the corner, I hear the loud and sporadic splashes from where the rain meets the pool. I turn onto the ground level patio, catching my reflection in the wall of glass. From the corner of my eye I see a stream of light spilling from the upper level. I follow it to the room overlooking the other side of the patio. From which partially illuminates the area around and below. My breath catches as I see a shadow of movement through the curtains and I freeze. The figure paces across the expanse of the window before retreating further in the room. Exhaling, I seize the opportunity to advance down the slippery stairs to the lower patio.
There are patio chairs surrounding a fire pit in front of me. The rain ricochets off the various surfaces. The windows to my side, the pavement at my feet, the pool in my path, the low thundering in the distance; each creating a beautiful harmony to muffle my footsteps. The curtains are drawn on these windows by my right side. I assume that means this is redhead’s room. Seeing how I can clearly make out the contents of the rooms lining the pool and patio. I tread with extra caution, following the wall of glass to the edge of the curtains where it meets a stone pillar. Perpendicular to which begins a wall of french doors. As I look past my water stricken reflection I am able to make out a staircase directly in front of me. There’s a dark railing on the side that opens up into the main room. The other side of the staircase runs with the wall adjacent to another turning down a hall across from the redhead’s room. If it weren’t for the drawn curtains beside me, this would be the best entry point. As it stands, however, I chance a glance to the illuminated room two stories up before searching for another way. The pool cuts the patio in half, but connects both halves with a wide bridge a few meters from the house. I leave the slightly sheltered awning to hastily jog across the bridge to the other side. Cupping my hands around my eyes and placing them on the window I see that this side is a mirror of the other. An identical staircase lies before me through the thick glass of french doors. Perfect.

I retrieve the little leather kit from my back pocket.

There are some skills that once mastered, one never forgets. Riding a bike for example. Playing an instrument, perhaps. Or picking a lock. A valuable skill taught to me by the very man I’m about to use it against. I was only 5 then, but I practiced every chance I got. Even after he left a year later, I kept practicing and practicing, eventually passing along the skill to Eren. Which, as it happened, saved our skin more times than I can count.

I remove the proper sized pick and tension wrench from their slots and set to work. In no time I feel the distinguishable click of a job well done. Placing a firm grip on the black metallic handle, I cautiously pull the door open. Just enough to slip through before slowly shutting the door with a dull click.

The air seems so still in here. Like that of a library. Warm, but tense almost. Aside from the pattering of rain on the glass, it is silent. I take each step on the balls of my feet, unwilling to break that silence. I pad my way up the stairs a short distance before looping the landing to resume my trek. As I near the doorless frame to the ground level, I freeze at the creaks and groans sounding from the other room. He’s coming down the stairs, I think. I gulp. Damn it, this is not the time for cold feet! I close my eyes, bring Eren’s scarf to my nose, and focus on controlling my heart rate.

One more deep breath and I open my eyes to take those last few steps.

Rain streaked glass and a flash of lightning greet me as I step onto the dark hardwood floor.

There’s still time to turn around. He doesn’t have to know I was ever here.

A sapphire specked emerald eye mostly hidden beneath swollen blue and black skin flashes in my mind. Eren. Do this for Eren.

Quite as the pittering drops, I make my way toward the sound of clattering glass.

Standing between a large rectangular table and a matching buffet, fiddling with a bottle of amber liquid, I see him. I move slowly to his back, catching my own eye in the mirror across from me. He’s rigid and in an instant his eyes flick up to meet mine in our reflections.

“Mikasa.” He says simply with a nod.
“Levi.” I reply, trying to harness back the sudden hostility I feel in his presence.

“How did you get in here?” Of all the things, after all these years, and he begins with that?

“Doesn’t matter.”

“Actually it matters very much.” He starts, filling his glass to the brim. He’s stalling. Good I managed to truly catch him off guard. “Tell me, do I need a better security system?”

“How would I know? I didn’t get in any way that would trigger an alarm.” I reply smugly. “Though, if you’re really concerned, you might try actually setting the code.”

He smiles into his glass. “I could have you arrested for breaking and entering.”

Cute jest.

“You won’t.”

“No. I won’t” In one swift move, he pulls out the chair directly in front of him and sits. Folding one leg over the other before gesturing to the one in front of me. I take the hint and do the same. A knot has formed in my throat. I want to reach across the table and strangle him. At the same time I want to cry in his arms and tell him how greatly he was missed. As these thoughts go through my mind, he shifts uncomfortably, sipping on his drink. He looks past me, to the light from the hall to my right, and as he does I see a peculiar dark mark on his chin. My eyes narrow as I try examining it from this distance. Huh, I wonder... “Mikasa, what are you doing here?”

“Why did you hit him?” I deflect the question quickly.

“He hit me first. Or did he not mention that to you?”

He didn’t, and at the news I tighten my lips to keep from smiling.

“That doesn’t matter.”

“I see.” He sets his glass down and leans onto table, sighing. “And now what?” He mocks. “You’ve come to exact revenge on the bastard who hit your brother?”

So, he knows who Eren is to me. I should have figured as much, Eren does like to talk.

“Typically, yes, that’s what I’d do, but I never had been able to beat you before. I doubt that’s changed.” My answer is honest. I have a reputation for exacting revenge on the morons who mess with Eren, but I another idea in mind for Levi.

“So then, what will you do? Certainly not catch up with me?”

“We have nothing to catch up on.”

It comes out before I can stop it. Bitter and curt. Yet as the words leave my mouth, I find I don’t regret them. Its true, after all. We don’t have anything to catch up on. At least not right now.

His jaw clenches and he follows it jerking his head to the side. His eyes are painfully narrowed, bruise fully exposed in the secondhand light. My heart aches. At the truth of my words. At the look on his face. He’s hurt, and I wish I cared. Wish I didn’t feel so gratified by his pain.

After a long silence, he runs his hand through his hair and lets out a heavy sigh.
“I’m sorry you feel that way.” He manages through a husky voice.

“I’m sorry you made it that way.”

Again the words come out easily, without so much as a beat. I don’t mean them to sound so harsh, but again I would take it back.

He puts my hands up in defeat and leans back in his chair before taking another sip of his drink. “Why, pray tell, are you here? Did you have something to say or did you just want to throw more guilt in my face?”

“No.” My eyes fall to the seat beside me. I knew we’d get here eventually, but honestly I’m still working through the details of the favor I need from him. “I came to ask for your help.”

Absentmindedly, I bring my scarf to my nose and close my eyes. 

*Family keeps each other warm.*

“Continue.” He presses with an encouraging wave of his free hand.

I take a deep breath and lift my chin to meet his eyes.

“With Eren.”

“With what exactly?”

“With this whole acting thing.” I answer through thinned lips.

“I assume you don’t approve.”

“Of course not, I think it’s impractical and senseless.”

“I’ll try not to be offended.”

“I couldn’t care less if you’re offended.”

“Oh course not.” He retorts. He takes another large drink before continuing. “So you want me to help Eren realize how senseless his passion is?”

Could he do that? No, that’s not fair to Eren. I mean it is his dream, right? As much as I hate it, and I do, what kind of sister would I be if I didn’t help him. Which is precisely where Levi comes in. “No. I may not approve, but if he’s serious enough to lie to me about it, then I want you to help him be successful.”

“And why would I do that?” He scoffs. “We didn’t exactly click.”

Ah, here it is. The time to use my ace in the hole. To use Levi’s vulnerability. *Guilt.*

“You owe me.”

I see it wash over him as he purses his lips. I’ve got him.

“I suppose I do.” With a final gulp of the half full glass of amber, he give a sharp inhale. “Fine.”

Bingo.

“Okay.” My work here is done. I have nothing left to say right now. Not while maintaining my
resolve. I stand, tuck in my chair, and head toward the front door. There’d be no point in going out the way I came. I leave him sitting in the dimly lit dining room, but stop when my hand curls around the doorknob. “And Levi?” I open the door, but I can’t just leave him like that. No I have to say something, even with the burning behind my eyes. Even with the lump in my throat. He hums in response and I hold his eyes as grey as the storm outside. He needs to hear this as much as I need to say it. “I understand. Why you-” I clear my throat quickly. “-well I guess why you did everything. I hate it, and I hate you for it, but I understand.”

I’ve closed the door at my back before he could even breath in response.

I shoudn’t have said anything, but at the same time I should have said so much more!

Standing in the rain I close my eyes and breath for what feels like the hundredth time tonight. Tears mix with heavy drops as I struggle to will them back. After standing there for a few minutes, I pull up my hood and race across the driveway.

Hopping the gate in one swift move, I continue across the street. I slide into my car and waste no time peeling the fuck out of here.
Universal Laws of Attraction

Chapter Summary

They say if you think about something enough, you'll attract that object to you. Whether its wanted or not.

“Dude, the fuck happened to your face?”

“Nice to see you too, Reiner.” I reply through gritted teeth. It’s too Goddamn early for this shit.

I shoulder my way past him to the office because I sure as hell am going make sure I’m being paid for every second I have to endure in this shit-hole.

“Okay, touchy subject.” He laughs at my back. I merely grunt because, yeah you could say that. “So,” He begins, calling from the front. “Mikasa beat you up again or...”

I don’t like that. The abrupt silence protruding from the front counter. I shrug off my coat, throw it haphazardly onto the office chair, and head up front to investigate. “Reiner, what are you-?”

His eyes shoot up to me, cutting me off. His brows furrow as he looks anxiously from the magazine in his hand up to me. What is going on?

“No way, dude.” He starts to himself. “No fucking way, dude!?” He finishes looking at me expectantly.

“What the fuck are you on about!?” I yell. Fuck, the sun’s not even up, and I’m not a fucking mind reader.

“You!”

“Me?.”

“Yes, you! The fuck, dude? Did Ackerman really do that to you?”

What? How in the hell would he know that? Momentarily at a loss for words, I decide I’m going straight to the source. I cross the distance and snatch the magazine from his grasp.

“No, no, no, no, no this is bad.” I mutter.

Not good. Fucking bad. Stupid, stupid, stupid!

You know what, me? I’m not even mad. In fact I agree 1000%.

Levi, in all his raging glory, is pictured moments before his fist collided with my face. At least he looks good, full of emotion, still completely controlled. I, on the other hand, look like a fucking baby. My eyes are narrowed and broken, my arms are caught behind me, my mouth open in declaration. Oh, and there are fucking tears rolling down my cheeks. I’m pretty sure they’ve been edited to stand out, too, because nobody’s tears are that blue.

Don’t even get me started on the fucking headline. I mean, are you fucking serious? Secret-what?
The first thing I do is pinch myself because this must be a nightmare.  

Fuck, just as I feared, I am awake.  

My mouth is moving, constantly switching between mumbling *fuck* and *no*.  

“I guess congratulations are in order!” A massive hand pats my shoulder. He keeps laughing, shaking his head as he does. “Levi Ackerman’s sister, eh? She’s kinda hot, I’ve never been a fan of gingers myself, but good for you!” I take a moment to shoot him a pointed glare over the top of the magazine. He laughs, and shrugs.  

“Dude, breath before you have a stroke or something.”  

"Don't tell me what to do, asshole!" I snap. "You know this is bullshit, right?"  

"Yeah I got that at sister. Now brother I could believe. Or Levi himself, I mean he’s hot too.”  

"FUCK YOU, BLOCKHEAD, THAT'S NOT FUNNY!"  

"Eren, calm down." He begins with his hands in front of him as if I’m a spooked animal. Then he cautiously takes the magazine out of my hand. "We'll take them down, and if anyone says anything I'll knock them out."  

I take a deep breath. "Sorry, Reiner."  

"Don't worry about it, man." He says with a pat to my shoulder. "I'm just surprised there's no news on his murder. Unless you didn't tell Mikasa?"  

I wince. She hasn't been home since the night before last. I must have called her a thousand times, and text her twice as much, but all I got back was:  

**Don’t worry about me. I'm going to stay with Ymir. Get some rest.**  

"Oh, so you didn't?"  

"Worse, I did."  

"And?"  

"I haven't heard from her since."  

"Ouch buddy that's rough."  

With my eyes averted I shrug. Yeah it is, but for more reasons that he knows. He probably assumes she's just pissed I got into another fight.  

Instinctively run my fingers over my black eye. The swelling's gone down a lot since that night, and has turned into an ugly rainbow. Mostly because Armin kept bringing me packages of frozen peas all day yesterday. When the hell did we so many bags of frozen peas anyway? And why? I guess, thinking back, one of the three rotating bags was corn, but still its not like we eat them. At least I sure as hell don’t.  

Anyway, I’ve ended up falling asleep in the chair with one held to my eye for the last two nights waiting for Mikasa. Obviously in vain.  

Reiner stays true to his word and takes them off the front display. I make a mental note to burn them
“Thanks.” I say when he reappears from the office.

“No prob, Rob.” He replies with a grin.

“I’m just going to go in the back. Unless *you* already put the truck away?” I ask hopefully, but I already know the answer.

“Hell no, man, I left that for you!”

“Of course you did.” I roll my eyes.

In the back most room of the already tiny convenient store, I absently match our inventory to the shipment. As I do, I can’t help but think about Mikasa. Why won’t she talk to me? And why stay with Ymir of all people?

*Good ol’ Ymir.*

She’s the one who helped [forced] me out of the closet.

Now that’s a fun stroll down memory lane I can’t help but take.

We all were at the beach in lieu of the graduating class commencement, because who the fuck needs to watch *other* people get ready to graduate when we all still had 2 years to go? It was as hot as California is at the end of May, which is to say slightly above warm. Still it was nice enough to play some beach ball, swim, and surf. I was not among those of us who could keep my balance, so I stayed on the beach under the sun. Ymir, Mikasa, and Reiner were already surfing. Annie and Bertholdt played volleyball, and Armin was being a good band member at the school. Well, he and Jean, who was part of the student council. They ended up joining us a couple hours later. Armin immediately set off on writing his inspirational speech for his fellow band geeks beside me, and Jean joined the crew in the water. It was then that Ymir caught me checking him out.

I couldn’t help it! He was right in front of me, no shirt, no shoes, running into the waves, I had no control of my eyes. She called for me to stop drooling over him from the safety of her wading surfboard. Then, according to legend, I turned tomato red and attempted to find refuge with my head in the sand. I don’t remember doing that, I was too mortified, but I do remember a cool hand on my back and turning to a face full of Jean. He eloquently proceeded to push my embarrassment by asking, and I quote “*You gay, Jaeger?*” I answered honestly by stating that, yeah I might be. Ymir called for us to repeat our conversation loud enough so she could eavesdrop, Jean did and she screamed “Fucking finally! I thought he’d never admit it.” Which caused me to resume my attempt at ostriching.

Not like Armin didn’t already know, I confided in him long before then, but everyone else? Well they might have had their suspicions, but they *politely* kept them to themselves. Though, after that Ymir and I just clicked. In an annoying love/hate kind of way, so I my resentment over the whole thing fell away fairly quickly, and we’ve stayed close since. Yeah it helped that she happened to kick start my relationship with Jean…

On second thought, maybe I could scour up some resentment.

And why am I thinking about this right now?

Right, Mikasa...and Ymir.
They’ve never been overly fond of each other. Ymir’s thinks Mikasa’s too uptight, and Mikasa thinks Ymir’s too carefree. Which is exactly why it’s so strange for them to stay together. Why isn’t she with Annie?

“Hey, Reiner!” I call, he pokes his head around a tower of boxes after a few moments and grunts. “Where’s Bert?”

“Why?” He rebuts, moving to lean on the tower in front of me.

Because he’s the only reason I can tell that Mikasa wouldn’t be with her. “I’m just curious.”

“He and Annie went upstate to stay with the folks.” Well that explains that.

“Well, I got into a fight with him after my call back.”

“Yeah? Why in the hell would you go and do something like that?”

A heavy sigh escapes me as I rub furiously at my neck. I guess my reasons are so obvious to me and the parties involved that I never thought of a plausible reason for those who are not. Though, to be fair, it’s not like I could have predicted a fucking snapshot of the incident.

Only Armin and I know about Mikasa and Levi’s relation. Though I suppose that list has been extended to Hanji, Isabel, that sandy blond assistant, the receptionist, and those two huge security dudes. But besides them, nobody knows, and for good reason.

A) its a relation that, from what I can tell, they don’t even want.

B) What’s the point in shining light on our shitty childhood?

And C) if word was ever to get out, now that Levi went and got himself famous, life would probably just become a living hell.

No, it’s better nobody else knows. Our friends all, of course, asked when they found out her real last name, but a quick ‘no’ quelled their curiosities. Hell, they barely know we’re adopted, having met us in the middle of junior high after we had finally settled with Hannes. We legally took his last name, Thorn.

On paper I was born Eren Percival Jaeger changed to Eren Percival Thorn in 2007, believe me I tried to change my middle name, but Hannes wouldn’t have it. He wanted me to keep that tie to my mother. She named me for her favorite of King Arthur’s knights. Still, everybody knows me as Jaeger. What can I say? I like my birth name. It’s become a nickname of sorts, and is the name I provided at the time of my audition. Rather Armin provided it since he did all my paperwork, but he
did it to my preference in any regard. Thorn connects me to Hannes and Mikasa, Percival to my mother, and Jaeger symbolically to the time I was whole. And to my father I guess, but I that I couldn’t care less for.

“Earth to Eren-hello, Eren! You lose signal with the mothership?” Reiner recalls my attention with a wave of his hand in front of my face.

“Huh?”

“You were going to tell me what happened between you and Captain Stevens.”

“Who?”

“Do you even watch tv?” He asks exaggeratedly throwing out his hands. “That’s the name of Levi’s character in Goliath.”

I shrug. I do watch tv, probably too much of it, but I actively avoid anything he’s in. Too bad, I’ve heard it’s a great show. “There’s not much to tell.” I begin, desperately trying to think of something. Like any good lie, I start with the basic truths. “I went to the studio, he was there, and...-” Saved by the most beautiful sound in this moment. The bell to the front door, signalling the presence of a customer.

“I’ll be right back, and I want the rest of that story, Jaeger.” He responds with an accusatory finger at my face. I roll my eyes, but agree with a nod. He disappears back to the front. Phew, at least I bought some time.

The bell signals steadily for a good hour or so. Effectively keeping Reiner and all his curiosities behind the counter. I’m able to put the truck order away, weaving between aisles to restock candy, chips, energy drinks, etc. in relative peace. At least one good thing comes out of working here and that’s free coffee. With that luscious liquid pumping through my veins, the fact that I’ve beat the sun to rise by a handful of hours doesn’t seem so horrendous. Don’t get me wrong it is, but coffee makes it better.

As the morning rush dies, Reiner signal’s that he’s taking a break, and I fill my cup for the third time before assuming my post behind the counter. I’m almost surprised that he left without interrogating me. Another person might just assume he’s forgotten about it, but I know Reiner and he hasn’t. Though, I was able to conjure up a plausible story somewhere in the Hostess aisle for when he decides to ask again.

Thinking of plausible stories, though, you know what’s not? Me being fucking engaged to Isabel! What the hell would make anyone think that? My curiosity is peaked enough that I trudge back to the office and return with one of those stupid, lying, horrible magazines. I’ve got time, Reiner’s gone, and the store is empty. I thumb through the slick pages until I reach the article.

Riddled between the print are snapshots of Isabel and I. Of us walking together in the rain and at the coffee shop.

_The couple met in secret to discuss the details of their plan to elope._

Yes. Absolutely. I would have drawn the same conclusion from the tense, uncomfortable looks on our faces and the noticeable space between us. We sure look like a passion swept couple with a secret.

There are a few snaps of when Levi butted in and he was hovering over me at the table.
Levi threatening the unknown fiend to leave his baby sister alone.

Okay, he was threatening me, but for entirely different reasons. Transportation reasons, not marital ones.

Sources say the pair had a heated argument before leaving the shop.

Well yeah, but the picture above this caption is from the studio, not the fucking shop. And if somebody fucking followed us from the fucking studio to begin with, then why the hell try to make it seem like the same place? Also, there are no pictures of him giving me a ride, or of, I don’t know, the hit I got in! Though all of the shots of him show his bruise off beautifully. Like my tears, I’m fairly certain both our wounds have been edited for emphasis.

The fucking article itself is so ridiculous that I end up throwing the entire magazine across the store. Who the fuck reads this bullshit!?

Everyone.

Yeah, well whatever.

It’s been about a twenty minutes since I begrudgingly picked up the magazine and threw it rightfully into the bin. Reiner should be back soon, I think I’ve drunk all of the coffee we have made, and we haven’t had anyone else come in. Don’t get me wrong, I appreciate the solitude, but I’m also a fan of distractions from my thoughts as well as from the ticking clock. The sun has almost fully ascended on the horizon by the time I finally get a customer.

A little old lady comes in as I’m drinking the dregs of my fifth cup, and if the jittery feeling creeping into my fingers is any indicator, this should probably be my last.

“Hi, ma’am! How are you today?” I inquire automatically.

“Oh, it looks like I’m doing a bit better than you!” She responds cheerily. Um okay? “What happened to your eye, dear?”

Oh, that.

A short laugh sounds from the corner as Reiner comes back from break shrugging into his snazzy blue vest once more.

“I’ve been trying to get him to tell me all morning, ma’am.” He sighs, leaning on the counter to slurp on a slurpee. I roll my good eye at him and smile to the old woman who’s looking skeptically between us both.

“Hmm..” She begins, squinting at me curiously. Then she snaps her finger, and her expression lights up. “Looks like what you need is a good sized meat popsicle!” She says with a sturdy nod. As if she’s just given me the cure all solution in life. "I imagine that'd clear it up in no time!"

I doubt she has any idea what she just said, but my God if Reiner didn’t pick up on it right away.

He snorts so hard that icy blue liquid starts dripping from his nose. “Shit. Ouch!”

Ducking to the bathroom, he holds his hand cupped over his nose all the while laughing like a maniac. I glare the whole time. The poor old lady looks confused and worried.

“Well, I wonder what that was about.”
It was about your unintentional dick joke, and the accuracy which it unintentionally held. “I don’t know ma’am, he’s has a few screws loose, if you know what I mean.”

She hums thoughtfully. This lady knows exactly what I mean.

By the time Reiner returns—I’ll be damned if that does not sound like the sequel to an 80’s thriller-the woman had payed for her gas, a lottery ticket, and left. When he sees my face he starts laughing hysterically once more, leaning on the counter for support.

“Oh my GOD..” he manages between breathes. “You’re fucking face, man!” Another loud snort. “I bet you could go for a decent sized meat popsicle about now, huh?” he mocks with twitching eyebrows. Which is immediately followed by more obnoxious laughing that has him doubled over.

I, for one, am not amused.

Meat popsicle. A snort escapes me.

Okay, maybe I’m a little amused.

I give completely and join Reiner in his hysterics.

“Okay, okay seriously, Eren.” He says as his laughter dies down. When I finally stop chuckling he has his arms folded in front of him and is wearing a deadpanned expression. “Story time.”

“Fine.” With a heavy sigh I began my fictional tale of woe. “There I was, after the strangest call back in the history of ever, and the asshole has the nerve to say something about looking like a lost stray. About my clothes looking like something out of the garbage. So, naturally I responded by calling him a grumpy old gremlin.”

“Nice, dude.”

“Yeah, well it kind of snowballed from there..” Spinning a heart wrenching story of offense, betrayal, and short jokes, I continue. To which Reiner runs to grab a magazine and agrees that Levi had a hypothetical point about my outfit. Rude, Armin took a lot of pride in putting that outfit together! I can’t get mad at him without admitting that I’m lying literally to his face, so I opt for squinting my eyes menacingly. You win this round Reiner.

“Whatever. I’m taking my breakfast.” I declare. Without sparing him another glance, I go to the office, throw off this God forsaken vest, clock out, then kick my feet onto the desk. Right on top of the pile of magazines. Purely out of spite, I take a moment to dig my heels a little deeper, relishing in the sound of ripping paper. Damn straight.

Pulling my phone from my back pocket, I quickly dial Mikasa. Unsurprisingly it goes directly to voicemail.

“Hey, Red, it’s Green. Again. Just-” I sigh. “-call me back whenever you get this. Or really any of my other messages.” Then after a beat of silence I add, “I’m really sorry. Please just answer me, I’m getting worried, sis.”

My finger hovers over the end button for a moment before tapping on it.

I just really wish she would at least answer me. I feel like everything I’ve done lately has disappointed her, like I can’t do a Goddamned thing right! And, you know what? I can’t.

I can’t go to school like a normal person. I can’t control my temper like a normal person. I can’t have
normal goals or aspirations. I can’t do anything like a normal person.

Maybe because you’re not a normal person.

Yeah, I know and that’s what pisses me off. Life would be so much easier if I were. If I was just a better human being, but I’m fucking not. I’m selfish and and stubborn and ungrateful. I don’t deserve her as my sister, I don’t deserve Armin as my best friend. I don’t deserve anymore than this. Than being locked away in this shitty convenience store.

“Look, lady, he’s not in right now and you have to leave.” Reiner’s voice pulls me from my thoughts. Why is he speaking so loudly? His tone is stern, but is almost immediately lost muffled argument.

“EEERRRREENN!!” The countering voice calls. I lift my feet off the desk, flickering my gaze to the small pile of magazines that fall before heading to the front. That voice seems very familiar, and as I poke my head around the corner I understand why. In an outfit that can only be described as bright and a messy brown ponytail stands…

“Hanji?”

In no time I am caught in an inescapable bear hug. “Eren! Oh my goodness! I was so worried! You don’t hate me do you?”

“Hanji.” I gasp through my crushed lungs.

“Hm?”

“I can’t breath.”

Immediately she jumps back and brushes off my arms.

“Sorry.”

“It’s okay.”

“You know this lunatic?” Reiner chips in by my side.

“Uh, yeah. She’s with the studio.” I answer before turning back to Hanji. “What are you doing here?”

“I came to see you of course!” She starts. “Check in,” Alright. “make sure you’re ok,” I am, but she gingerly touches my black eye anyway. “talk to you about a preliminary hearing regarding your acceptance into the Scouting Regime,” She rushes. “and all that jazz!”

Wait, what?

“Want to run that last part by me again, Hanji?”

“All that jazz?”

“What about an acceptance hearing?”

“Oh that!”

“Yes, that!”
“Well, you were a shoe in, Eren, you really were.” She begins expressingly. “Even after the unfortunate happenings with Levi, our department head still considered you, but when Dok—I’ve told you about Dok, right?” I nod with a grimace. “Well, he heard that Erwin was still going to let you in over Hitch, then he went to Zackly, the studio’s chair and CEO, with yesterday’s EW headline and now, in order for you to be accepted into the Scouting Regime’s program, you’re going to have to go through a hearing of sorts, it’s stupid, I know, but don’t worry, Erwin will think of something!”

She takes a huge breath while I try and process the information. A hearing of sorts?

“What does that even mean?”

“Basically the studio needs to determine if you’re an asset or a liability. Erwin will argue for asset, Dok for liability, and Zackly will decide who he agrees with most.”

My hand absently runs through my hair as I tilt my head toward the ceiling. This is...unexpected. I can’t decide if it’s a good unexpected or a bad one. I mean I pretty much figured all odds of me getting in were forever lost when I took a swing at Levi, and now I’m not sure how I feel about the possibility of still getting in. I mean it is what I want. To become an actor. Actually have a chance at my dreams. I guess when I think of it like that, this news is the good kind of unexpected.

If it doesn’t work out, then oh well, nothing changes.

“Wow, um, okay. When is this hearing thing?”

“That’s the thing,” she begins while rubbing the back of her neck. “We need to find a good time for everyone.”

“Everyone?”

“Yes. You, obviously, Erwin, Dok, Zackly, Hitch, Levi, Moblit—”

“LEVI!!?”

“Oh-huh.”

“Why does that asshat need to be there?”

“Well, sweetie, you did hit him. Which makes his opinion on your acceptance valuable since you’d be working together.”

“Count me out then, Hanji.”

“Eren!”

“No, I don’t want to see that asshole again!”

“Wow, Eren, you really hate this guy don’t you?” Reiner interjects. “Remind me never to say anything bad about your wardrobe.”

I hide my head in my hands and pray that Hanji doesn’t question his comment. She doesn’t, though she looks thoroughly confused.

“Eren, please reconsider. I believe you would absolutely flourish in our program.” She says softly laying a hand on my shoulder. When I drop my hands and look at her, the concern etched on her face fills my stomach with guilt.
Are you, Eren Jaeger, really so easily defeated?

No...

Are you really going to let Levi stop you from following your dreams?

No.

All those who have laughed at you, all those who have told you that you can’t, are you really going to let them win?

Hell no!

That’s right, so stop being a little bitch and step up.

Right!

And stop talking to yourself, it’s creepy.

What!?

“Eren?” Hanji asks, tightening her grip on my shoulder.

“Okay, I’ll go. Just tell me when and I’ll be there.”

“Oh, Eren, that’s wonderful!” She pulls me into another bone breaking hug. My back actually cracks this time, and not in a good way. “And what’s your number? I don’t think we have the right one on file. The last time I called a rather sour sounding girl answered.”

“Oh, yeah that was my sister. We have almost the same number, so that happens a lot.”

“Your sister?” Understanding settles in her eyes. “Well I guess that makes sense then.” Yeah. I shrug awkwardly before walking to the counter and writing my number to hand over to Hanji. “Thanks, Eren! I’ll let you know as soon as I can! It should be within the next few days. Hopefully your black eye will be gone by then, too!”

With an enthusiastic wave, she takes her leave.

“Dude,” Reiner starts next to me once more. “you sure that chick’s a chick?”

“What?”

“I’m just saying, man!” He responds with his hands up. “Doesn’t matter, they’re hot either way.”

“You are un-fucking-believable.”

“What? They are!”

I roll my eyes and go back to the office where I can spend the rest of my break wallowing in conflicting thoughts and feelings.

When I get back it’s about time for Reiner to leave. He was graveyard so he gets to leave before 9.

The rest of the morning passes uneventfully, and I’m off by lunch. Well what normal people would call lunch, but I think of it more as a late afternoon snack. I’m stuck with the weird shift between graveyard and daytime all this week. Which is honestly the worst kind of shift, but when it comes to
hours I’ll take what I can get.

The walk home sucks, and I can’t call anyone because they’re all either working or not talking to me.

CLICKCLICKCLICK.

What was that? I whip my head in every direction and then I see it. A great big camera lens pointing directly at me from behind a half opened car window parked across the street.

CLICKCLICKCLICKCLICKCLICK.

Ah, fuck! I start running, completely disregarding the turn I’m supposed to make at the end of the block. I don’t want to lead them to my house!

But what if they already know where I live? Or where I work? How did they find me? Were they waiting for me? Are they following me? What the fuck am I supposed to do now!?

I go a couple more blocks before my burning lungs urge me to stop. I do so behind a random tiny tree. I know there’s no way I’m being hidden by this trunk the thickness of my thigh, but for some reason its comforting. I chance a peak around it and determine that I lost them. Still, I pull the hood of my jacket over my head before continuing my trek. I have no idea where I’m going now only that it’s definitely not home.

As I duck into a deli restaurant I’m grateful I at least remembered to bring my wallet today. I order a Ruben at the counter and take a seat in the furthest corner of the joint. My hood is still up, my shoulders are hunched, I probably look like the fucking unabomber, but I don’t care. Just as long I’m not recognized by any damn paparazzi. At least not for something like this. Like, maybe in a few years, when I’m actually famous, it’ll be different. Maybe I’ll have better media skills, but right now I’m completely unprepared. Besides, the last thing I want to do is drag Armin and Mikasa into this. None of us want the media digging even a little at our past. At first glance and with the right spin, they won’t even look twice at Mikasa and I’s relation when I come into the business on my own. But at this point in time, with the already scandalized story and the fact that I’m currently a nobody, odds are they’ll want to do some research. Which could only end in tears.

The article stated that I was an "unknown fiend" and I pray to whatever God there is that that still rings true. Though I’m skeptical since that photographer just happened to be hiding in a parked car on my exact route home. Maybe it was a coincidence. Or maybe they recognized Hanji and followed her from the studio.

*Or maybe they know your name.*

I waste no time in pulling out my phone to seek the help of my most trusted ally, Armin.

Me: SOS! I’m stuck in McAlisters because I saw some person taking picture of me while I was walking home...Pls txt me back when you get this!

It takes him half of my sandwich to reply.

Agent Blue: WHAT!?

Me: long story.

Agent Blue: My lunch is in about an hour, can you wait that long?

Me: yup I’ll just hang here
Agent Blue: I’ll text you when I leave, okay?

Me: k thnx

True to his word he’s there in just over 90 minutes.

“Armin,” I begin as soon as I open the door. “What the hell would I do without you?”

“Crash and burn.” He replies with a grin. “Eren?”

“Hm?”

“You can put the hood down now.”

“Oh, right.” So I do.

“Also, traffic really sucks, which is why it took me so long. And my break’s almost over…”

“Armin, I will hang out in the car for the rest of your shift. Don’t worry about taking me home right now, and thank you so much for getting me!”

“Thanks, but you can come inside! It won’t be a problem! It just maybe a little boring.”

“Ha! Remember the last time I went into that building?”

“Eren, unless you’re planning on punching Marco out again, it’ll be fine.” I shrug and look out at the city slowly passing by. Seriously slowly, the Grandma with the walker we passed a block ago is catching up. “So, what’s with this photographer guy?”

“EEURG!” I begin. “So, I went in to work today, and Reiner directed my attention to a row of EW magazines…”

“Oh, you saw those?” He interrupts nervously.

“Yeah I fucking saw them! When did you see them?”

“This morning on my way to work. They were hanging in a newstand right out front.”

“Awesome.”

“Yeah. Well on the brightside, I didn’t see many copies when I left to get you so you’ll be fine going in.”

“Except that means a lot of people bought copies.”

“Nobody really believes that stuff, Eren.” His voice comes out a notch higher than usual. Not even he is convinced by his words. “Nobody who matters anyway.”

“Whatever, Armin. People will believe what they want, just as long as they don’t actually know me. Which is why I’m freaking out about that paparazzi guy! Do you think he figured out who I am?”

“Maybe…” Amrin starts truthfully. I let out a frustrated groan and frantically run both hands through my hair. Fuck, I didn’t need to hear that. Even though it’s true, I just want to live in ignorance a little while longer. “But, that doesn’t necessarily mean they know where you live! Since the lease is technically in Hannes’s name, it would be harder to look up your address. Which may be why they were trying to follow you.”
“So, they might know my name, where I work, but not where I live?”

“Right.”

“Is that supposed to be comforting!?”

“Eren, maybe you should have thought of this before you started a fight with an international superstar.”

Damn you Mushroom brain! You could have just slapped me, it would have been just as effective and less painful. I bite the inside of my cheeks to keep from yelling. Because it’s Armin, and he does have a point. He doesn’t deserve to be bitched at just because I don’t like what he has to say. I return my attention to the buzzing city just beyond the glass. Oh, and there goes the Grandma. “Don’t get me wrong, I understand why you did. But you also didn’t consider the consequences. Honestly, you’re lucky neither he nor the studio has pressed charges!”

“I get it, Armin.” I grumble through a clenched jaw.

“Do you, Eren?” He asks almost desperately. I glance at him and see concern written all over his face. “Forget about nearly ruining any chance you had of getting into the industry, and think! You’re an adult now. An adult who would be tried and treated as such. You can’t afford to indulge your short fuse anymore, this isn’t high school. It’s the real world and there are real world consequences! First the incident with Marco, then the thing with Jean—which again I personally understand— and now this? Do you really comprehend just how lucky it is that you haven’t been prosecuted yet? Especially given your record as a minor, anyone of those could have sent you away. Anyone of them could have permanently stained your record!”

“I SAID I GET IT, ARMIN!”

“Good!” He snaps. I repeat snaps. Armin never snaps at anyone... He lets out a deep breath and closes his eyes for a moment before fixing them once more on the road. “Eren, please just take better care. I don’t want to see you throw everything away because of your temper. You deserve more from yourself.”

That effectively crushes my morale. Fuck, my throat closes and tears rim my eyes. So I turn away from Armin again and try to blink them back. I deserve more, huh? What have I ever done to deserve more?

It seems, just like with Mikasa, I can’t help but disappoint him. My best friend. Except, I know he really just disappointed because I don’t hold myself to a higher standard. Goddamnit can’t he see that’s because I don’t belong with that standard. I’m not as good as either he or Mikasa so why pretend like I am? Why hold myself to a level I’ll never achieve?

Armin is sitting rigidly. Waiting, no doubt for me to explode. Which makes me feel worse. So I do what I do best which is curl up and do absolutely nothing.

The remainder ride is spent listening to the radio, and somewhere between trost university and central downtown I drift off.

I come to two and a half hours later, curled in my seat like a cat in a sunbeam. The car is parked in a dark garage and is empty. Though, he was kind enough to crack all 4 Windows so I didn’t overheat. How sweet. Continuing in my imitation of my feline friends, I do my best to stretch in the cramped space. As I do I'm incredibly aware of the sweat soaking my clothes to my body. Ew. Note to self: don't fall asleep in cars when it's more that 80 degrees out.
To be fair, it’s not nearly as hot as it would be if we were parked above ground instead of the studio garage underneath. Even so, I extract myself from the vehicle with a grimace in search for air conditioning. Which comes in the form of an elevator leading to the upper floors of the building from which I, technically, am banned.

Armin is finishing his internship for Regime Studio’s PR department. He personally works directly under Dot Pixis. When he started almost two years ago, there were ten total interns is his program. Now there are two. He and Marco.

Thinking of whom, is currently waving enthusiastically at me from across the floor as I step out of the elevator. I wave back awkwardly and begin my search for Armin’s cubical.

Marco is probably the closest thing to an angel any person has ever been. He is honest and kind and generous and smart and funny and just truly a good guy. He’s also the reason Jean and I broke up. Well part of the reason anyway.

How can that be? Well, he and Jean are best friends. Or were, though I doubt that’s changed. Now, Jean would talking in his sleep. An annoying habit I was quite used to by then. Infact I found it adorable, but it quickly lost that effect when he started calling out Marco’s name. The first time I was taken aback, but I mean we can’t really control our dreams so I let it slide. By the ninth time within two weeks, however, I had reached my limit. Either Jean was simply fantasizing, or something was going on between them. The firehead in me jumped directly to the latter. So I marched into this very office, yelling horrible accusations and throwing my fists. Security kindly helped my ass meet the sidewalk, and Pixis told me not to come back.

Which reminds me that I should try to avoid him and security in case that threat hasn’t expired.

Of course, after that I found out that Marco was telling the truth. Nothing was going on between them. Sadly, that didn’t mean nothing was going on with someone else.

At the time, I lived with Jean. He was an up-and-comer in the music industry so he could afford the flat downtown. I covered what I could of rent and paid the utilities because, even though he told me I didn’t have to, I still felt like I needed to. Anyway, after I confronted Marco, I was far too upset to go into work. I ended up calling in so I could go home and think.

Home.

Where we lived together, shared our meals, watched tv, showered, slept, made love.

Where we grew as a couple.

Home, where we were safe from the world and the disappointment that comes with it.

Home, where I found Jean casually fucking some random guy in our bed.

I remember feeling so many thing instantaneously that overall I was numb. The stranger left, Jean cried his apologies, and I packed without saying a word.

Mikasa went back a few days later to get the rest of my things. I changed my number and cried myself to sleep for months.

Then, a little over 3 months later, I saw him. He was talking with someone while sitting in a restaurant's patio. I saw him from the bookshop across the street, and I couldn’t help the rage that boiled inside me. I walked over and stood behind him until he turned around. He looked so shocked, but still so fucking arrogant. "Eren?" He said when he stood, and without missing a beat I punched...
him square in the face. My whole body moved behind it, making it difficult not to follow the momentum to the ground. Though he did. He landed with a thud, knocking over the table stocked with dishes in the process. I smirked, turned on my heel, and walked away without even a glance back.

I finally find the cubical with the name plate Arlet. However, no Arlet is found. So I take residence of his chair and bide my time waiting for him by folding origami. When he finally comes back he has a full blown menagerie of paper animals. I even created a little fence for them with paper clips.

And this is why I could never work in an office.

“Hey! Glad to see you’re awake!” He exclaims while leaning against the small frame.

“Yeah, well it got hot.” I reply.

“So,” he begins with a guilt stricken gaze to the floor. “About what I said earlier…”

“Armin, forget about it. You were right.” I interrupt. “You shouldn’t apologize for being honest with me, and I needed to hear it.”

“I like rested you, have I ever told you that?”

“Ha! Well I had been up since 2…and if it’s an excuse for being a dick you’re willing to buy, then I’ll use it!”

“Yeah. A sleep deprived you is like a hangry Mikasa.” He says with a shudder. “Except louder and less deadly.”

For that he get a paper cow to the face. He takes his chair back so he can do work on the computer. I take the floor crisscross applesauce and continue making paper sculptures. Two lotus’s, a Yoda and a Darth Vader later, that totally weren’t just fighting each other in an epic battle to determine the balance of the universe, a familiar strawberry blonde pokes her head in.

“Armin?” Petra asks. Her eyes fall to me holding up Yoda and Darth and cutting off the lightsaber sound effects I was not making. “Oh, hey! Eren, right?”

“Uh…” I immediately drop the figures and wave with one hand while the other scratches the back of my head. “Yeah, hi, nice to see you again!”

“You too!”

“How can I help you, Miss Ral?” Armin asks cheerily.

“Oh, stop with the Miss Ral, Armin, it makes me feel old! Call me Petra.” She laughs. “Anyway, Pixis sent me to get you! We’re just finalizing the paperwork for my transfer!”

“Transfer?” I inquire.

“Yes! I’ll be taking over Pixis’s position in a few months, but first I need to officially transfer so he can train me.”

“That’s exciting! Do you mind if I ask where you’re transferring from?”

“It is! And not at all. I am currently working as a talent manager for the Scouting branch.”

“Wow, that sounds great!”
“It is. Really I’m going to miss it over there, it’s the best job I’ve ever had.” She explains with a heavy sigh.

“Then why are you transferring?” I ask before I can think better of it. The scarlet of her cheeks tell me I should have tried harder to hold back such a personal question.

“Let’s just say it’s a conflict of interest.” She blushes brighter and says through a coy smile. Hm, interesting, what kind of conflict I want to ask. In fact my mouth is open and the question is already about to roll off my tongue…

“Eren,” Armin stops me before I can begin. A plea laced in his tone. “I’ll be back. Don’t get into any trouble.”

“No promises. Good luck with everything Petra!”

“Thanks! And you, too, Eren. Especially with...well you know.” She replies with a sympathetic look. Ah, shit, I’m assuming she knows about my acceptance hearing thing.

Then she and Armin leave me alone to stew in renewed anxiety.

Fuck, the hearing. What the fuck am I going to do? I mean I totally get why they wouldn’t let me in. Still I want to be in so badly!

I need a distraction. One that can’t be found in even paper Yoda. I need to pee.

I find the bathrooms on the other side of the floor across from a big conference room walled in glass. As I go in, I recognize mushroom blond hair bobbing around a gleaming bald head. Petra’s standing next to a giant blond and someone else is standing in front of them. I do my deed, wash my hands, and step out. When I exit the bathroom, I walk directly into Marco. Between a hurried and uncomfortable exchange of apologies and niceties I fall silent after making eye contact with the fifth person in the conference room.

“Eren? Are you ok? Do you need to sit down? You look pale.” Marco asks with a reassuring hand on my shoulder. But his voice is almost immediately drown out by another voice ringing through the floor. A voice I have tried long and hard to forget.

“Can anyone tell me where Marco is?” It calls.

My eyes are still locked with Levi’s and my ears are tracking the voice’s footsteps heading straight toward us.

“Marco! There you ar-” Jean starts while rounding the corner. “Eren?”

Fuck. I can't do this. I can't fucking do this. Levi squints his eyes slightly and looks between Jean and I with interest. My own have gone wide, and I know I'm white as a sheet. My mouth is dry and I am desperately trying not to look at Jean, which pretty much keeps me eye locked with Levi which is not what I want to be either.

Marco ducks his head in concern to intercept my line of vision. The freckled saint is saying something...I can't make it out. It might be my name, but all I catch is 'ren' which sounds close enough to 'run' which sounds like the most brilliant idea in the universe. So I turn and I run. I find the stairs at the end of the hall and I bolt through the door. Taking them two at a time, I go up. Why? Who the fuck knows why, it was just the first place my feet carried me. I make it up about three flights before I hear the echoing of a slamming door and the stammering of feet running up behind me. I pick up my pace and before I know it, I'm on the roof.
"FUCK!" I yell at the top of my lungs. I'm too high up for anyone to hear me, and even if they did, who the fuck cares?

I begin pacing, trying to catch up with my racing thoughts.


A muffled click sounds somewhere in the middle of all that.

"Fuckfuckfuckfuckfuckfuck, Goddamnit! Fuck!"

The crunch of gravel as someone approaches me.

"Hey, kid. Are you alright?" My pursuer asks.

"No! I'm not alr-" I start, turning on my heel to tell the fucker off. Except who I see cuts me off. Because the person I see, the one who followed me up ten flights of stairs is- "Levi?"
Absolutely Not Hiding

Chapter Summary

Eren, in the midst of ex drama, finds himself taking comfort in the presence of someone unexpected.

Chapter Notes

Hello my dears!
Thank you all so so so so so so so so so much for all the kudos and comments! I love you all! Truly it is you who keep me going. So keep on giving me feedback and I'll keep on improving on what needs to be approved on.

Only the buzz of the city below hangs between us.
I pant trying still to catch my breath from both climbing ten flights of stairs and, you know, screaming my head off.
Levi doesn't seem affected at all. Which shouldn't really be surprising.
Fucking in shape bastard.
Considering the hammering of my heart, my breath returns to a relatively normal pace. He takes a small step toward me. I take a large step back. He rolls his eyes. I narrow mine.
"What do you want?" I ask in a voice much more strained than I wish it were.
"Why did you run?"
“None of your fucking business.”
“Okayy then.” He huffs in annoyance. “Who was that?”
My throat closes and my breath catches. Fuck, I don’t want to answer this. “Who’s who?”
“Really, kid?”
“What!? I don’t know who you’re talking about, okay? Goodbye now.”
“Fine, if you’re going to play like that.” He starts, cocking his hip to the side and crossing his arms. “Am I the reason you ran?”
“What?”
“So, yes?”
“No!” Shit I said that too fast! He’s going to thinks things. “I mean yes..” I groan because he’s being
an asshole who is asking way too many questions that I can’t answer without sounding like a complete idiot. “Maybe.”

“Maybe?”

“Yes!”

“Yes?” he asks cocking his head to one side.

“What?”

“I know you hate me and all, but c’mon, Jaeger, I didn’t think you were actually afraid of me.”

“What? No!” I, again, respond way too quickly. Prompting a twitch of an eyebrow from the older man. Shaking my head at my own stupidity, I try to correct myself. “I-I-I mean yeah, I do, but don’t give yourself too much credit.”

“So, it was Sir Frosted Tips you ran from?”

“Yes!” A hand clasps over my mouth before I say anymore. Shit. That sneaky motherfucker! I should have known. Should have seen what he was doing asking me all those questions. A triumphant expression lights up his face.

“Oh?” He mocks. “I thought you didn’t know who I was talking about.”

"Fine you got me, so kindly Fuck off.”

"Really?” He starts with a short, humorless laugh. “You expect me to leave you on the top of a skyscraper when you’ve already expressed you aren't ok?”

"It’s not like I’m going to jump, asshole.”

"Good. Then carry on with the yelling, or whatever the hell you were doing.” he says while shooing his hand at me."Don’t mind me."

“You aren’t going to ask me anymore questions?” I ask in doubt.

“Nope. Like you said, it’s none of my business.” He says while pulling out a pack of cigarettes. Cupping his hand around the death stick in his mouth, he lights it and takes a long drag. I look at him with disgust. Though I’m far from shocked; I remember too well his scent holding a hint of cigarette smoke. It’s a disgusting habit that he shouldn't look so good doing. "Don't Fucking look at me like that, kid, I'm aloud a vice.”

"Have fun killing yourself." I scoff.

"Does that mean you’d care if I did?” He asks with a raised eyebrow. A ghost of a smirk playing at his lips.

“*No,*” I begin exaggeratedly. “It means….” Shit, what does it mean? He raises his eyebrows as I lose access to any and all smartass retorts mind could possibly conjure. “Whatever, I hope you get lung cancer.”

A snort escapes him and he shakes his head. Wrapped around the cigarette clamped between his teeth is a tiny smile. It would be more noticeable if he didn’t have that thing in his mouth, but it’s still there. Mocking me with its presence on his usually cold face. He takes another drag, regaining his composure, and when he speaks next he does so whilst exhaling the smoke. “To be fair, I only do it..."
when I'm stressed."

"So you're stressed right now?" I mock. It’s my turn to ask questions, bitch.

He shrugs while flicking the accumulated ashes to the ground. His eyes follow them. "You stress me out, kid."

“Why?”

“I don’t know, you just do.” The older man answers in annoyance. Good.

“Is that why you followed me up here?”

“It might be.” He says with a shrug and another drag. I stress him out? Before I can help it, I let out a short laugh. “Something funny?”

“It’s nothing.”

It is something. Something that doesn’t make any sense. Because it should be the other way around.

Yet, right now it’s not. If anything my heart rate has normalized since we started talking. Though that may largely be due to trying to focus on the circles he was talking me in.

Don’t get me wrong, lately he’s been the exact cause of my hair falling out, but right now his presence is strangely comforting. Maybe it’s because he’s currently the lesser of two evils. Or three, I guess, if you include solitude. Better him than Jean or my conscious that’s for Goddamn sure.

I sigh and walk to the ledge of the building. As I swing my legs over, I hear Levi start behind me, but he stops when I sit.

Really? I know they call me a suicidal bastard, but c’mon. He makes a frustrated groan at my back and moments later he’s leaning on the ledge beside me, facing the opposite way.

We stay like that for what seems like an eternity. Me with my elbows on my knees, my legs hanging off the edge, and my eyes fixed on the skyline. He, leaning on the roof side of the ledge to my left, one hand behind his back, the other alternating between bringing his cigarette to his lips and resting at his side. Every so often I feel his eyes on me. Feel like he’s studying me, but I keep my own on the horizon.

Whatever comfortable silence we had formed is broken in a soft hiss from the extinguish of the bud on the cement ledge.

“You okay now, brat?” He asks, and from my peripheral vision I can see his face turned fully to mine.

Brat, again, huh?

I take a deep breath and close my eyes. When I open them I gaze down at the ant sized people hustling about 35 stories below. So busy, so completely detached. Then I scan the skyline, parts of which are silhouetted by the bright sun. It’s beautiful, in its own way. The staggering skyscrapers, the maze of streets, the HOLLYWOOD sign in the distance.

Am I okay?

In this moment, yeah.
Even if Levi’s at my side. It’s peaceful up here. It simply raises me above all my problems. Which, okay, is literally true, but it feels so metaphorically as well.

My shoulders rise and fall in answer to which he hums thoughtfully.

When I turn my head to look at him, I’m met with a blank expression. My eyes fall to the brownish, yellowish, purpleish bruise I put on his jaw, and I feel a peak of pride. But when my gaze flicks up, it gets washed away in the storm of his eyes. Because there’s a spark of concern somewhere in them. A lighthouse in the middle of a raging sea. Showing to me that at least a small part of him is being genuine when he asks if I’m alright. That somewhere in his icy and razor sharp facade is a softer side. A warmth I would never had guessed existed.

But it’s not enough to burn away his wrongs. Nor is it enough to dull the blow of his neglect.

Right now, in this moment—for reasons not even I can explain—I wish it were.

But before I get the chance to so much as question that train of thought, squeaking hinges from the heavy metal door breaks our eye contact.

“Er-” Armin starts, struggling for breath. “-en?” He immediately crumbles to catch his breath.

"Whoa," swinging my legs back over, I start toward him. Happy for any excuse to distance myself from Levi and whatever the hell I was just feeling. "You okay there, buddy?"

He throws me a thumbs up while doubled over. When he regains control he straightens and gives me a quizzical look. "What are you doing up here?"

"Wait, what are you doing up here?" I retort because I simply assumed I was the reason he was, but apparently that’s dead wrong.

"Erwin sent you after me, am I right?" Levi chimes.

"Yes, Mr. Smith sent me to get you so we can finish things up with Miss Ral." Armin answers.

"Figures he’d send someone else to do his dirty work." He sighs before pushing off the ledge and crossing to the door.

"Why would you need to be there for Petra’s transfer?" I inquire.

"I’m not sure on the details. Legalities aren’t my forte, but I know there’s a ton of shit paperwork I have to sign since she’s coming from my crew."

"Your crew?"

"Yeah, she’s my assistant. Or was until Erwin set his eyebrows on her."

Ohhhh, so that’s what she meant by conflict of interest. Because Erwin is the head of the Scouting Regime, or at least I think that’s what Hanji said. Which makes him her boss, which definitely complicates things. Scandalous.

The door opens with a protesting groan and Levi stops in the doorway. Holding it open, he looks over his shoulder to me. "You coming, kid?"

"Umm..." I start still frozen in place. He turns to lean on the door and challenges my hesitation by hardening his gaze. I don't know if I'm ready to see Jean again, but if I don't go now I risk humiliating myself even more by hiding out. I'm not going to give him the satisfaction.
Armin puts a reassuring hand on my arm, silently asking if I'm okay. I nod and know he can see through it, but he nods back anyway and starts toward the open door. I follow, very much aware of Levi’s eyes tracking me as I pass.

He's last, closing the door behind us. Armin and I fall in step side by side.

"Are you okay?" He asks in a hurried whisper once we’re a several flights down and a handful of steps in front.

"I'm fine." I'm not, but maybe if I say that I am out loud it will make it true. Maybe it’ll make it easier.

"I, ah-" Armin whispers hesitantly. “I saw Jean.

My steps falter, and I look over my shoulder to the man stalking behind us. I hope he didn't hear that. Sure he already knows Jean’s the reason I ran, but he doesn’t need to know why. Or who he was to me. Or his fucking name for that matter. Levi’s eyes lock with mine, but his face is just as impassive as ever.

Well, whatever. As long as I don’t make a big deal out of it nobody will know.

Armin matches my pace, eyes full of concern.

“It’s fine, Armin.” Whispers back. “I’m over it.” I’m so not over it. But again, why not test that saying it aloud theory?

“No you’re not.” He says as though he’s stating some stat from one of his textbooks. Fuck him for knowing me so well. “Just ignore him. He can’t bother you if you pretend he’s not there!”

Oh my sweet summer child, if only it were that easy. “Why do you think I was up there?”

“Hiding out isn’t the same thing.” He whispers empathetically.

“Well you’re the one that said I can’t afford to get into anymore fights!” I bite back. I wasn’t hiding, at least not on purpose, I just panicked.

“Yes, I did, and you shouldn’t, but that doesn’t mean you get to hide from people who make you angry. That’s not you, Eren.” Armin says calmly and quietly.

“What the hell am I supposed to do then, Armin? Just smile at him? Try to get along? Pretend that everything that happened didn’t happen!?" I say barely a notch below my normal inside voice.

“No, you know that’s not what I’m saying at all.” Armin starts in a frantic whisper and a quick glance behind us. Right, Levi. Thanks for reminding me why we were whispering to begin with. “I’m saying you should ignore his passes, his apologies, and his comments. I’m saying you should ignore anything he has to say so that he knows you’re over him. Even if you’re not.”

I stop completely. Armin keeps his pace seemingly unaware that I’m no longer at his side.

Even if you’re not?

No, Armin, that’s where you’re wrong. I am over him. I have to be. I may not be over what we had; what I thought we had; but him I am. His stupid pale green eyes and lopsided smile. His irritating voice laced with condescending words and backhand compliments. I’m over his arrogance and his blatant stupidity. Hell, we fought more than we fucked! Mind you, we fucked liked rabits in the
spring. I hate how every little thing was a competition with him. God forbid I ever did something I was proud of! He’d just scoff and make an offhand comment that he could do it better. That he was a better pianist, even though he’s never taken a lesson in his life! That he was a better singer, which is probably true seeing how he made a career of it. Still didn’t need to be a dick, though. A better actor—hates theatre. Better athlete—only ever beat me at swimming and golf. Better student—again he’s got me there, but he would go on and on about how he was supposed to be Valedictorian instead of Armin. Better friend—no way in hell seeing how the only people who put up with his ass are Riener; simply by extension to him, Bert; and for some truly dumbfounded reason, Marco!

No matter what, he had to be the best, and God knows why I let him think he was!

What I’m not over, however, are his warm arms wrapped around me as I slept. His butterfly kisses as I made breakfast. How, at first, he couldn’t keep his hands off me. Of course I miss the sex. The way he made me unravel. I miss the movie nights and the surprise lunches. I miss the moonlit walks on the beach and having someone waiting for me when I got home. I miss having someone to love me, and I was foolish enough to think he did as much as I loved him. I hate him so much for tearing to shreds everything we had, but at the same time I’m relieved it’s over. Because I can’t stand the person he’s become.

“Eren,” I follow the deep voice to find Levi behind me by two steps. I have to actually look up at for a change. It’s weird, is this what it’s like all the time for him? “You’re crying.”

“Huh?” I ask.

“Tch,” He starts leaning toward me. Before I can make my retreat his hand is curled against my cheek and his thumb sweeps the outer corner of my black eye. Unfortunately I feel tears smear my cheek to follow it. “See?” He says, pulling his hand back enough for me to, indeed, see.

Shit, well I guess my eyes have sprung a leak. It’s kinda sad that I couldn’t feel them myself. Do I really cry that often?

Apparently so.

I make haste to wipe them away with the back of my hand, wincing as I go over my bruise.

The very bruise the man two stairs above me so graciously gave me. The very man currently wiping his thumb on the front of my shirt.

"What was that for!" I ask backing down a step.

"Why would I wipe your disgusting bodily fluids on my own clothes?"

"Why did you touch my bodily fluids if they're so disgusting?"

“Tch.” Is all I get before he’s rolling his eyes and shouldering past me. Armin is looping the landing, apparently having realized I didn’t follow him, but gets a face full of Levi before jumping out of his way.

"What was that all about?" He asks after Levi’s echoing footsteps fade.

"The fuck if I know." I grumble as I join Armin on the landing.

“You know, he left the meeting kind of abruptly.” He says while we fall in step down the last few flights.
“What do you mean?”

“Pixis was in the middle of going over the paperwork when he just announced that he’d ‘be back’. I just assumed he meant to go to the restroom, but when he didn’t come back right away Mr. Smith asked me to go find him.”

“How did you know he’d be on the roof? Why not any of the other floors?” I mean that seems like a pretty big stretch.

“I didn’t.” He shrugs. “Mr. Smith said he saw him go straight to the stairwell. That he expected him to be up there and if he wasn’t I was to work my way down.”

“What made him think that?”

“My guess is that he just knows Levi really well.” Armin offers with another shrug. Then he looks down the stairs as we walk and furrows his brows. “What I don’t understand, though, is why Levi went all the way up there to begin with.” My throat goes dry causing me to gulp nervously. Because of me. He was up there because of me, and I don’t even know why. “Did he follow you?”

Quick as whip as always. He’s turned his face toward me as I assume his previous gaze to my steps. I take a deep breath before I answer. “Yeah.”

"Why?"

"Dude, Armin,” I begin quietly, stopping completely. “I have no idea."

"Hmm.” He hums thoughtfully. I look back up to see his brows furrowed in concentration just before they shoot up his head and his eyes widen in some sort of understand.

“What?"

“It’s probably nothing.” He answers a little too cheerfully. Damnit Armin, tell me your secrets! “We should keep going.”

“Yeah...” I say with a wary look to him. Don’t think you’re off the hook mushroom head, but I’ll let it go for now in favor of keeping my head when we go through that door.

Two more flights of stairs and a bucket of nervous sweating later we’re at the threshold. I think about continuing my downward trek straight to the garage, but Armin must have sensed that because he takes hold of the short sleeve of my shirt and pulls me through.

My throat initially closes, but as I look around the large hallway I relax. Jean is nowhere in sight. It seems, this time, that luck is on my side.

Levi has taken back residence in the meeting room, his raven hair barely visible over the top of one of the chairs.

"I should get back in there. Are you going to be okay, Eren?” Armin asks at my side. I nod. As long as I don’t see Jean I know I’ll be fine. I’ll just go back to the paper Jedis waiting in his cubicle. He offers a smile and a half wave before leaving me in his wake.

I sigh and run a hand through my hair before beginning the journey back. I honestly don’t know if I’m relieved. Mostly I just feel like a fucking fool for making such a big deal out of it all. Especially if he’s not even here anymore, why did I have to freak out like that?
As I turn the corner of the hall across from the conference room, I can't help but glance at Levi. He's hunched over a small pile of papers in the large table looking more bored than usual. Which is a feat I didn't think possible.

"Jean, don't!" I hear Marco call, shattering any hope of my luck holding out. My heart hammers in my ears and breath stops short.

"Hey, Charming!" The bastard calls. Fucking using that stupid fucking pet name. The one he dubbed me with back in high school. "I thought you were banned from this building!"

I can hear his steps barreling toward my back. Practically feel him fuming. My fist and jaw clench on their own accord. Fear, jealousy, pain all boil in the pit of my stomach, but nothing comes close to the anger.

"Yeah?" I start with a turn of my heel. "What about you?" He stops well within my personal bubble, his features positively painted in disdain. My eyes are venomous, mouth thinned, and I wouldn't be surprised if steam is rising from my face. "I didn't think they aloud pop trash in. Or are you strictly here as Marco's lap dog?"

"Watch it, Eren, I still owe you for the black eye!" He starts before zoning his eyes on my one. He cracks an approving smirk. "Though, it looks like someone already beat me to it." I growl. Yes, actually growl. Then the bastard lets the smirk grow into a smug smile. "Speaking of which, I hear congratulations are in order!" My nostrils flare and my eyes narrow more than I ever thought possible. He’s enjoying this too much, and I fucking hate him. If Armin wasn't right there; if he didn't just explicitly tell me not to get into anymore fights; he'd already be curled on the ground. "What did you have to sell to pull that off? She's got to be a pretty expensive beard."

"Fuck you, Horseface!" I snarl very clearly through my clenched jaw. It's taking everything in me not to headbutt him right in that equine shaped nose. His smug grin grows wider and he huffs in amusement.

"You really haven't changed, have you?" He taunts. His eyes trail up and down my body slowly. "Except for your hair." His tongue darts quickly at the corner of his mouth. Fuck, I know exactly what he’s doing. "I like it."

I snit, dropping my jaw in disbelief. Damn, I fell for it. I fucking played right into his favorite little game. The one in which he'd wind me up like his favorite toy and watch me go. The one that always ended in screams and tears.

And sex.

Well not today, pal. Not fucking today.

We’re not fucking today. Or ever. Probably. No, not probably. Never. Again.

"You can like whatever you want. I didn’t do it for you, asshat." I snide. Suddenly, however, I feel obliged to remind him why I didn’t do it for him. Why I won’t do anything for him. "I’m curious, since you brought it up and all, was it my hair that made you want to fuck someone else? Or was that entirely different."

Okay, admittedly not my best work, but it’s enough to wipe that smile off his face. Enough to cloud his stupid eyes with guilt.

"Damnit, Eren!" He groans, running a hand through his hair in frustration. "Can’t I even compliment you without you ripping my head off!?"
“I can hardly look at you without ripping your head off, Kirstein.”

“Kirstein?” He repeats dangerously offended that I’d call him something so impersonal, and I can’t help but smirk. Because golly gee, jeepers wiz seems I may have struck a nerve. “Really, Jaeger?” Shit, he’s about to strike one right back, and my face falls instantly. Don’t fucking do it, asshole. “Or is it Thorn? That’s always been so confusing for me.”

Oh, I forgot just how well this motherfucker pushes my buttons. How he knows which ones to aim for and how hard to jab.

He knows, oh he fucking knows how I get about my surname. About my family.

My mom always told me not to start a game I wasn’t prepared to lose.

And I never should have started the name game.

Because, he fucking knows how to play.

And how to win every time.

Knows how defensive I get over it.

Fuck him. Fuck him so much.

I don’t know how my hand gets wrapped up in the front of his button up shirt. I don’t remember pulling him within inches of my face. Hardly notice his hand mimicking mine in my own tee. All I’m focused on is shutting that obnoxious mouth of his. Of reminding him that he can’t fuck with me. Not anymore. My right arm is extend behind me, ready to swing. My left foot is slightly in front of my right, my weight evenly distributed. Just how Annie taught me.

I’m ready for a fight.

I’m ready for blood.

And if the rigidness of his stance is anything to go by, so is he.

“JEAN!”

“EREN!”

Marco and Armin sound at the same time, I flint my gaze long enough to see them shoving their way through the small crowd that has gathered. Their cries can’t stop this, though. They both saw this coming a mile away, yet here we are. Jean swings first, but he only gets a .002 head start before I’m doing the same. I brace for impact on my face and knuckles, but neither happen. Instead I feel a forceful tug on the back of my shirt, and, like a lot of my fights, I end up with my ass on the floor. Marco is between Jean and I, hands on both his shoulders trying to talk some sense into him. Good luck with that.

That view gets cut as a particular raven haired midget bends his face over me. He’s standing at my head so it’s upside down.

“Two fights in less than three days?” He starts while shaking his head and clicks his tongue twice. “You’re really something, kid.”

He offers me a hand, and, though I make sure to glare up at him, I twist my body around to accept it. After he pulls me to my feet I’m immediately ambushed by Armin.
“Eren, are you stupid!?” He rushes. I open my mouth but am immediately cut off as he pinches the bridge of his nose. “Don’t answer that. Just leave before Pixis comes over!”

I turn my head in the direction of the conference room and, to my dismay, the gleaming scalp is already nearing the front of the crowd. So I take Armin’s advise and book it back to the stairwell.

As the door slams behind me, I realize I never should have left the safety of this haven. I should have either stayed up on the roof or listened to myself and continued down to the garage.

In fact, I should have just stayed in the car and gone back to sleep.

But I didn’t. Because I’m a fucking idiot.

I'm already on thin ice with the studio! What the Fuck was I thinking? Why did I let him wind me up like that? How come he still has that effect on me?

All important questions I can't answer as I jog down to the car. The windows are still cracked, which is a horrible idea in downtown L.A., but it serves my purpose as I slide my arm through and undo the lock.

It's Fucking hot. I feel like I'm head first in a down sleeping bag, but at least it forces me to control my breathing.

Jean.

That Fucking bastard. Fuck him for talking to me. Fuck him for mocking me. For getting under my skin.

Thank God Levi pulled me back when he did, otherwise I'd have a darker black eye. Plus it may be enough to save me at my acceptance hearing.

Doubtful.

Whatever, conscious, shut the fuck up.

"Here." Armin says, throwing me a baseball cap when he opens the door less than a half an hour later. I hold it up to examine the scouting studios emblem on the black fabric. One white abstract wing layered over a dark blue one. In the openings of their films they are animated as crossing over one another as real wings before a few feathers fall and they turn into the stoic emblem like this one. When I twist it around, silver embroidery spells REGIME STUDIOS across the back centered over the adjustable strap hole thing. My guess is that it's from the gift shop on the ground level. But why?

"Levi told me to give that to you. He said between he and Jean there's bound to be a swarm of paparazzi outside."

Well that answers that. Also seems as though he figured out who Jean was. Damn it.

I put it on with the visor a little lower than strictly necessary over my forehead. Better safe than sorry. Armin pulls out of his spot without another word. Obviously he's still miffed about Jean and my argument. Which is a fair way to label it seeing how no fists were thrown. Well, no fists made contact. Besides, we've said worse to each other. A lot worse. Really I'm surprised; we must have both been in too much of an emotional shock to take it to that level before trying knock each other out.

Levi's prediction proves true, there are fifteen or more cameras fixed on all entries. A few fluster about as we roll out of the garage, but deem us unworthy of their film and slump back down. Thank
goodness.

The ride home is spent in silence with every look Armin casts me lined in disappointment. Which
does nothing to lighten the mood. By the time we pull into the driveway, I am more than ready to
escape this rolling contraption of judgement.

What's worse is I know he's right. He's absolutely right to be disappointed in me.

Hell, I'm disappointed in me!

And if Mikasa was here she'd be disappointed in me.

Though, she wouldn't so much be against me fighting Jean if it weren't caused by my inability to
control my temper.

I throw open the door and kick off my shoes before flopping into the cool couch. The click of the
front door is all that signals that Armin has followed inside.

"I'm going to catch up on some work. I'll be in my room if you need me." He announces densely.

I nod into the couch cushion, completely aware that he's already left the room. I turn over with a
groan and throw an arm over my eyes.

Damn it! Fucking damn it!

I'm sorry! I didn't fucking mean for any if this to happen. I shouldn't have called Armin at all.
Should've just sucked it up and gone home. I could have cut through the park and down the alley to
the back without being followed. I had options and I chose to drag Armin into my troubles because
I'm selfish.

Which is why Mikasa is still gone. Why I'm not already starting in the program. Why I'm hiding from
the paparazzi. Because I'm selfish bastard who can't control his temper.

I roll off the couch to answer to the hot shower calling my name before wallowing in my room for
the remainder of the evening.

The next few days pass without too much excitement. I've been careful to wear baggy clothes and
hats on my route to and from work. Though it's probably unnecessary since I've switched Reiner for
the graveyard shift.

Mikasa has yet to come home, but I did notice a folded pile of clean laundry on my bed yesterday
afternoon. My made bed in my clean room, neither of which will I take credit for. So she was home,
cleaned my room and did my laundry. Funny she can do all that but still can't find time to at least let
me know what the fuck is going on with her. It's these thoughts that are making it nearly impossible
for me to stay the fuck asleep this early afternoon/my evening. Which is what I'm supposed to be
doing so I'm not a walking zombie tonight at work. I guess that's why people invented coffee. By
this point I'm pretty sure my blood it at least 80% that. Maybe that's why I can't seem to stop tossing
and turning.

DUN NA generals gather in their masses Ugh. who the fuck would call me right now? DUN NA
just like witches at black masses I groan and roll over to reach my phone on the nightstand. DUN
NA evil minds that plo-

"Hullo?" I answer through a superficial yawn with the swype of my thumb.
"EREN!" The person, who I'm guessing is Hanji, screams into the phone. I jerk it away from my ear before it starts bleeding, and decide to keep it at a safe distance while they—because Reiner had a point about the non binary thing—speaks. "IT'S ME, HANJI!" Called it.

"Oh hey! What's shakin' bacon?"

"HAHAHA! OH EREN YOU CRACK ME UP!" Seriously? It seems everything I say is funny to this person. "WHAT'S SHAKiN IS THIS, WOLF EYES; IT SEEMS THE BEST TIME FOR EVERYONE TO MEET FOR YOUR APPEAL IS TOMORROW NIGHT AT 6. DOES THAT SOUND LIKE SOMETHING THAT WOULD WORK FOR YOU? SORRY FOR THE SHORT NOTICE BUT IT'LL BE OVER A MONTH BEFORE ALL OUR SCHEDULES LINE UP LIKE THIS AGAIN."

What am doing tomorrow night at 6? Well, I will be sleeping most of the day, but I have that night off. It’s Friday so I could have plans, but who am I kidding? Anyone I'd be going out with isn't talking to me or has to work. What an eventful life I lead.

"Ah, sure. Sounds good to me." I pull the phone even further from my ear as she lets out a blood curdling squeal. "Do I, like, need to bring anything?"

"JUST THAT BEAUTIFUL FACE!" I groan inwardly at the compliment. "WELL, I'LL SEE YOU TOMORROW AT 6 AT THE MAIN STUDIO!" Oh great the one I’m most definitely banned from. “HAVE A GREAT REST OF YOUR DAY!”

“You too, Hanji.” With a click so ends the most exciting thing to happen today.

I am sure to send a quick text to Armin, who luckily is still speaking to me, about the update. He’s at work so I wouldn’t be surprised if it’s a few hours before he responds. More time for me to sleep.

Or at least attempt to sleep. Which after about an hour more of flopping around in my bed I give up in pursuit of beating The fucking Warrior in Borderlands 2. Which I can’t. Fucking. Do! I’m down three cokes and a bag of popcorn, my palms are sweaty and my glasses keep falling down my nose. When Armin finally walks in I’m screaming at my avatar for dying again when I clearly pressed O several times and he never fucking jumped. Stupid Goddamn game.

“Still can’t get it?” He asks while peeling off his shoes.

“It’s fucking rigged man, it’s gotta be.” I respond tossing the controller to the table. He chuckles a bit before crossing the room to curl up in the chair. I turn in my seat to face him. “So, how was your day?”

“Good, I guess. It was Miss Ral’s first official day so that was something.”

“Cool. Cool. How did that go?”

“Meh, fine I guess. I pretty much stuck to my own work, though.”

“Oh.”

“Anyways, I got your message! So tomorrow night?”

“Yeah, I guess.” I shrug.

“Well, do you want a ride?” He offers, leaning onto the cushiony armrest closest to me.
“I mean, if you don’t mind.” I answer sheepishly. I hate having to have him take me everywhere. Walking would be ok with me, but since he’s offering...

“Eren, why would I mind?”

“I don’t know, Porcini.”

“Did you seriously just call me a gourmet mushroom?” I grin widely. Hey, sometimes I can be creative. He rolls his eyes and throws the pillow behind his back at my face. I deflect it easily enough and we both dissolve in a fit of laughter. A handful of hours later he wishes me a good shift and I bid him goodnight.

A grueling 8 hours filled with anxiety over the hearing appeal thing later, I stumble to my bed. My body apparently deciding that now it can sleep the moment my head meets the pillow. I fall into a string of nightmares raging between showing up naked to Levi beating the shit out of me in front of the entire crowd while I’m tied helplessly to the ground. All good things to quell my nerves about tomorrow.

With the lights out it’s less dangerous, Are you fucking serious!? Is fucking call Eren just as he’s trying to sleep day!? Here we are now entertain us. I feel stupid and contagious. Wait a minute, here we are now entertain us. A mulatto, an albino, a mosquit-

“Mikasa?” I answer hurriedly.

“Eren.” She answers quietly.

“Where the hell have you been!? I’ve been worried sick!”

“I told you not to, I’ve been staying with Ymir and Annie.”

“Why haven’t you answered any of my calls or texts?” I ask frantically swinging my legs off one side of my bed so that I may sit up. She sighs into my ear, I imagine she’s clutching the scarf I gave her years ago. She usually does when she’s stressed.

“I wanted to think.”

“Are you mad at me?”

“I’m upset you didn’t tell me, yes.”

“What are you talking about? I did tell you!”

“Only after I coaxed it out of you. Don’t tell me honestly would have told me if I didn’t come in to check on you.”

“I-” Hesitation. Definately not a good way to deny something.

“Exactly.”

“Okay, but that’s only because I knew you’d freak out like this.”

“I’m not freaking out, Eren.” She says with irritation. I roll my eyes. Sure you’re not, and ‘de-nil’ is just a river in Egypt.

“Whatever. I don’t want to fight. Just come home.”
“Armin told me about your appeal.” Way to change the subject.

“Of course he did.” I say shaking my head in my hand. Why am I not surprised?

“I’m going with you.”

“What?!” I yell into the phone. Is she joking? “Please tell me you’re joking!”

“Why would I be joking?” She deadpans.

“Because that sounds like an awful idea!”

“Why?”

“Um, I don’t know, maybe because Levi will be there!”

“So?”

So? What the fuck? So, maybe it’s not a good idea for you to see him. Maybe you should save yourself the heartache. Fuck, maybe because you’ve spent the last 12 years trying to forget about him! “Mikasa, I don’t think it’s a good idea.”

“I can take care of myself.”

“And you think I can’t?!” Seeing how it’s the only explanation that she would go, it’s a legitimate question. Because of me. Always because of me. Because she is afraid I’ll get myself into trouble or that I’ll get hurt. Well you know what, Mikasa? I can handle my fucking self thank you very much.

“Do you think you can?”

“DAMNIT MIKASA! I’M NOT A CHILD!”

“You sure are acting like one right now.” Silence settles over the line as I take deep breaths to calm down. To prove her wrong.

“Fine, but if you come you can’t get mad at me later when it goes horribly.”

“I can accept those terms.”

“Okay. Are you coming home tonight?”

“I’m meeting you guys at the studio tonight.” Oh yeah, it's barely 10 AM for normal people. Which is definitely not tonight, meaning the appeal is tonight not tomorrow. Damn graveyard really messes with my mind. "I have files to go through all day, so it’ll be best if I just stay here.”


“Yeah. See you later. Goodnight, Eren.”

I smile because she still said goodnight. Because she doesn’t have to be around me to know my schedule. “Good morning, Mikasa.” I chuckle.

“Go back to sleep, Eren.” She chastises half heartedly. I can hear the smile on her face.

“Love you too, sis!” I reply through a grin of my own.

The call ends, and I feel better. I’m still smiling as I curl back between my sheets. Because I missed
her a lot more than I thought I did, and, even though I still think it’s a bad idea, the thought of her being there tonight is extremely comforting. After all, it’s always been us against the world.
The moment has come to determine Eren’s future.

I really need to work on my chapter summary skills. Because they are none existent. Anyway, I can't believe this, I have a chapter up ON TIME and it has 2000+ more words than usual! Woot woot! So finally we reach the precipice of Eren's future in the Scouting Program. The appeal. Which, yes, is loosely based off of the trial in canon. I tried my best to make it as realistic as possible while still pushing the plot in the direction I have planned, and very much hope I succeeded in that. Please let me know if I didn’t!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Looks like I’m stuck with you, kid.” Levi says glancing down at me. The shackles pinning me to the floor of the courthouse are removed and I am able to stand. Rubbing the raw skin of my wrists, it’s my turn to look down at him.

“Looks like it.” I remark with a smirk. He rolls his eyes and walks away, I follow hastily. Where is he going? Is he going to leave me behind? “Levi, wait!” I call as he races down the steps of the courthouse. He stops on the last stair and looks over his shoulder to me. I cross the gap, padding my way down the stone steps until I’m one above him. People pass us in a blur while we just stare at each other. I don’t really even know what I’m doing. Only that I don’t want him to leave, and I have no idea where to begin. Like, do I start with ‘Hey where are you going?’, yeah, that sounds casual enough.

“Please don’t leave me behind.” I whisper, adjusting my face to my feet. So much for casual. A hand lifts my chin to fit my gaze with his, then he smiles. A true wide all teeth smile with no cigarette to obstruct it. It takes me aback. No, it blows me away to the point where I can’t feel his fingers interlock with mine until he’s pulling me with him away from the faceless crowd. Time seems infinite, words are exchanged, though the moment they’re uttered they’re forgotten. We end up on a bridge in some park, who knows where. The sun is unusually bright. Leaves are falling around us, a tiny bite of cold air goes through my teal jacket. I don’t remember getting this. I look back to Levi who is at my side as we stroll to see him bundled in a black peacoat. The chill is there, but his hand; fuck, his presence is so warm, so right. Yet there’s a voice in the back of my head questioning all of it.

Aren’t you supposed to hate him?

‘Why would I?’ I silently ask the voice. Levi stops in the middle of the bridge and turns to me. ‘He’s so wonderful.’

What would Mikasa say?
He cups my face in his hands. ‘Who’s that?’ I reply before he silences both voices with his sweet, warm lips on mine.

“Eren.” He says with a husky voice inches from my mouth. My eyes are still closed and I smile. Loving the sound of my name as it rolls off his tongue. “Eren.” I look at him, stormy eyes filled with warmth, silky hair between my fingers. He leans up and pulls me back down for another short kiss. “Wake up.”

“What?” I ask pulling back to look at him once more. He curls his knuckles to my cheek and strokes my cheekbones with his thumb. Just like he did in the stairwell. Wait a second, in the stairwell? At the Main Studio, where I saw Jean. Shit, this isn’t real? No, it can’t be. Because I do hate him. I know that.

So why am I slamming our mouths back together?

Because I don’t want this dream to end. Even though I already feel it fading. Feel the edges blurring. I don’t want to lose him, because, damn, this feels so nice. To be like this again. To hold someone’s hand again, to kiss, to smile, to feel fucking wanted. This is comfortable, this is everything I didn’t know I wanted back. And the moment I wake up, it’s gone. Then I’ll be stuck in reality where this could never ever happen in a million years. Because I hate him. Because in real life he’s a fucking prick. In real life he hurt my sister and that’s unforgivable. This dream man only shares his physical attributes; and what nice attributes they are; though that means that this man isn’t him in any other way. Because I don’t think Levi could ever be this warm. Could ever feel this right.

“Eren” He says again, voice muted, touch dulled. “We have to leave soon if you don’t want to be late.”

“Lev-” I begin but cut myself off as my room swims into focus. The back of Armin’s head visible for only a moment as he turns back down the hall.

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. NO! HELL FUCKING NO!

That did not just happen! I did not just dream about kissing Levi in a super romantic park. What the actual fuck subconscious!? Why would you conjure something like that up!?

A fucking wet dream I could handle. Because it’s just sex and I’m a healthy young man who can’t help who wanders into my dream bed. Hell, even Annie’s found her way there. Doesn’t mean I feel sexually attracted to her, like at fucking all, when I wake up. So I’m sure I could handle a sex dream with Levi. I’d wake up without even questioning my feelings toward him. But that was far too...fluffy. Too fucking intimate.

Don’t get me wrong, I still hate him, but I can’t help but wonder, why him? Why not Jean or that really cute guy who comes into 711 on Tuesdays? Jean would make sense, because we had that. Maybe not exactly that, but those same feelings and interactions. Brandon, the cute guy, would also make sense because I’ve been pining over him for the last like month. Hell, anyone fucking else would make more sense! So why Levi? Any dream I’ve had with him has ended with one of us beating the shit out of the other. In fact that’s even how this last one started. Obviously it took an unexpected turn.

What the fuck is wrong with me?

A fucking lot, actually.
I groan and throw my blanket off before acquainting my feet with the cool wood floor. I welcome
the change in temperature as I’ve had enough warmth for one day. Night. Whatever the hell time it
is. When I open the door and start down the hall, I’m greeted with the sight of Armin standing
outside the bathroom. Towel in one hand, toothbrush in the other, and a smile that says ‘I don’t mean
to be rude, but do something about yourself.’ I snort, take both with a thanks, and close the door
behind me. After brushing my teeth, I step into the steaming shower. My God, this feels nice.
Nothing like a hot shower to purge one’s head of certain raven haired masochists.

Shit.

Again I must ask: what in the actual fuck is wrong with me? Why can’t I stop thinking about that
dream? Or about how concerned he looked on the rooftop? Or him helping me to my feet? Or him
driving me home in the rain even though I had just punched him? Or the out of the fucking blue kiss
he gave me the first time we officially met? Because that alone still keeps me up at night. It’s
infuriating that all I can answer to any of these questions is: I have no fucking clue! Because I sure as
hell don’t like him. How could I? He’s five foot nothing of pure unadulterated dickishness.

And hard muscle, but mostly the dickishness thing.

I finish my shower with a wrapped towel around my waist and step into the hall in search of a
distraction. Which thankfully comes in the form of Armin ransacking my room.

“What are you doing?” I ask from the doorway.

“Don’t you have anything nice to wear?” He answers-sort of-without so much as a pause in his
pursuit.

“Hey! I have plenty of nice things to wear.” I retort defensively.

“Nothing quite ‘courtroom appropriate’.”

I gulp. Levi’s boots connecting with my face as I’m chained down flash before my eyes. As does the
smile he had when they released me. “C-courthouse?”

“Well, no, but it’s still an appeal so you should dress like it’s a proper hearing.” He reasons. I shrug
and join in the hunt desperately hoping I can talk him down to a more business casual look.

“Armin, this isn’t going to work.” I say grimacing at myself in the mirror precisely 23 minutes later.
It's a little under an hour until my appeal and Armin insisted on me wearing a button down regardless
of the fact we never found one in any of my piles of clothes. Not even in my closet, which I was
surprised by. Still, it’s Armin and he's nothing if not a persistent bastard. Just as I was nearing my
victory in the battle of appropriate attire, he returned to my room waving one of his own shirts in my
face. Thus why I’m standing in a too tight green button down with too short of sleeves and that
barely reaches the waistband of the one pair of slacks I have. Thank God we found at least that
much.

“Roll up the sleeves and keep it tucked in so it doesn’t look so small.” He suggests. I do, and I'll
admit it looks better. However, it doesn't change the fact that the buttons look as though they are
going to pop off in I make any sudden movements. I suppose that can't helped if I want to look less
like scrappy kid and more like an actual adult, and if I pair this with my black Rockports I may
manage to pull that off. I sigh and begin trying to tame my now dry and incredibly untidy mane.
“Eren, don’t even try. Just run your fingers through it a few times, you'll look fine.”

“So,” I start, suddenly reminded of his betrayal earlier that day. Or yesterday I guess technically.
“Thanks for telling Mikasa by the way.” I sass whilst I continue fiddling with my hair.

"Er-well she deserved to know, right?"

"No."

"Yes she did, and the world isn't going to fall out of orbit if they're in the same room together."

"You don't know that, Armin.” I start, feeling guilty for the dream I couldn’t control and the look on Mikasa’s face if I ever told her about it. “It could change the outcome of our destiny."

"If it's destiny, then there's nothing you can do to change it.” Okay, smarty pants. "Besides, maybe it's destiny for them to see each other; you know, lay the past to rest. It could be good for her."

To that I roll my eyes and escort myself to the kitchen for breakfast. Well my breakfast anyway. Between my dream analysis and clothes hunting, I haven't had a chance to eat yet. Though, I hardly finish slathering cream cheese on my blueberry bagel before I'm being hurried out the door. Ugh, I don't know why we're leaving so damn early. Well I do, it's downtown and traffic always sucks, but still, let a man at least take a bite before pushing him out the door!

The sun is no more than halfway through it’s decent on the horizon; reminding its onlookers that autumn is just around the corner. Even though those transitional months are merely an extended summer for us. In fact its our hottest time of year.

I'd like to think I'd like autumn. Trees ablaze with reds yellows and oranges, cool air nipping just enough for a light jacket, piles of dead leaves waiting to be jumped in, warm kisses on storybook bridges-wait no. Not that last part. Everything but that last part. I do believe I'd like autumn a lot so long as I steer clear of perfect parks. Maybe someday I'll be able to get out and see things like that. With someone who’s not my sister’s older brother.

God, how fucked does that sentence sound?

I mean, imagine someone hearing that out of context. They’d be completely confused and freaked out. I’m completely confused and freaked out, didn’t we already agree that I’d stop thinking about that stupid fucking dream? And that stupid fucking asshat? Yes. Yes we did. Now stop bringing it up, me.

As we pull into the garage there is no need to hunt for parking since most of the building is stuck in rush hour on their way home. Despite the incredibly wide variety of spots, Armin of course parks right next to a certain black Mercedes. Does he do these things on purpose? Does he know whose car that is?

Maybe it's fate.

Or maybe it's Maybeline, but whatever it is I sure as hell don't appreciate it.

As soon as he turns off the ignition he twists in his seat to give me his full attention.

“Are you ready?” Shit, I have an appeal to worry about. Why the fuck have I been thinking about Levi this whole time when I should have been thinking about this? I’m such a fucking idiot.

“No.” I sigh.

“It’s going to be fine, okay?”
“Okay.” I start with assurance before cracking a grin and adding “Fine.” I say with a giggle. Lame grammar jokes, man they’ll get me everytime. I finish giggling with a clear of my throat under Armin’s ‘are you fucking seriously right now’ face. “I’m good. Yeah, nevermind. Ignore me.”

“Never.” He says through a smile. Aw man, I fucking love you mushroom head! “Anyway, it’s good to see you making jokes at a time like this. Lame though they absolutely are.”

I swallow thickly as climb out of the car. What can I say, it’s all I can do without completely crumbling. "Yeah, I guess."

"It's going to go well." He starts we cross the garage to elevator. "I'm sure once everything is said and done Mr. Zackly will make the best decision."

"Wait a second," I start once the elevator doors close. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"That Zackly will do whatever he thinks is right for the studio."

"So what if he decides I'm not good for the studio?" I start on the defensive. "Would that make it the best decision?"

"If that's what he decides then yes, however that doesn't make it the most desirable outcome."

"Not the most desirable?"

"You know what I mean, Eren. Stop projecting your nerves onto me."

The ding signaling the arrival of our accent sounds just as my throat closes. Damn, I didn't even realize I was doing that. Not really. I really need to stop taking my own shit out on everyone else. I’m a horrible person. We step out into the waiting room outside a huge pair of slate wooden doors with a small line of chairs against one wall and a small grey desk against the other. As we take a seat, I turn my face toward Armin and give him all I can offer. "Sorry."

His features soften and he gives me a reassuring smile. I return the favor and slouch comfortably in my chair.

"Make sure you don't do that while you're in there." He says while giving me a disapproving once over.

"Huh?"

"You'll need to sit up straight." Oh no. "And speak clearly." Mom mode has been activated. "Don't forget your manners, and it's probably best for you to not talk directly to Levi,” Don’t worry I don’t plan on acknowledging him at all. “or Mr. Smith, or Mr. Dok, definitely not to Zackly himself.” He stops and looks at me thoughtfully. “Actually better not speak unless they ask you."

"Wow, Armin, thank you for that helpful and totally reassuring advice." I say with an eye roll.

"He has a point you know." Someone calls from near the elevator.

"Mikasa!" I stand and wait just long enough for her to push off of the wall she was leaning against before attacking her with a bone crushing hug. "I didn't know if you'd actually come."

"I said I would didn't I? Now let me go, you oaf, before I knee you in the balls."

Just like that she's transformed into a white hot wire, and I want to be as far away from her as possible. When I am back at Armin's side I notice the suit she's wearing. A red button down
underneath a dark grey blazer with a matching pencil skirt. Her hair is twisted up into a neat bun. No scarf in sight. Which saddens me a little. She just doesn't look right without it. However, she does look like one hella deadly lawyer.

"You look nice, Mikasa." Armin says.

"What's with the suit?" I ask abruptly.

"What's wrong with it?" She asks while looking down at herself. Armin clears his throat to grab my attention so that I might appreciate the accusatory look on his face. I sigh and rub the back of my neck.

"Nothings wrong with it, Mikasa. You just look...different." I slap my forehead when I see her frown a bit. “Good kind of different. Really nice! Very intimidating!'’

“Oh.” She replies flatly. Though her face lightens considerably and that air of confidence is renewed ten fold. I sigh with relief.

"Est ce vous, Mon loup?" A sing songy voice calls out.

"Huh?" I turn to see Hanji, of course, standing in between the two large doors of doom. Armin snickers in his hand and I whip my head back to him. "What?"

"Nothing, it's just a very nice nickname."

“What do you mean nickname?”

“Eren, please come in.” They say as they make their way to my side. “We’re all ready and waiting on you.” They finish with a guiding hand on my arm. I groan one last time, rolling my head on my shoulders to fix both Mikasa and Armin with pleading eyes. Armin offers a wave of consolidation while Mikasa simply starts following us. What the hell?

“Um,” Hanji asks as we stop right between the doors to look at Mikasa curiously. “Who might you be, dear?”

I can’t help turning my head to let myself scan the room. As I do, I see Levi, Erwin, and that sandy blond assistant talking amongst themselves, each cradling some kind of drink. Beside them is another dirty blond, though this one seems much taller and younger than the other, chatting away with Isabel. Fuck, I forgot about the fact she would be here too. How will Mikasa react when she learns who she? And just like that I'm angry all over again. Though the impending appeal is keeping it in check. Levi’s profile turns and he regards me with disinterest, but his eyes widen and mouth drops ever so slightly at the girl by my side.

“I’m Eren’s legal adviser.” She answers to Hanji.

“Attorney?” A weasly little man pipes up from in the room. His slimy eyes narrow in on me, and I see Hitch stir behind him. I can’t help but mentally shake Mikasa. Why would she say that? That’s going to make it seem like I’m being defensive. “Why would he need an attorney?”

“Sh-she’s kidding.” I interrupt with out stretched hands. “This is Mikasa,” I gulp, my eyes fitted back on Levi as he downs the contents of his glass. “My -er- sister?”

“Sister? Well, Mr. Thorn,” Shit, how does he know my real name? “Your sister will just have to wait outside.”
“I think not.” Mikasa interjects, stepping through the threshold to stand nose to nose with who I’m presuming is Dok. Hanji closes the doors behind her to better watch the scene playing out.

“Regardless of Mr. Thorn and I’s relation, he has been summoned here pending acceptance to the Scouting Regime’s program. From which he’s only being denied on the grounds that you, Mr. Dok” Nailed it! Wait, how the fuck does she know who he is? “Find his placement in said program to be inconvenient to your pupil, as he would be taking her spot.”

“W-w-what? No h-he’s here because he’s a liability to the studio! Whether or not my pupil has a place in the program is irrelevant, I just don’t want to soil the studio’s good name with a delinquent like him!”

“Delinquency is a relative viewpoint, wouldn’t you agree?” She asks daringly. Her eyes flick over to Levi and Dok follows her gaze. “Take Mr. Ackerman here.” Oh shit, Mikasa what are you doing!?

“Given his...history I’m surprised the studio even gave him one shot let alone make him its poster boy. Yet it did, and look at how it paid off. He has had a wildly successful career thus far, and by extension has made the studio hundreds of millions of dollars.”

“W-w-w-what are you talking abou-” Dok stammers.

“Young lady,” Erwin cuts him off while stepping toward her. Isabel fuming by his side. “Though I appreciate your argument, those were entirely different circumstances. So I’ll kindly ask you to refrain from mentioning them further.”

They stay silent as they size each other up. Mikasa looks from him to Levi-who looks too damn calm for what is happening-before bowing her head the tiniest bit in defeat.

“In any case,” She begins again. “My brother was summoned here over no more than a question in his character. Which is quite unfair given that this room is full of people that, at best, are no more than acquaintances. Thus, second to providing any legal advice as needed, I am here to act as a witness.”

“Isn’t that a conflict of interests? You can’t be a character witness to your own brother.” Well it seems as though Dok found his annoying voice again.

“I never said I was a character witness, merely that I will act as a witness to this appeal should the need for legal action be required.” She responds dangerously. Her voice is full of authority, eyes brimmed with contempt. Goddamn, she’s going to make one hell of a lawyer. “The character witness is in the hallway should he need to be called in,” Wait a second, she can’t mean- “His name is Armin Arlet.”

And she does mean. Okay, that’s good right? I mean it would have been fucking nice if I knew that she’d be going all Judge Judy on everyone’s ass so I didn’t look like such a fucking idiot. Levi still looks impressively impassive as ever, but I know I already saw him finish his drink. Yet there he stands with a half full glass, which he downs the contents of with another knock back of his head. Damn son, slow down.

_Hows that whole ‘no plans on acknowledging him’ this going?_

Shut up.

Erwin puts a hand on his shoulder and whispers something in his ear. They look awfully cozy with one another. Does Petra’s know they’re that cozy? I don’t like it. Wait, no, why do I even care!? What the fuck!? Why the hell am I thinking about this right now!?
“It’s a pleasure to have you join us, Ms. Thorn was it?” A lion of a man speaks from his vantage point behind a great oak desk in the middle of the room. She answers with a small nod, Levi quirks an eyebrow. “Our space is limited, but please make yourself comfortable.”

I gulp.

This has got to be Zackly. I mean, who else would sit behind the only desk in presumably his office? Exactly.

To be frank, I didn’t even see him. He is so stoic. Even when he spoke I hardly saw his mouth move. Damn intimidating is what he is.

Mikasa nods gratefully, but her breath catches when she looks over to Levi’s corner. She must have spotted Isabel.

Except, as I follow her line of vision, I find that’s not it at all. She’s locked her gaze with the tall dirty blonde. The one I don’t so much as recognize. The one who is staring back at her as if she’s the ghost of girlfriends past. Oh she better as hell not be a ghost of his past! Who the fuck is this bastard? How long would it take to cross the room and beat the shit out of him before someone stops me? Levi seems to have the same question as me because he joins me in looking between them skeptically.

"Son, please," Zackly recalls my attention with a gesture to the seat directly in front of him. This isn’t over, Strawhead. "Take seat." I don’t wanna, but I obey nonetheless. "Now, let me explain how this is going to work." He commands the attention of the entire room, everyone turned fully to him. It’s eerily divided in here. Hitch, Dok, and a few others I recognize as the security guards and secretary on one side; Hanji, Levi, Erwin, Mikasa, Isabel, sandy, and ogling bastard on the other. “Mr. Smith will present and defend his decision to accept you into the Scouting program, then Mr. Dok will present his rebuttal. Hopefully it will be as easy as that and no character witnesses will need to be called. I already have listened and read through the detailed accounts of what happened from every person here, so my decision pends solely on what happens in this room now. Sound good enough?”

“Yessir.” I choke out. Damn I’m shaking like a sweaty maraca. Thank God this chair is upholstered and heavy or it would be rattling on these wooden floors. Also, who has wood floors in an office? I guess the owner and CEO of Regime Studios.

“Great, now let’s begin. Mr. Smith.” Zackly gestures to the blond giant, who obliques and steps forward.

“Thank you, sir.” He begins. His hands are folded behind his back, his voice is determined, he has me feeling like this is really a court trial. “Eren Jaeger” Well at least someone is considerate enough to use the name I gave them. “Applied for the Scouting Program at our last open recruitment. I, in fact, was one of the judges who sat through his preliminary audition. As was Mr. Ackerman, Dr. Zoe, Petra Ral, and Dot Pixis. All of whom, myself included were blown away by his performance.” All of them? I glance behind him at Hanji and Levi. Hanji beams at me with pride, Levi doesn’t spare me even a flicker of his attention. Fine, asshole. “He advanced into the final round of auditions, I.E film acting, where he was paired with Ms. Dreyse.” Turn my face just in time to catch her huff and pout in the corner. “You’ve seen the final edit of this, and again I must express how impressed I am with Mr. Jaeger’s raw talent. He is a diamond in the rough, and with the right technique he’d shine like the brightest star. I feel that it is not only in the best interest of the studio, but that of Mr. Jaeger to help him reach his full potential. After all, is that not why the Scouting Program was created?”

Wow. I’m humbled, really. He was truly impressed with me? Why? I’m not nearly as good as I
could be. Though I am utterly flattered, and can feel heat rising to my face as I go over his words.

“Thank you Mr. Smith.” Zackly comments behind his folded hands. He moves his eyes to Dok who is standing arrogantly to my right. “Mr. Dok, the floor is yours.”

“Thank you, sir.” He starts, mimicking Erwin in stepping forward. “First of all, I want to know what you are hiding, Mr. Thorn.” He starts, leaning toward me. As if I’d find that intimidating. “Doesn’t anyone else find the use of the alias, Jaeger, a little suspicious?” Damn it, you sonofabitch. He straightens and gestures to the room. “I ask you, why would someone with nothing to hide go through the trouble of applying under a false name? Hmm?”

“Eren?” Zackly prompts me to answer Dok’s ridiculous and offensive question. Like it’s any of his damn business! I bite the inside of my cheek and take a deep breath to keep an air of calm.

“Jaeger is the name I was given at birth.” I start, desperately trying to reign in the bite of my tone. My answer seems to have taken Dok by surprise; his eyes widen and he backs off a bit. Clearly someone only did enough research to put me in a bad light. “Thorn is the name I took at adoption. I use Jaeger as one would use a pseudonym. If you want all the details on why, I’d be happy to give you my shrink’s number.”

I shouldn’t have said that. Damn, I shouldn’t have said that, but it felt so good. I really have a problem turning off my suicidal sass. I can practically hear Armin facepalming in the distance, and I look over just in time to see Mikasa shake her head and Levi pinch the bridge of his nose. What the fuck is he upset about?

“Well thanks for clearly that much up.” Dock starts, attempting once more to be intimidating. “But I’m not entirely convinced that’s your reason.” What the fuck man, are you fucking stupid or something? I just told you it was! “See, I think it’s because if there was a background check on Eren Thorn they’d have found quite an impressive rap sheet.”

Shit. I gulp. Fuck.

“Pardon my interruption,” Mikasa starts, her voice trembling with rage. “But any records held by the state of California regarding Eren Thorn or Jaeger, from anytime before the age of 18 have been sealed. I know because personally saw to it. Now, I’d like like to know how you got that information.”

“Hm, I find it interesting that you went through all that trouble to cover it up in the first place.” Dok replies smugly, leaning against Zackly’s desk with his arms folded over his chest.

“Because he was just a child!” She snaps, essentially shattering her calm and collected facade. Could we please end this conversation?? It’s definitely starting to feel more like a trial than a fucking acceptance appeal.

“Because he was a child, or because you both were?” No. Scratch that, it’s like we’re in Guantanamo fucking Bay on a tiny stool underneath a flickering lamp. You fucking bastard don’t do it. Mikasa is shocked into silence, and I’m sure she’s surfing the same brainwave I am. “Are you sure you didn’t go through all that trouble just to bury what you and your brother did all those years ago?”

Mikasa’s chest is heaving, her eyes are wide with shock. Fuck he’s going to trigger her if he hasn’t already.

“ENOUGH!” I yell. Anything to get him to stop talking. “That had absolutely nothing to do with her. I said it then and I’ll say it now, it was all me. I did it, she did nothing wrong! Just leave her out
of it!” I plead desperately trying to wipe that look of horror from her face. I’m fucking pissed, I want nothing more than to rip his face off with my bare hands! How did he find that out? Like she said, those records were sealed and shouldn’t be able to be held against me anymore! When did I get to my feet? When did Dok get so close? “Besides, how the hell is that relevant to this?” I start lowly. My words propelled by venom. “Like she said those records were sealed. Holy hell, that was over 10 years ago in an incredibly desperate circumstance that I don’t imagine a pompous ass like you could ever comprehend! It has absolutely nothing to do with my ability to act! I can see how my Juvie record—which again is sealed—could potentially shine a bad light on the studio, but like she said, just look at Levi!” And look he does, look we all do. Levi stares at me, and I think there’s a warning glimmering behind his stoic expression. But I pay it no mind, because I have a point to make! “You took a chance on him, and look how that turned out! He’s one of the biggest stars in Hollywood! That could be me in a few years, if you just took the same kind of chance!”

As it turns out it was a warning I saw in those steel grey eyes. One that manifests itself in the form of Levi barreling past Dok and pinning me back in my chair in the blink of an eye.

“Calm down, brat.” He whispers in my ear as I try to squirm out of his hold. “I think,” he starts, straightening his arms pinning my shoulders to my chair to look me dead in the eye. His voice is no louder than usual, but it holds nothing but authority. I stop my struggle immediately under the fix of his steel. “The brat needs a firm push in the right direction.” I take a moment to turn my head toward Mikasa. She’s being held back by that tall bastard and she is positively fuming. Everyone else looks too scared or too shocked to stop or say anything. Then my chin is forcefully jerked back front to face the raven-haired menace, and by the evil most depths of my mind, I see the ghost of a memory that flashes the last time he jerked my chin. My ears are ringing ‘Please don’t leave me’ as I try to shake away the flashes of my dream. Fuck, brain, why now!? “He’s talented,” His breath fans over my lips. Reminding me that it’s not the fucking time to be reminded of things that never happened! Well, that only happened once and didn’t really count as happening. “There’s no reason to deny that, and it would be a great loss to the studio to let him slip through its fingers.” With my chin still firmly in his grasp he straightens and turns to speak directly to Zackly. “Still he’s got a firehead that needs to be extinguished.”

“You mean when the brat took a swing at me? Why the fuck should I be worried now? He got what he needed to out of it, and in all honesty I don’t blame him at all. It’s a damn shame the paparazzi got a shot because if they hadn’t, none of us would be here discussing something that I feel is pointless to discuss. He’s talented, and bright enough to wear matching socks by the looks of it.” Even though my face is stuck in place, I flick my eyes to my shoes. Oh hey, look at that, they do match today!

“What more could the studio ask for? We’ve never made a big deal out of someone’s past before, why should we now?”

“Hmm.” Zackly sounds behind his folded hands. We all fall silent as his eyes scan the room, as he takes everything in that has been said since the doors closed. He seems unable to come to an immediate decision, that’s good, right? “I have reviewed everything, heard everything, and I’ll even admit I’m finding it hard to make a call I feel right with.” Ummm, what does that mean exactly? “Clearly he would be a huge asset based on his skill level at this point, however I cannot condone his acceptance in the usual manner given his past. By that I mean what he has shown not only today, but with Mr. Ackerman, Mr. Kirstein,” Damnit, I knew that would come back to haunt me! “And Mr. Bott. You have quite a history of starting fights on my property and I’m sure you can understand why I’d be hesitant to allow you to live on them.”

“Live on them?” I burst despite the hand steadying my jaw and squishing the lower parts of my
cheeks. What is he talking about? Nobody said anything about living anywhere.

“Yes, it is an imperative part of our program. In order to get a well-rounded education we require our students to live in campus housing. There simply is no other method, that’s just the way we do it.” Well, you learn something new everyday. “This is my greatest concern. I don’t trust you to keep your wits about you 24/7 and I will not be liable for your actions outside of the curriculum. Which is why I’m afraid I do not think I can allow you into the program.”

My stomach drops and my chest tightens. After all this shit I guess I didn’t think rejection would hurt so bad, but it does. Because this is all I wanted for myself! I literally have no backup except working at 711 forever. And I don’t fucking want that! Tears sting my eyes and I widen them in the hopes of pulling them back. **Damn it, Jaeger get it together!**

“Sir,” Erwin starts by looking back at Hanji, who eagerly nods their head, before continuing. “I may have a solution for that.” Say what now? The fingers indented in my chin fall away and Levi turns again to face him. I quickly try in vain to rub the aching from my jaw. Bastard. “If I assumed full responsibility for Mr. Jaeger- you do prefer Jaeger here, I take it?” I nod to that, but what? Take responsibility for me? Would he really do that? He knows nothing about me. How could he put so much faith in a bratty kid like me? “and he entered the program on a trial basis under a mentorship pending review a few months down the road, would this be something you could accept?”

Zackly regards him intently for a long minute. “Hm. I suppose I could accept those terms, but how would that solve the housing issue?”

“Couldn’t I just stay at home? I only live a few miles from the Scouting studio!” I offer enthusiastically. Because really, I hadn’t even considered the thought of having to leave home and I’d rather not.

“Nobody asked for you to speak, brat.” Levi drawls with his back still to me. I clamp my mouth shut. Nobody asked for you to exist.

“Who, might I ask, did you have in mind for a mentor?” Zackly asks Erwin after a long silence in which his eyes stayed trained on Levi and I. Hanji tries, and fails miserably to hold back a squeal.

“Who would you deem most suitable, sir?” Erwin asks back, and suddenly I don’t like that response. Don’t like the way Zackly is look at me and Levi. Not one bit.

“In all honesty, anyone other than Mr. Ackerman would have me reject any terms.”

Dammit! I fucking knew it! Levi looks me up and down over his shoulder.

“I would have to agree, sir.” Erwin replies with a smile. Hanji has their hand cupped over their mouth, their eyes positively glowing with triumph. What the fuck, Hanji! I thought I could trust you! At last I know Levi will be just as against this as I am, maybe even more so.

"Would you accept him in your charge?" Zackly asks Levi.

"I don't think anyone else would put up with his snarky ass."

What? Holy shit you incomparable bastard! I thought for certain I could rely on you for this one little thing.

"It's settled then!" Zackly begins, clamping his hands together. What exactly is decided? "Eren will be enrolled into the program on a trial basis. Until the time of his review, he will be placed under
direct supervision of Mr. Ackerman. Erwin, you are claiming responsibility of him and his actions, is that correct?"

"Yes sir." He answers with a nod. I'm still confused and rapidly losing track of this conversation.

"Good. Now, Levi, would you prefer a shared dorm on campus, or will Mr. Jaeger be staying with you?"

"Excuse m-" Levi starts.

"Ah, sir" Erwin interjects. "Could we have a moment to hash out the details?"

"I suppose." Zackly answers while pulling up his sleeve to check his watch. "Don't take too long."

Erwin nods to Levi who wastes no time clutching my shoulder and dragging me along. Erwin holds the door for us and I'm practically thrown through. Actually if Armin wasn't here I probably would have fallen. Ass. I turn back just in time to see Hanji and Mikasa slip through before Erwin closes the door behind himself. As soon as it clicks, Levi crosses his arms and narrows his eyes.

"I must have missed something." he begins lowly. "When exactly was it decided the brat had to stay with me?"

Finally! Somebody's asking the right questions!

"Where else would he stay?" Erwin asks, and I swear I detect mockery in that tone.

"Don't Fuck with me, Eyebrows!" Seems I'm not the only one who picked up on it. "You claimed responsibility for him, why don't you board the little asshole?"

"Um, I'm literally right here!" I interject.

"Shut up, brat, the adults are talking."

"I don't understand why he can't just stay at home!" Mikasa jumps in with award winning commentary. Thank you my sister from another mister! At least you've got my back!

"Because its a total emmercement program, dear." Hanji explains. “It’s what sets us apart from other organizations. Our students finish with a 93% higher chance in the field of their choice. Actually, I wrote a thesis on it, if you’re interested in reading-"

“Nobody wants to read that shit, Glasses.” Levi interrupts with a roll of his eyes.

“You did!”

“Because you held my silk sheets hostage!”

Erwin clears his throat. “Maybe we should get back on point.”

“Eren, can I talk to you please?” Mikasa asks curtly. I nod and follow her to the other corner of the room. Armin follows us, and the poor guy looks like a deer caught in the headlights. I would too if a group of people literally came out of nowhere arguing with each other.

“What's going on? How’s it going in there?” He asks once we've formed a small circle.

“Armin, did you know about the studio housing?” Mikasa asks.
“Well, yes. It’s all part of the program, but they’re really lax about visitations so long as it’s not impeding on their curriculum.” He starts sheepishly. "I, uh, though Dr. Zoe would have explained that to you.” I shake my head to indicate, clearly that they did not. He looks over his shoulder to the three we left behind and in no time his eyes widen. “That’s what you all were talking about? They want Eren to live with Levi?”

“There’s no way in hell that’s going to happen.” I scoff.

“Eren, how badly do you want this.” Mikasa asks suddenly. What does she mean? I do want this a lot, but I guess I still haven’t decided how far I’m willing to go to get it. Besides, is she saying she wants me stay with Levi? I thought we hated him. “Because you don’t have to do this. We can go back in there, tell him ‘thanks but no thanks’, and get you enrolled in some fall classes at ELAC.”

“What!?” I react as though she’s just doused me with boiling water.

“All I’m saying, Eren, is that there are still other options. Better, more secure options.”

“Really, Mikasa? You choose to bring that up now? Don’t you know you can force a square peg through a circular hole?”

“Good. Then, if this is what you want, I expect you to fight for it.” Huh? I really wasn’t expecting that. “I expect you to be willing to do what it takes to be successful. If you can’t do that, then you can expect me to drive your ass to ELAC everyday come September. You know I’ll do it, too. Actually I very much prefer that option, but if this is what you really want then I’ll stand behind it.”

“Who are you and what have you done with my sister?” I start staring at her through star speckled lenses. “You do realize that that is Levi, right? Levi, Mikasa!”

“I know, Eren.” She snaps. “Trust me I know exactly what following through with this could mean, and I hate it. But if you’re serious then I’ll get over it. If you're serious, You’ll need to get over it!”

I stare at her wide eyed and mouth gaping. Is she feeling alright? Seriously what is up with her? "Oi! You brats done gossiping over there?" Levi calls. Mikasa nods to me, I sigh in defeat, and Armin places a reassuring hand on my arm.

"You can do it, Eren." He starts and I find his sapphire blue eyes shining up at me. "I believe you could be the best of the best if you'll just give it a shot! It's not like you'll never see us! Don't forget, I actually work with the studio and there's no chance in hell Mikasa won't check in on you!"

"Armin, did you just curse?" I ask in amazement.

"Hell isn't a curse word, Eren, and even if it were, it's not like I never curse." he replies shyly, his ears turning bright scarlet.

I laugh to myself as Mikasa leads the way back to the others.

"Eren, I know this is a lot more than you bargained for. How do you feel about it?" Erwin asks at our approach.

"I know I'll regret it if I don't try." I answer truthfully. "I'm willing to do whatever it takes to do that. Even if it means sharing the same space with that asshole." I finish with a nod to Levi. He rolls his eyes.

"Don't get ahead of yourself, kid. I haven't agreed to shit." He replies. I grit my teeth.
"Now, Levi, it's either he stays with you-" Hanji starts thoughtfully.

"I don't have room." he interrupts.

"C'mon! You have like 6 spare bedrooms!"

6!? Holy shit! I guess that's normal for a superstar, but still.

"Not true. Farlan has one on reserve, and as I recall you've laid claim to the Titan room, Shitty Glasses!"

"Wow, my God, how could I have made such a grave mistake," They deadpan. "You're right. You only have 4 spare rooms, three huge couches, and a fully fucking furnished movie theater; there's absolutely no room! I guess you'll just have to take Zackly's offer and share a dorm!"

"Or the kid doesn't get in."

"Or..." Mikasa starts dangerously. "You could do the decent thing for once and help him."

Shit. She wasn't kidding about doing whatever it takes to support me. They stare at each other like they're having a silent argument, and, let's be honest, they probably are. One in which he apparently loses as his jaw clenches and he looks away.

"Fine, fucking brat, but I'm not a fucking babysitter!"

"Good thing I'm not a baby," I start, crossing over until I'm nose to forehead with him. "and I'm not fucking charity case! I can get my own food, pay my own bills, do my own laundry-"

“Oh?” He starts mockingly with a slight cock to his head. His face is literally inches from my own, and for the second time I am overwhelmed with his scent. Mint, sandalwood, and the tiniest bit of tobacco. “And can you wipe your own ass, too?”

“Levi.” Erwin cuts in with warning laced in his tone. We both step back with unwavering eye contact. "We need to inform Zackly. Hopefully Dok hasn’t convinced him to reconsider in all the time we’ve been out here."

I didn’t even think about that! I hurriedly follow him back into the office suite. Zackly has moved from behind his desk to the mini bar against the wall to our left. Dok and Hitch are crowding him, and I hope beyond all hope that he’s still on board with the trial basis thing.

“So?” He starts before guiding his tumbler to his mouth. Which appears to be nothing more than a slit in his magnificent grey beard.

“Sir,” Erwin begins. "With your permission, Eren Jaeger will be placed under the care of Mr. Ackerman.”

Hitch makes some sort of whining noise and pouts, alternating between throwing me flaming glares and Levi longing expressions. Ew.

“Splendid!” Zackly replies with a smack of his lips. Dok looks as though he’s been punched in the gut. Ha! Looks like you dug all that dirt up for nothing, asshole! “Dr. Hanji?.”

“Sir!” They reply at attention. What is with these people? Everyone is so crisp with him, so formal. Like some kind of boot camp or Military base. Or maybe I’m just too lax with my superiors.

“I expect that you’ll have a full routine planned out for Mr. Jaeger within the next 24 hours.”
“Already on it, sir!”

“Perfect. Well, Mr. Jaeger, I am glad to see that we could work something out.” He begins, extending his hand to me. I take it and smile foolishly. What? I’m fucking slap happy right now, don’t judge me. “I look forward to seeing you in a few months for your review.”

“Th-thank you, sir!” I stammer excitedly. As soon as I let go of his hand I run my hand through my hair and let out a breath I’ve been holding in for the last two fucking weeks.

**POPPPOPPOP!**

Shit. My eyes instantly fall to my chest where the top three buttons of Armin’s shirt have decided to spring free. My eyes widen and my cheeks are burning as I clutch at the fabric to keep it together. I fucking knew something like this would happen! I’m pretty sure I even made a mental note to not make any sudden movements!

Silence. Absolute silence. Then Isabel starts giggling behind her hand. I throw her a look of offense, but that only makes her laugh harder.

“Pffft! Sor-” Snort. “-ry, Eren.” She manages between giggles. Pretty soon Hanji joins her, Erwin looks genuinely embarrassed for me, Levi just keeps staring at the hand wrapped in my shirt, and Mikasa looks like she’s ready to fight them all off.

Zackly clears his throat and they all fall silent once more. “Well, then. I won’t keep you any longer.” That was possibly the most formal way of saying ‘Get the fuck out’ I’ve ever heard. Dok and his posse are the first ones to storm through the doors, followed by Isabel, the two sandy haired men(one of whom I need to remember to keep my eye out for), Hanji, Mikasa, and Erwin. “Oh,” Zackly starts again. Levi is on his way in front of me, but we both stop in our track at his voice. “And, Levi? Make sure he stays out of trouble. I don’t want to see his face anywhere in the media during this time, understood?”

“Yessir.” He answers with his back still to Zackly and his leading foot planted in the doorway. I look between them with uncertainty. Keep me out of the media? Is that going to be possible with the trouble I’ve already stirred? Aren’t they still on the lookout for me? His hand wraps around my bicep to pull me with him. Though he pulls a little too hard and a few more buttons pop off as I go through to the waiting room. Well, shit.

I look from my exposed chest up to him, and almost lose my shit at the smirk proudly displayed on his face. Dick! I go to yell things at that smug little face, but before I can even start, Isabel pounces on me.

“Congrats, Eren!” She starts with her arms wrapped around my chest. “I just knew this would all blow over! Oops!” She jumps away once she realizes the state of my wardrobe. My cheeks flush and I hastily use both of my hands to clamp Armin’s shirt closed again.

“Yeah, thanks!” I reply awkwardly. There’s a thump on my back and I turn my head to see Hanji join my side.

“Great job today, Mon Loup!” They explain. Wait, mon-what? “I’ll meet you, say...tomorrow afternoon to help you move?”

“Slow down, Hanji, give him some time to gather his bearings.” The sandy blond assistant says as he approaches us. “Moblit Berner! I was with you at your second round audition.” I go to shake his extended hand, but immediate return it to my shirt when it starts falling open again.
“I remember, nice to officially meet you.” I reply lamely with a nod. Well at least I have a name now. He smiles warmly then turns his attention back to Hanji.

“As I was saying, give him a few days. He’ll need time to pack and say goodbye to his friends.”

Man I like you, Moblit Berner! Such a nice guy.

“But that’ll put him behind! The other’s are starting on Monday which only leaves tomorrow to get him settled and set up for success!” They whine. Monday, huh? Well, fuck me, that’s soon! I go back to work Monday, too. Back to mid morning...yay!

“Be fair, dear.” Dear? Oh. So maybe not exactly an assistant, then.

“Mooobliiiitttt!” They whine while burying their face into his shoulder.

“Hanji.”

“Ugh, fine!” They sigh and straight back to me. “But you need to be settled with Levi before the weekend so I can go over your new schedule before you start on Monday. You’ll be a little behind, but that’s okay because you’re starting in an entirely different place than your peers. Still you’ll have to play catch up in a few workshops!”

I sigh. I mean, I guess I can say so long for now to the comforts of home by next weekend. I nod in agreement, they squeal, give me a hug, and follow Moblit into the elevator where Erwin offers a warm smile and a wave before the doors close. I wave back even though they’re already gone. Isabel and Strawhead are also gone, as is Armin, in fact. I pull out my phone to call him, but he’s beat me to it with a text.

Agent Blue: Had to make a call. I'll be waiting at the car.

Well that answers that, but, I whip my head around and, fuck, where’s Levi? I could have sworn he was right in front of me a second ago! Fucking Houdini. Whatever, more importantly, where’s Mikasa?

There’s literally nowhere for her to be hiding. Well, I suppose there’s the tiny hall where the second elevator lets off. Yeah, I’ll check there.

“Mikasa?” I call as I round the corner. Oh. This is...weird. I-I need help reacting. Mikasa stands with her arms crossed over her chest and eyes narrowed. Levi is leaning against the wall in front of her with almost the exact expression. Holy shit do they look a lot alike. Levi parts his lips when he looks at me and quirks an eyebrow. What now? I sigh, then I realize exactly what now. My hands move from my side once more to my[Armin’s] shirt. My face is on fire.

“Let’s go, Eren.” Mikasa says abruptly. The elevator doors open and we step inside. By we I mean all of we. Mikasa stands to my right, I stand at the doors so that I may dash out they moment they open, and Levi chooses to lean in the back corner to my left. I let a few floors pass before I can’t take it anymore.

“What were you two talking about?” I ask with a turn of my heel. My hands splayed out in front of me, but I’m too curious in their answer to care.

“None of your business.” Levi curtly answers. I turn to Mikasa for an answer and she only shrugs.

“Seriously? Neither of you are going to tell me.”

“There’s nothing to tell, Eren.” Mikasa says, though she doesn’t match my gaze.
“The gist of it, though,” Levi starts, steel eyes matching my emerald under hooded lids. “Is that it looks like I’m stuck with you, kid.”

Chapter End Notes

Mwhahahahaha, yes you made it. That or you skipped to the end notes, in which case you are a cheater. But I still love you.
Anyway, keep in mind of Levi's promise to Mikasa about helping Eren earlier in the fic, as it is the main motivation behind their interaction and his ultimate decision. I hope I made that pretty clear in this chapter, but I wanted to write this in case I didn't. Also, I hope I explained the housing thing clearly. I based that off of a school for the preforming arts that I was looking into. It's basically because they incorporate the curriculum into your everyday life. Especially the nutrition and personal training aspects of it. Which is why it's crucial to live on campus, or in this case with a designated mentor. If there are any other questions regarding that aspect, they will most likely be answered in the next chapter. Ummmmm, I can't think of anything else to add right now. So, yeah, I hope you liked it! Please please please comment/kudo/follow me on tumblr sgt-jaeger-meister I also started tracking this fic as fic: No Business Like Show Business And feel free to message me through there with any other questions/comments/concerns/ice cream recommendations/etc.
Sparky

Chapter Summary

Move in day! Hooray!
The gang says their temporary goodbyes, Eren settles in, and Levi once again sees more
than he bargained for.

Chapter Notes

I'm sorry! I really suck at updating this consistently and I am so sorry. I hope I haven't
lost anybody because of that. :( 
Anyway, on a happier note this chapter made me laugh, made me cry, and made me
laugh even harder! I can only hope it has the same effect on you all!
Also I tried to describe Levi's not so humble dwelling as best as I could through the
awestruck emerald eyes we know and love. I hope it makes sense, if not I actually have
blueprints drawn up...yeah, it's kind of my dream house. Or one of them anyway.
Everything I describe is also architecturally accurate so fret not!

Holy fuck. This house makes me feel utterly puny. I’m standing out front, heavy duffle bags packed
to the brim in each hand. Mikasa and Armin stand at my sides, each balancing boxes in their arms.
Well, okay that’s not entirely accurate. Armin has one rather small box filled with miscellaneous
things while Mikasa mans two large boxes filled with rocks. Pictures and books, and mainly video
games, too, but truthfully there is a small collection of rocks in one of them. Armin matches my awe
with wide eyes and a gaping mouth, Mikasa on the other hand looks utterly unimpressed. I can’t tell
if she’s just trying not to show it because it’s Levi’s or if she’s genuinely bored.
Which also doesn’t make any sense because, I reiterate, holy fuck.

This place is massive. There is a four car garage to our left that angles away from the house itself.
Which, by the way is built with giant dark stone paneling and is lined with neatly trimmed bushes.
On what I can only assume is the first floor, there is a long window jetting along the length of the
wall of the house from where it connects to the garage. It bleeds into a larger window on the other
side of the front door, but dark blue curtains block any clues as to what room that is. A few feet to
the right, the wall is extended toward us for the rest of the way to the corner. There’s another small
window higher up near the start of the extension. It, too, is longer than it is tall. Then about 20 or so
feet from that, wrapping around the right corner of the house is another window, this one further
down, larger proportioned, but in the same style as the others with it’s height. Even from way over
here I can make out drawn curtains. It’s got to be pretty fucking dark inside.

Though this is Levi we’re talking about; darkness suits him.

The second floor isn’t much better in terms of windows. There’s one, a little more normal looking,
on the far left in the center of another extended part of the house. It jets above the first floor for a bit
before the wall flattens once more with the main part. Another long and thin one seems to be centered between each corner and begins where the corner for the extended upper floor connects. It ends maybe 5 feet to the right of the front door. Only, you know, a full story above it. The last visible one from this vantage point is from the space above the corner room. This one is probably barely smaller than the largest window next to the front door. Of course, the curtains are drawn.

The front door itself follows seamlessly with the geometric and absolutely contemporary style of the rest of the house. It is black, of course, with a tall, thin window stretching from just above the slick silver handle to the thicker frame at the top. There is a beam presumably acting as a hinge about ⅔ of the way from the window. The door sits atop two steps which, oddly enough, are rounded. They, of course, are stone instead of cement. Because apparently he’s too good for regular ol cement like the rest of us common folk. I mean, holy hell, even the driveway is that weird smooth tiny tile things that other rich people have. At least there’s not a fountain in the middle. Though there is a tall black fence and security gate along the perimeter which is almost just as bad.

Whatever.

The front door opens, as predicted pivoting around the post, which swings the other 3rd of the door inside as the rest opens out. A red haired girl in pigtails, a purple tank top, blue high waisted shorts, and black converses stands with one hand on her hip and the other waving enthusiastically over her head.

“Eren and crew, welcome! Do you need a hand?”

“Umm..” I start, looking at my companions for an answer. Armin shrugs unsure, but Mikasa shakes her head with a tense look on her face. “No thanks, we’ve got it.”

“Oh, well then, I guess just set your things right inside the door and I’ll give you all a grand tour!”

Mikasa grunts and rolls her eyes behind the tower of boxes in her arms. It doesn’t take an Armin to see that she doesn’t like Isabel, and I can’t say I blame her. She is, essentially, the one who replaced her in Levi’s life. I’d be resentful too. Hell I am a little resentful, but I understand that wasn’t her fault. She only accepted the best she could hope for at that time in her life, and I can relate to that wholeheartedly. Because I did the same with Hannes. Plus I have the feeling she’s going to be the one getting me through this whole arrangement. She’ll totally help me by ganging up on Levi.

We do as she instructs and dump my things right inside the door, and holy fucking shit! If I thought the outside of the house was impressive I was vastly underestimating the greatness of the interior. Dark wood floors flow through what I can see of the house. The first thing after following the floor, however; the first thing that blows me away completely; is the wall of glass which makes up the entirety of the opposite wall in the living room. I kid you not, from floor to the absolute ceiling. Even from here, on the other side of the fucking room, I can see the expanse of the city below us. Two black beams frame it perfectly where the main room splits into halls on either side. That part is walled with warm grey expanding from the dark floors to the light ceilings of the halls. At least I assume the hall on the right is the same as the one on the left; as it is mostly obstructed from my view by not only the staircase to the right of the door, but the expanse of a warm gray wall that’s corner also serves as an obstruction.

Exactly in the center across from the window wall is a see through fire place. It lies near the base of a rectangular chimney of dark blue stone. The base is the same cool black as the front door. The fireplace itself is enclosed in glass. Looking beyond, it becomes clear that the space between it and the glass is lowered a few steps from the level which we currently stand.

When Isabel clears her throat, I realize that I’m gawking like an idiot. I sheepishly rub the back of my
neck and do the same in clearing my throat.

“So, this is our not-so-humble abode.” Isabel says while throwing out her upturned palms and offering a shrug. Armin is still looking around with the same wide eyes as before. Conversely, Mikasa’s gaze doesn’t so much as waiver from what must be an incredibly interesting spot on the wall in front of her. Isabel starts our tour by leading us through an opening on our left to a small, but long room. A bench runs most of the length of the room on the exterior wall. Underneath I can make out colored hampers and on the wall above it are coat hangers properly adored with just those. In the corner beside the opening we entered through sits another hamper, this one with a lid. I turn to ask Isabel what all of these hampers are for when I realize she's taking her shoes off. I give Isabel a quizzical look to which she shrugs apologetically.

"Er—it might be better just to wait for Levi to explain the whole process, but basically no shoes but socks only if they're clean. He will actually make you change your socks and put your old ones in your designated dirty laundry hamper, but he's not here so don't worry about that part."

What the fuck? My designated what now?

Armin takes a seat on the bench and begins untying his shoes. Mikasa stays standing while she peels her own off with the opposite foot on the heel. So I shrug and follow them by meeting my foot halfway while balancing on the other one. Once we've finished that, we are careful to line them neatly where the other shoes lie in cubbies on the opposite side of the small room. Isabel then leads us through another opening on the adjoining wall and into the kitchen.

Greys and black swim and swirl together to make up the marble countertops. Directly to our left is a large stainless steel fridge with the counter running from it to a massive copper bottomed sink then continuing to the stovetop wedged in the corner. The same counter forms a bar ledge opposite of the small room we were just in. Speaking of which, along this side of the wall is another counter which runs from the opening to about 3/4 th the way to the corner. There it is met by black corner shelves. Between that and the bar is an island which swirls only with black and a deep blue. It, of course, is perfectly angular beneath three evenly spaced hanging light fixtures.

"So, yeah. The kitchen." Isabel says.

I nod absentmindedly as my eyes continue to roam.

Dark wood cabinets with stainless steel handles line the two walls above the counters. They break only to fit a stainless steel microwave directly between the sink and the stove. Various utilities sit in the gap between the countertops the cabinet bottoms. Such as a collection of blue, grey, black, green, and red tinted jars filled what looks like dried leaves?

What the fuck is this guy into?

Maybe they're an important part of his voodoo rituals.

The backsplash is an arrangement of bright blue, teal, and silver jagged tiles. They are in no particular pattern which surprises me in juxtaposition with how crisp and exact everything else is.

Isabel leads us around the island to stand in in the space right next to the floating wooden staircase. Incidentally we are just further in from the front door.

Though all that I've seen thus far fail in comparison to the glorious grand piano sitting partially beneath the highest of the floating steps and the bottom of the second floor landing. It is beautiful. Dark stained wood propped above a glittering display of hammers and cords. Clean monochromatic
keys scream for me to touch them, but I must resist. For now.

Though I can't stop the twitch of my fingers as we follow our guide back toward the door and into the opening beside the base the stairs. It ends up being a formal dining room which holds the large front window covered by the dark blue and, I now realize, grey curtains. The grey makes up a large floral pattern against the deep sea blue. It matches perfectly with the grey runner on the slightly lighter than the floors wooden table. The centerpiece of which are 3 pedestals of various shapes and sizes with one blue and two white candles sitting upon them. There is another opening at the corner of the same wall in which makes up the one we went through. Between the two doorless entryways is an almost grey stained cabinet with glass doors in order to show off the fancy china.

He fucking would have a china cabinet. Asshole.

The opposite wall has a matching buffet which runs the length of it. Drawers are centered beneath and at one end there sits a trash can beneath the buffet top; the other houses a wine rack. On top of the buffet itself is an arrayment of knick knacks, a station of tumbler and a crystal container of amber liquid. Possibly scotch by the looks of it. Could be bourbon. The fuck if I know what the difference is. I keep my alcohol limited to cheap beer and cheap cider. Even though, technically speaking I shouldn’t have any sort of opinions formed since I’m underage. For only another 6 months, 27 days, 11 hours, and 42, no, 43 minutes, but who’s counting?

My attention is redirected to the confused face reflecting back at me from the large black framed mirror centered on the wall.

Do I always look this way?

*Meh, you've looked worse.*

That’s true. I shrug and, we continue through the other opening into the main room once more. Isabel is chatting away, but honestly I'm far too fixated on the view that I unintentionally tune her out.

"Eren?" Armin calls from the distance of my focus.

"Huh?" I follow his voice to see all three of them waiting patiently in the hall to the right. Isabel is further down with her hand on a doorknob, Mikasa is closest to me, and Armin is stuck in the middle. I nod and jog a bit too catch up with them.

"So, this is one of the rooms you can choose from." Isabel announces as she swings the door open.

Its huge! At least an extra half of my room. The window is the one which wraps around the corner, and I must say I like the way it looks. There's a queen bed with a deep red and orange bed set. It goes nicely with the abstract painting of what looks like two salsa dancers. A dresser and mirror are on the wall to my right and behind it-or beside it depending on where you're looking-is a sliding dark metal door to the closet. I like it, but the color may be a bit much for me. Though, its not as though I couldn’t change it up a bit. We all step back into the hall and Isabel obliges us by opening the door opposite us, which is conveniently beside a sliding glass door leading to a patio. It is another bedroom. This one slightly smaller than the other and is decorated in various earthy shades. there is a large window on the opposite wall, a dresser to my left and the closet door on my right. Its still bigger than my room, but not nearly as impressive as the last. Then we get to the door at the very end of the hallway. Which turns out to be a half bathroom.

Okay, so neither of those since I’d possibly would have to cross into another dimension just to shower.
We are led to the other hall. Which cuts through the lower living room. Of course I end up lagging behind again, but my God there's a fucking pool directly below us! A huge one with a fucking bridge connecting both sides of the lower level patio.

As much as I hate Levi, I can’t deny, he’s got style.

"So the room over here is openish." Isabel states as she shows off the bedroom in the other hall. It too is next to a sliding door, opposite of a descending staircase, and adjacent to a full bathroom. The room itself is bigger than both of the last two rooms and ordained with paintings of Greek mythology. I recognize one as Kronos eating his children while surrounded by lesser titans. Very nice. Very comforting to doze off to.

"Ish?" Mikasa says with an accusatory tone. She leans with crossed arms in the doorway. Her black Led Zeppelin tank top is all bunched up making it look like it spells LEZPIN. Which, in turn, has me suppressing a chuckle. I save myself by turning it into a casual throat clearing.

"Yeah..." Isabel starts again, rubbing her upper arm nervously. "Hanji has kind of claimed this room. They've-" Ha! Reiner totally called it! "-even unpacked extra clothes in the dresser and closet. But-" she starts with a wave of her hands in front of her. "I mean, we can totally boot them out! I'm sure they wouldn't mind!"

I take another look at the unusual painting and shake my head. "Um, nah that's alright, really."

"Oh, okay." She says with relief and clasps her hands in front of her. "Then there's just one room left to show you. I think you'll like it best." She says with a wink. Okay? "And after you get all settled we can finish up the tour."

"Yeah, okay."

Mikasa rolls her eyes and storms away. What's with her?

I look to Armin. He easily reads my mind and answers with a shrug.

Isabel looks slightly taken aback but regains her cheery composure and gestures for us to go ahead. Armin and I follow after Mikasa who makes her way to the opposite hall with determination. Where the hell is she going?

"Actually," Isabel calls Mikasa to a halt at the top of the other descending staircase. She turns toward her with folded arms and a cocked hip. Her jaw is clenched, her eyes are deadly even before she raises an eyebrow. Shit, she really doesn't like her. The glare she's giving has sent many a men away with their tails between their legs. Poor Isabel. Armin looks past me with nervousness and his eyebrows shoot up his forehead. I can imagine her without even turning around. Collapsed into herself, head bowed, a hint of fear in her expression. It's too much, I can't look. "It's upstairs." Isabel raises her voice ever so slightly, her tone has adopted a bit of a bite. "But since you seem to know your way around, by all means, lead the way."

Damn, kitty's got claws.

I whip my head around to see Isabel rise to Mikasa's challenge with a straightened back, a widen stance, and one hand on her hip while other hangs at her side. She even dares add a smug smile. I look between the two of them sizing each other up from across the room. Mikasa stands coiled, ready to attack; her very persona screams 'don't fuck with me'. Isabel matches her with a held chin and open invitation saying "go ahead; try it'. I honestly didn't think she had it in her. Though I suppose I should have expected as much since she’s been living with the world’s most sadistic asshole.
Then, Mikasa looks at me, purses her lips for a moment before turning her gaze to the floor beside her. Isabel hums triumphantly, but not condescendingly, and takes the lead once again. She crosses to the stairs with purpose and doesn't even wait for us to catch up. Armin's already on her heels, but I lag behind in the hopes of checking in with Mikasa.

"Hey, what's-" She storms past me without even a glance. ":-wrong." I finish to myself.

She's already on the second floor when I groan in exasperation. Why is she being like this? I mean I get why she'd be a little hostile toward Isabel, but this seems more than that.

I stir from my thoughts when I hear their footsteps above my head. Right, I need to catch up.

I take the stairs two at a time, and almost trip from the gaps between them. When I reach the dark carpet at the top and lean against the rail in front of me, I'm once again taken aback by the view through the window wall. Just, damn. It reminds me of sitting on the rooftop. It's tranquil, beautiful, and, just like then, almost ruined by Levi's presence. Or rather the anticipation of his presence.

"Oi, Eren!" Speaking of the-oh wait no, its just Isabel impersonating the bastard. I think. That or she just likes dropping her voice several octaves at random times, but, judging by her fit of giggles, I'm guessing the former. It makes me smile. It was a fairly good impersonation, and it definitely means she'll help me piss him off. I spare one last glance out at the expance of the city below. Beautiful. This is a luxurious place to do my time.

We end up in a laundry room off the hall to the right. Even it is only slightly smaller than my room. A stacked washer/dryer sits centered between two counters on the opposite wall. Cabinets line above it. Adjacent to that is a door that leads to a massive bathroom. There's the larger window overlooking the garage behind the same, but shorter, dark blue curtains. The tile is cool grey and matches the tile on the wall in the shower. The likes of which is solid dark grey and unbelievably smooth cement behind glass doors. Well, shit, I'll definitely have to remember to lock the doors. The sink is a basin carved into the same smooth, dark cement that makes up the remaining counter. I raise my hand to edge of the mirror hanging flat and centered over the sink, to discover that it opens up to reveal a medicine cabinet seemingly carved into the wall. Nice. Very nice indeed.

We go through the other door leading us to the end of the hall.

"You go ahead, Eren." Isabel prompts me once we reach the last room. It too lies behind a dark door with a stainless handle. I take a deep breath and push it open.

Holy-fucking-balls!

Yes, a thousand times yes!

"So, you like it?"

"Like it? I fucking love it!" I exclaim, quickly pulling Isabel in my arms like she was Father fucking Christmas. The room is at least half windows. Most of the wall to my right and a quarter of it angles in opposite of it. Then another at the end connecting the two. The remaining walls are a warm grey-almost blue-color and the same dark carpet continues through here. Along the wall of the door is a long black dresser. On the other side of it sits the king sized bed. It's centered on the wall sharing the glass, and appears to be floating on the black frame underneath. The bed set with 1001 pillows are an array of blues and grey. The arrangement of which remind me of ocean waves along the coastline. A pair of sliding doors come together in the corner to reveal a walk in closet.

It's beyond huge! I just need to look for a cheap tv on craigslist to put on the dresser. Then if I switch
the dresser and the bed, it should be enough room for the beanbag that Mikasa and Armin let me take and I'll be set for gaming. The wall walls have beautiful textured paintings of the sea. Of waves crashing against the rocky shore, and a darkened body of water tranquil beneath the moonlight. Everything about this room is perfect! The oceanic theme, the walls of windows, and just the fucking size of it all.

I run to the furthest window, throw open the curtains, and lose myself in the absolute awe of the view. I feel like I can see everything from here, and it isn't until I look down that I realize there's nothing under this part of the room. The first floor ends somewhere on the other half of the rocking bench below. This is so fucking perfect!

I turn around to inform my companions of just that when I crack a wide smile at the sight that greets me. Armin and Isabel stand beside the bed with my things in their hands, and Mikasa is sitting on top of it with the two boxes at her feet. I laugh.

"How long have I been zoned out?" I ask.

"Well," Armin starts, moving to the other side of the bed to put his box on the dresser."After about the first 3 minutes of watching you buzz about, we figured that it meant you had made a decision."

"So we took it upon ourselves to bring your things up so you can get started on settling in." Isabel adds with a drop of by bags. I laugh appreciatively and look at Mikasa. She's looking around the room with a bitter sweet expression. I look at Armin and nonchalantly direct his attention at her. He picks it up beautifully and looks at Isabel. His expression reads 'What do you want me to do?' I widen my eyes and flick my chin up in Isabel's direction to say 'get rid of her.' He sighs.

"Hey, Isabel," he starts. You magnificent bastard! Who said telepathy wasn't a real thing? "Um, you wouldn't happen to have anything to eat, would you?"

"Huh? Um, sure!" She starts to lead Armin out. "What do you have in mind?" I hear her ask as they walk through the hall.

I sigh and rub the back of neck. Here comes the hard part, getting Mikasa to tell me what's really bothering her.

She's always been closed off and even more so when it comes to me. I think she thinks she has to be strong for me, that she can’t show me weakness. Which is bullshit because nothing she could ever say would make me feel any differently about her.

I cross the room to sit on the floor in front of her so that she has to look at me. She simply turns her face away. Then again, maybe not.

"Mikasa, talk to me." I start. "Please tell me what's bothering you."

"It's nothing, Eren." Avoid and evade, classic maneuver.

"Mikasa."

"I said it's nothing."

I fold my arms on her knees and rest my chin on them while I look up at her. She glowers down at me and I smile sincerely back. Then she rolls her eyes and a bit more than lightly kicks me off. I laugh and lean on my hands behind my back. It's enough for her to crack a smile before she slumps her shoulders in defeat.
"Well?" I ask, cocking my head to the side.

She sighs heavily, and twists her hand in her side braid, which today she has cleverly incorporated my mother's scarf into. Her hand continues to wrap itself in her long hair as she averts her eyes again. "I'm going to miss you."

Ouch. My smile falls and I gulp. I was very much avoiding those kinds of thoughts. Because I don't want to think about the fact that I won't see them everyday. That Armin won't be poking his head in to wake me up. That Mikasa won't be flicking cereal at me from across the breakfast table. That she won't be curled on the couch with me quietly watching disney movies when neither of us can sleep. That since we met, we have never been part for more than a couple of weeks. I don't want to think about that because it makes this so much harder.

I push myself off the floor to grace her with a world renown bear hug. She buries her face in my shoulder and squeezes back just as hard.

"I'm not going anywhere, sis. I'm just a phone call away." I feel her relax and hear her sniff back her tears.

"I know, punk." She says while flicking my ear. Ow, what was that for!? I jump away from her and rub at the pain she inflicted. I'm about to ask her just that when I see her smile. A bright smile even though tears brim her eyes. So I just pat her shoulder and head for the door.

"C'mon, I remember hearing something about food."

Isabel doesn't disappoint. When Mikasa and I join them downstairs, she and Armin have set up an entire sandwich making spread. White and wheat breads at one side followed by; condiments, cheese, deli meats, veggies, and the very end a variety of sodas. She and Armin are already feasting. She-sitting on the counter, which I'm sure Levi would cringe at-and he-sitting in a chair on the other side of the bar. What a gentleman. I, myself, with all my rebellious spirit, join Isabel on the counter. Mikasa, however, chooses to lean against the bar.

After a few minutes in the silence of mutual hunger, we make idle conversation. Isabel and Armin get into an enthusiastic conversation about colleges. Apparently this will be her senior year.

"It sucks because I'm one year older than everyone! I hate it, everyone's a freaking jerk about it, too." She says in defeat. "I mean, it's not my fault that I missed 3 and a half semesters! I didn't really have a choice."

"Well, it's admirable that you went back." Armin offers with reassurance. She scoffs.

"Trust me, if big bro didn't make me," Oh no, Isabel why? "I wouldn't have." Mikasa puts her Pepsi on the counter with force. Isabel looks completely horrified at offending her. "I'm sorry. I-I wouldn't have-I just forgot- I'm sorry!" She stammers.

"It's fine." She responds sourly. "Eren, don't you want to get settled before we have to go?"

Rather obvious hint received.

I shrug and lead the way to the, um...my room; taking my dr. Pepper with me.

"Don't let Levi catch you with that on the carpet or he'll skin you alive." Isabel calls to me as she cleans up our lunch buffet. We leave Armin behind to help.

The actual process of unpacking and rearranging takes the better part of the afternoon. Isabel comes
to help us, and Mikasa can't complain because it ends up taking all four of us to switch the dresser and
to bed. Isabel enthusiastically offered up Farlan's flat screen when I mentioned buying one of my own.
"He's hardly ever here, and I'm sure he won't mind anyway." So with that installed she excuses
herself to 'do homework', but really I know she wanted to give us time alone. For which I am
grateful.

We spend the next hour or so playing Super Smash Bros and Mario Cart on my N64. Mikasa
dominates, per the norm, but I swear there were a couple times in each that I almost had her! Then all
too soon, the time comes to say goodbye. I see them to the car. Dusk has settled, mind a few stripes
of dark orange to the west.

"Don't forget about me." I say with a melancholy chuckle. Then Armin hugs me.

"Never." He says with a smile. "It'll be okay, Eren. Who knows, you might end up liking it."

"Fat chance!" I scoff before turning to Mikasa. She's twisting at her braid with the same thousand
yard stare as before. I sigh and wrap my arms around her.

"If you need anything at all-" She starts.

"I'll call you."

She puts her hand on my shoulder and pushes away to look me dead in the eye. "If he hurts you
again-"

"Mikasa, I'll be fine. Besides, I can take him."

She hones in on the black eye long gone and narrows her eyes. "Still, if he so much as swats a fly in
your direction, you call me."

"I promise you'll be the first to know."

She pulls me into another hug. "I love you, Eren."

"Love you too, sis."

She pulls her lips into a thin line and blinks back a few tears. Followed up by a reassuring pat on the
shoulder before getting into the car. Armin follows with a pat on the back, an encouraging nod, and
crosses to the passenger side.

I stay outside of the gates to watch them go; waving until they are out of sight. Then I let out a
long breath and return to this castle of a prison.

Isabel checks with me when I come back in to see if I'm alright. I nod before resigning to lock myself
in my room for the remainder of the evening.

After switching out my dry contacts for less desirable, but admittedly more functional glasses; I settle
in with my wireless headphones and begin drowning out my sorrow with mindless undead violence.

Levi arrived who-the-hell-knows-when in the last 2 hours. I only know that because he so fucking
graciously decides to clue me into his presence by nearly giving me a heart attack from banging on
the door.

"Hey, dinner's ready if you want any." He monotonously drones. Fucking asshole totally made me
die! The next Goddamn checkpoint was right there!

I fucking hate this man.

My lights are off and my headphones silently connect me to the on going ons of my game—which I was kicking ass in by the way—so I resolve to hoping he thinks I’m asleep.

"I know you’re awake, kid, I could hear you cussing at whatever the fuck game you’re playing from across the house." Oh. Didn't think about that. I pull my headphones to rest around my neck and silently wait for him to take the hint and leave. Which thankfully doesn't take long. "Fine, starve. Just don’t complain about it later."

Finally I'm graced with the faintly growing pitter patter of his steps. I resume my indulgence in the gruesome world that is The Last of Us.

Though, I'll need to remember to keep my frustrations and exclamations contained lest he disturb me again.

~

8, no, closer to 8 ½ hours later and I’m still going strong.

Well, I have to pee like a fucking race horse, my ass is completely numb, my eyes are strained and tired, which as a result has given me one bitch of a headache, but other than that I’m good. Until, of course my stomach joins in.

You know you’re fucking desperate when watching a zombie mercilessly devour your avatar makes your stomach growl. Yeah, it’s pretty fucked up, but it’s an occupational hazard of keeping locked away. No food, no lights, no sound, no bathroom breaks.

My stomach rumbles again, needlessly reminding me that my last meal was over 12 hours ago when Isabel made us all sandwiches. Damn it, I should have taken her up on that second one.

I yawn and stretch and curl in on myself when my bladder protests the stretching. Okay, fuck, I’ll go to the bathroom. My stomach gives a painful lurch and I find myself rolling my eyes. If I’m up anyway, might as well get some fucking food. It’s after 2 am, I doubt anyone’s still up, and I can be light of my feet when I need to be.

I crack open my door and peer out. The hall is dark, and I can’t see any other lights. So far so good. Luckily the bathroom is only a few hurried steps away. The lights are to remain off, but, fear not, for I have the light of my phone. Plus I’ve reduced to my Spidey boxers and a plain black shirt so the task is done with ease. I’m sure to hold the handle of the bathroom down until it is completely closed so there’s not so much as a resounding click.

Then, by the same dim light, I tip toe to the top of the stairs and wince at the protesting groan of the first step.

“SHHHHHH!” as if it could fucking hear me.

One carefully placed foot in front of the other at a near agonizingly slow pace, and I make it noiselessly to the first floor. The only sound I make to the kitchen are the soft pads of my feet on the cool wooden floors. That is until, of course, I reach the fridge. Because in my haze of hunger, I mistakenly pull at the tortillas at the bottom of a shelf and a small avalanche ensues. I catch most of with outstretched arms, but a few clatter on the floor.
“Shut up!” I hiss.

Talking to food, huh? Have you really stooped so low?

Well, it shouldn’t have been so fucking loud!

I whip my head in every direction to ensure the authenticity of my solitude and am satisfied enough to continue my quest for the only thing I can think of to satisfy my stomach’s aching cries. An ever-holy Peanut butter and Jelly wrap. After, you know, haphazardly stacking everything back in the fridge.

I have a feeling that will come back to haunt me.

I start by grabbing a paper towel to set my tortilla and unscrew the lid of the strawberry jam I was lucky enough to catch. After finding a knife in the 5th fucking drawer I try, I’m all ready to go.

That is, if only I could find the peanut butter. It fucking better be JIF, too, and not some yuppy designer brand or some shit like that. Because, I swear to the heavens, if it’s not I will just go without. Another growl echoes in the quiet house. Okay, well I’ll just find something else. Regardless, I scour the cabinets as silently as I can, but come up empty handed.

Now, if I were a jar of peanut butter in a millionaire's mansion, where would I be?

Hmm, I’ve checked all the top cabinets, which just leaves the bottom ones. So I drop to my knees and make my way around the bottom cabinets via crawls.

“Spider-man, huh?” Levi’s low voice states above me once I’ve made my way to the island.

“Shit!” I jump, hit my head on the overhanging counter, fall back on my ass, and inadvertently slam closed the cabinet door I was searching. “The fuck, man?” I complain to the blurry mass peering down at me in black sweat pants and a white muscle shirt. Rubbing at the swelling bump on my head, I grab at my glasses and shove them back up the bridge of my nose. “What the hell?”

“Aw, do you need an icepack, Sparky?” He mocks in a whiny voice and pouted lips.

“Sparky? Where the fuck did that come from?”

“Just thought of it after hearing that yelp of yours.” He drawls before turning his attention to his nails. “I imagine you’d make a great lap dog.” He’s kidding. Right? I honestly can’t fucking tell because he said it the exact same way he says everything!

“Ha-ha,” I drone. “You should really consider a career in stand up comedy.”

“Believe it or not, kid, but you’re not the first to tell me that.” He rolls his eyes and looks back down at me. After a moment he cocks his head. “I didn't know you wore glasses.”

"What of it?"

"It's-" He begins, but stops a shrug. Then he crosses his arms. "You gonna stay down there all night, Sparky? Or do you want me to get you a biscuit for being such a good boy?" I scoff and reluctantly push myself to my feet. I needed to get up anyway, and like hell am I going to make it seem like I did it because he said something about it. “Really though, what with this boxer fetish you have?”

“What fetish? I wear boxers, get over it.”

“I can see that.” He starts with an almost appreciative glance down. I roll my eyes, it’s too late and
I’m too fucking tired to care that he’s blatantly checking me out. I’ll probably freak out about it in the morning, but that’s tomorrow’s problem. “Which is exactly my point. This marks the third time I’ve seen your underwear, Jaeger, and you know what they say about threes. Once is luck, twice is coincidence, but three is a kink.”

“It’s three is a pattern, pervert.” I reply. “And what do you mean the third time? If my memory serves me, this only marks the second.” I snark while folding my arms and leaning against the counter.

“Oh! What in the fuck do you think you’re doing!?” He starts, crossing to wrap his hand in my shirt and yank me forward. My God, he’s not going to kiss me again, is he?

Nope, I realize that quickly as I throw my hands in front to catch my fall. My glasses crash to the floor. What the fuck? He literally just tossed me out of his way. I swear to God, if he broke them—“Getting your filthy ass all over my counter! And what the fuck is this!?” He snaps with a gesture to my pb&j wrap station. Which reminds me…

“Where do you keep the peanut butter?” I ask. As I maneuver myself into a better sitting position, I am forced to readjust my glasses, again.

“What?”

“The peanut-butter.” I say it slowly this time so that he can get it.

“I heard what you fucking said, brat, but it doesn’t answer my question.”

“I’ll answer yours if you answer mine.” I tease.

“Are you fuckin-” He cuts himself off with a heavy sigh and a pinch to the bridge of his nose. “Just clean this shit up, and I’ll go grab your fucking peanut butter.”

I smile triumphantly and jump up while he rolls his eyes and pushes past me. Well, somebody doesn’t like being out snarked. Also, what does he mean by ‘clean this shit up’? As far as I can tell, it’s perfectly clean. Not a crumb out of place. So I shrug and don’t do a Goddamn thing. I doubt he’ll even notice.

A few moments later he’s back in the kitchen. He flicks on the over hanging lights and I can clearly make out those three beautiful letters. JIF. My stomach grumbles loudly, and Levi makes a disgusted face as I lick my lips. Hey, it’s not my fault, okay? I’m fucking hungry!

“You call this cleaning up?” He says after he joins my side at the counter. “Please tell me you’re joking, Sparky.”

“Would you stop calling me that!?”

“No.” I make a frustrated groan, that comes out more as a growl which makes Levi smirk. “Tsk, tsk, your bark is truly worse than your bite, and I speak from personal experience.” Asshole, I literally got held back so you don’t even know what I could have done! “Though I have to admit, even that’s not very intimidating. As I said, perfect lap dog material. Now,” His smirk fades and his tone adopts an edge. He’s back to being serious. “Answer the fucking question.”

“Yes I do, thank you very much.” I eloquently answer his fucking question.

“You didn’t fucking do anything!”
Damn he noticed. “No, but I honestly don’t see what’s wrong with the way it is.”

He runs his palm over his face as he lifts his chin to the ceiling and closes his eyes. “Get a fucking plate, you barbarian.” He says lowly through gritted teeth. Fuck, that sounds dangerous. Only one problem, I don’t know where the fuck they are! I remember seeing them when I was searching for the peanut butter, but like hell I remember! “Second set in from the fridge. Get a grey one.” Fridge, got it! One, two, grey one-boom! “Put the damn tortilla on the plate,” Okay, simple enough, right? “Wash your hands, you fucking-” He cuts himself off again with an exasperated face palm.

“Really?”

“You were just crawling around on the damn floor like a damn animal, so yes, really.” I roll my eyes and obey. “Good boy, Sparky.”

“Now you’re making me think you have some weird kink.” I grumble while drying my hands.

“Maybe if you didn’t act like a dog, I would feel obliged to treat you like one.”

“So,” I start jokingly. “Does that mean if I rolled on my back you’d rub my belly?” I smirk at the image in my head before my words catch up with me. I look up at him absolutely mortified, and he stares back in surprise. Like, real surprise. His mouth is parted, his eyes are wide and freely moving up and down my body. Wait-no-I take it back! “Fuck! I didn’t mean-I-!”

“Calm you tits, kid.” He drawls in annoyance. His face has returned to its usual impassive mask before he turns back to the counter. He pulls out a package of clorox wipes before he pushes me out of my spot to take over ‘cleaning’. I try to help, but get a finger in my face before I can even take a step toward him. Without faltering his gaze, he flicks his finger to the bar. “Sit.” I huff and he give me a sideways glare. Grudgingly, I find myself obeying, again. Damn it! “Good-”

“Don’t even finish that sentence!” I snap. I’m getting real tired of this good boy shit! He shrugs nonchalantly, but I even from here I can make out the amusement in his eyes. Having nothing better to do than watch his meticulous cleaning of the counter, I begin to drum my fingers on it. Silence stretches uncomfortably, and I find myself actually starting an actual conversation with this bastard. “Sooo, what are you doing awake?”

“I could ask you the same.” He replies coolly.

“Couldn’t sleep.” I shrug.

“There you have it.”

“Do you not sleep often?” I inquire.

“Do you ask a lot of annoying questions often?”

“Are you such a dick often?” I bite. He turns to me with narrowed eyes.

“Are you such a sarcastic ass often?” He bites right back.

“Only when it suits my fancy.” I snark right into a smug smirk. How’s that for sarcastic, asshole?

He studies me with those steel eyes, sharp enough to cut me to the core if he wanted to. But my smug expression doesn’t falter and he goes straight back to his work in silence. A couple tense minutes later the rough clatter of a plate being drop in front of me rouses my stomach.
Doth mine eyes deceive me?

A Peanut Butter and Jelly Wrap! Straight from the heavens!

“Eat up, Sparky, and for Godsake, wash your fucking plate when you're done.”

And just like that, he’s gone.

Chapter End Notes

By the way, holy-fricken-crap! Thank you all for the kudos/comments.hits/submits/being unfathomably fabulous! Seriously you all bring the biggest smile to my face, and your comments really truly motivate me! So please keep it coming. I love each and everyone one of you and it warms my hear more than you know to see the response this fic has gotten. Because I honestly don't think much of my writing ability and didn't know if this fic would even catch anyone's attention none the less keep it. So thank you. :)
I do finally end up sleeping just as the sun begins its ascent. I wake on a fucking cloud contorting perfectly to my body. As my eyes flutter open I'm greeted my hues of blue and grey and what the fuck!? Where the fuck am I?

A hollow knock echoes through this strange room and Isabel's sweet voice reminds me that I'm far from home. "Eren? It's nearly noon. Do you want some of the pancakes I made? They're getting cold."

An indefinable noise comes from my throat as I stretch out the rumble in my tummy. You shut your damn trap, stomach, you got me into enough trouble last night!

Just like that my cheeks get red hot. Fuck, I can't believe I made such a fucking fool of myself. Also, did I just imagine Levi's wondering eyes or did that actually happen?

At that thought I fall back in the bed and groan into the pillow. Damn it. "Eren?" Isabel sounds again, a hint of worry in her voice.

"Yeah, I'll be right down." I answer through the pillow over my face. Another groan crosses my lips and I reluctantly roll off the bed. Which takes for-fucking-ever because I somehow ended up in the exact center of the massive thing. Once my feet hit the plush carpet I stretch again, my hand finds my glasses on the nightstand, and once they are pushed comfortably on my nose I give another yawn. After twisting my body to pop a few vertebraes, I scratch my chest on the way to the window that is the right wall. I throw open the curtains only to immediately shut them. In the mirror across from me I see that a fresh shade of pink has brushed my cheeks.

Taking a deep breath I chance to open the curtains just enough to peep my face through. Levi is walking around the room on the other side of the gap with apparently the same kind of window wall facing mine. Except his curtains are opened fully. And he's fully nude save the towel around his waist. How did I not know he was right there!? Does he not know that I'm right here!? Just as the thought crosses my mind he begins to walk nonchalantly to the curtains, and for a moment I am grateful for the stroke of luck. Except, as he slowly pulls the curtains, his eyes lock with mine across the vast area between us, and...fuck my life.

I look like Peeping fucking Tom, and he’s going to think things.

*You didn't have to look again.*

Erm...shut the fuck up conscious. God damn am I that much of a smart ass to other people?
Yes.

Whatever.

There are more pressing matters at hand, like cold shower calling my name to steal away from anymore embarrassing encounters with Levi. With any luck, he’ll be gone when I get out.

Then again, when has luck ever been on my side?

I cheated and basked in the luxury of a hot shower. Which, really was well deserved since it took me about 20 Goddamn minutes just to turn the damn thing on. Difficult but oh so worth it. I fiddle with my contacts and head back to my room to change. Once I’m comfortably in blue jeans and a regular green tee shirt with a rough outline of the Hulk, I peek through the curtains again. No Levi in sight, so I decide to throw them all open to let in the sun. After which I have a long debate as to whether or not I should brush my teeth. Meh, what’s the point though? Shrugging to myself I turn for the scent of fluffy pancakes waiting for me. I’m going down to eat anyway, I can just do it later. What can I say, I’m not exactly the greatest at oral hygiene. Something I’m sure Levi wouldn’t appreciate. Not that it’s something I even care about him caring about.

Because I don’t.

I mean, seriously, how would that be any of his damned business. Though, judging by his manic obsession with cleanliness, if he found out what little concern I have for the state of my mouth I’m sure he’d be disgusted. In fact he’d probably lock me in the bathroom until I finished flossing.

As my feet reach the first floor I realize I’ve taken far too much time thinking about what Levi would think of my mouth. I mean the cleanliness of it.

Goddamnit! Stop thinking about it.

Taking my same seat at the bar as I did last night, I absentmindedly shake my mind silent. Doing so I apparently commit a terrible crime as a few droplets fall from my hair and onto the immaculate countertop.

"Oi, Sparky," The man of the hour snaps at me from his station in front of the coffee pot. “Bad dog!”

"Dick." I mumble.

"What was that, boy?” He starts in a mocking voice. “Little Jimmy stuck in a well?"

I give into his goding and snarl dangerously.

"What side of the bed did you roll off of, Levi?” Isabel starts as she slides a bountiful plate my way. "Stop being an ass!"

Finally someone said it. Well loud enough that he could hear without fear of being out witted.

I shake my head and turn my attention the three fluffy pancakes spread across the porcelain surface with a small pile of scrambled eggs in the center. I smile as my stomach growls and help myself in drowning the golden medallions in sweet maplely goodness.

"Hanji is on their way over. So enjoy those while you can." Levi drones with a nod to my plate.

"Wutr-ou-takin bout?" I say through a full mouth.

"You're fucking disgusting." he says with a grimace; and really, the only appropriate response to that
is opening my mouth to reveal my half chewed food.

He gags and sets his coffee mug on the island top before leaning across the bar to pull my plate away.

"Hey! I wasn't done!" I whine. What the fuck dude?

"Well, Sparky, when you play with your food I assume that you are."

"But. I'm. Not!" I protest and slide my plate back.

"Yeah. You. Are." he responds dangerously while pulling at my plate once more.

"Boys, boys," Isabel starts, slamming her hands on the countertop. "I don't really know what is going on with you two, but knock it off or else this entire experience will be hell for all of us!"

Levi takes a hot second to glare and I take that time to do the same. He reluctantly shoves my plate back at me as I smile in triumph.

Haha, asshole! I win this round.

He rolls his eyes and heads to the sink where he meticulously begins washing the dishes.

I have never seen a person take so much time on each dish. This guy is definitely mental. Which, yeah, I already knew that to a degree, but he keeps surprising me. I mean really, who puts the dishes in the dishwasher after washing them!

A loud ring echoes through the house seemingly out of nowhere. Coxing out of me a yelp that quickly turns into a coughing fit as chunks of half chewed food clog my throat. Levi smirks into the half loaded dishwasher and mumbles something that about having to get a better guard dog.

Prick.

"That'll be Hanji." Levi states with disinterest while pushing buttons and turning dials on the dishwasher. Isabel hurries out of the kitchen and throws open the door.

"Isabel, darling! How are you?" Hanji exclaims. "They haven't killed each other yet, have they?"

"Hanji, we can hear you." Levi drawls monotonously, having moved onto wiping down the counters.

"What?" They start innocently. "I said nothing."

Isabel snorts and they exchange muffled words. About us no doubt.

Oh well, let them have their secret conversation.

I still have my food, and food I can rely on. It doesn't talk about you across the room, nor does it give you weird pet names. It is clear to me now that food is my only true friend in this place.

"EREN!" Hanji squeals when they enter the kitchen. The first thing that strikes me with their appearance are the black and white tribal print pants and the bright red heels that peak from beneath the flowing hems. They have a plain black shirt tucked into the high waistband, a messenger bag across their chest, and a messy bun.

"Hey, Hanji!" I say with stuffed cheeks. Partially just because I'm lazy, but mainly to get a rise out of
Levi because he's an ass and I love pissing him off. Boy, oh, boy does it work like a backfired buckshot as he swiftly takes my plate and dumps its contents in the trash. "What the fu-" I start angrily before one harsh razor sharp slice of steel eyes has me swallowing not only the rest of my food, but the rest of my sentence as well.

Shit. Okay, time to lay off a bit.

"Oh, Eren, we're really going to have to work on your diet." Hanji starts with a sympathetic look to the grave of my breakfast. "That young metabolism of yours isn't going to last forever."

"Wait does that-" I begin.

"Yeah, that means no chips, no beer, no ramen, pasta, donuts, candy and whatever the hell else you've been living off of." Levi needlessly interrupts. I throw him a pointed glare. Fuck him.

"Well not that drastically," Hanji adds encouragingly. "Most of it can just be substituted with a healthier alternative!"

"Great." I groan.

"Hey you wanted to do this, Sparky." Levi shrugs with folded arms. I roll my eyes at him because, yeah okay I wanted this, but damn! I didn't realize there were so many layers to this program. Honestly I'm starting to wonder if all this bullshit is going to be worth it.

Though looking around at this palace, I wager it might be.

Hanji looks between us and shakes their head with a sigh before turning toward the dining room. Unsure really of what else to do, I scot off my chair and follow them. In the short amount of time it takes me to catch up, and we're talking maybe 20 seconds, Hanji has spread an array of paperwork on the surface of the dark table. They're positioned in the seat closest to the corner and when they catch my eye, gestures me to seat at the head.

“So…Eren,” Hanji starts. “I’ve compiled what I believe to be a reasonable schedule and menu.”

“Awesome.” I groan.

“I know this is a lot.” They frown. “But honestly it’s really lucky we’re even here discussing this.”

Great now I feel bad. After all, they're right, I am lucky.

So suck it the fuck up, Jaeger.

“Sorry, Hanji.”

“Well now, down to business.” They smile.

We start with my new diet, and honestly most of it sounds delicious. Home cooked meals, actual food that actually have expiration dates, and these things called fruits.

Yes I imagine it’ll be such a hard transition.

Beyond that we move onto my schedule. To stay on 7-11’s payroll I am keeping one shift a week. Demoted, of course. Reiner moved up to my position as shift leader. Which is A-Okay with me. Mostly I will be doing inventory and stocking. I have scheduled classes Tuesday and Thursday:

Foundations 1~7-9
Voice Production and Speech 1~9:30-11:30

Improv 1~12:30-1:30

English and Comp~2:00-3:00

Yup, that’s 8 fucking hours! A full fucking shift at 7-11, and I don’t even get paid.

Though, all the while Hanji describes it all to me, I keep my smile on and groans to myself.

Hey, at least I have the rest of the week to myself. Except, of course, Wednesday morning for inventory. “As far as your workout routine,” Come again? “I’ll go ahead and leave that to Levi.”

“W-what!?” I exclaim, curling my fists on the table.

“He is your mentor after all.”

“Yeah, but-”

“But what, Jaeger?” The very bastard asks from the doorway behind me. “Don’t trust my training abilities?”

I turn in my chair to glare at him. He sips from his mug being completely impassive. “I just plain don’t trust you.”

“Fair enough.” He shrugs and takes another sip. “Hurry up though, Glasses, we’re going to be late.”

“Oh!” They reply as they hurriedly shove papers back into their bag. “Right!” Hanji sends me an exaggerated wink that makes my stomach lurch. What the hell are they on about? “The rest of your schedule is up to Levi, seeing how you’ll be his PA during your mentorship.”


“Personal Assistant, dear.”

“Why? Doesn’t he already have one?”


“So, what exactly does that mean?” I ask with a bite and a turn in my seat to match my tone with a glare.

“What it means is,” Levi matches my bite without skipping a beat. “Anytime you aren’t in class or working at your shitty job, your ass is mine.”

*Was that a pun?*

Damnit, conscious, not fucking now!

“Yes, well have fun!” Hanji, who has completely packed up and moved to the other entrance of the dining room waves.

Have fun?

“That’s your cue, Sparky.” Levi drawls as Hanji disappears through the front door. What the actual
fuck is happening right now? “As in get your ass-” *Again with the ass?* “-ready to go.”

“What?”

“Because.”

“Because, why?”

“Kid, I will end you.” With that he’s gone.

I reiterate, fucking prick.

After taking another few seconds to glower at the now empty space, I sigh in defeat and head to put on my shoes. I guess this means today is the first day of my new job.

Yay.

I get paid for this shit, right?

Because I still need to pay my share of the bills at home. That’s all Mikasa agreed to let me help with. Plus if I’m expected to run around as Levi’s personal lapdog I sure as hell better be compensated.

After reluctantly following Levi through the garage, it isn’t long before we’re settled in his car and winding down Hollywood Hills.

"So...where are we going?" I inquire after a few minutes of tense silence.

"Does it matter?"

"It was just a question." I mumble in defeat.

He sighs, "We’re going to the set. I need to shoot a few scenes, shake a few hands, and smile for a few pictures."

"Sounds exhilarating." I smirk.

"You’ll get used to it." He says.

Now hold up...not an impersonal *you* get used to it, not even an *I am* used to it, but *you’ll* get used to it. As in *I, me, myself*. 

Holy jeepers, did Levi just give me a glimmer of encouragement?

"So, you believe that I’ll make it?" I say half mockingly half sheepishly.

"I wouldn’t have taken you in if I didn’t." he deadpans.

Despite my better judgement a smile creeps upon my face, and for some reason I can’t just shake it off. The most I can do is keep my hand over it as I look out the window.

Why is it such a big deal?

*Because it’s coming from him.*

Why should that matter? He’s a fucking asshole. I don’t care what he thinks about me.

*Maybe it’s because, somehow, you made that fucking asshole believe in you.*
“Thanks.” I grunt without wavering from my position. His only response is a thoughtful hum.

The rest of the drive is spent listening to the radio, though the silence between us is considerably less tense than it started. I keep my eyes roaming over the many sights of Hollywood, only casting them to Levi every so often.

By way of a sideroad, we are let into the gates of the Studio Lot.

I.E directly into the soundstage and warehouse hub. The movie center, the heart of television production, the location of behind the scenes; otherwise known as the bigtime.

Maybe someday I’ll be here as the star instead of the insect in the star’s shadow.

Once we’re parked, Levi takes out his keys, takes off his sunglasses, and turns in his seat to get my full attention.

“Here’s how it’s going to be, Sparky,” He starts. I scowl at my new name. “Any resentment, any contempt, any animosity stays here. Once you get out of this car, you let all of that go. Hear me?” I give him a look of skepticism. Is he serious? Does he really think I can just drop everything that he’s done? He leans across the median with narrowed eyes. I gulp. “Let me clarify. When you’re in this lot you will be a Goddamned professional. Everyone you will meet deserves to be treated with the utmost respect. Which includes me.” I grimace, to which he cocks his head and inhales sharply. “I am your employer, whether you like it or not. Which means when you’re on the clock, you will treat me with respect.” Damn, he’s kind of got a point there. “It’s not that hard, you’re an aspiring actor, fucking fake it. Understand?”

“Yeah.” I sigh with averted eyes.

“Yes.” He corrects. My jaw clenches and I take a deep breath. Fucking ass on a fucking power trip. I may have to fake it, but we aren’t out of the car yet, and I sure as hell am not going to let him try and intimidate me. So I snap my eyes to his, hardened emerald to sharp steel. Match him by leaning so we’re mere inches from each other.

“Yes.” I hiss with a cock of my head.

“Yes what, Jaeger?” He bites. His mouth working to enunciating each syllable with as much venom as it can muster. My eyes narrow, I bite my tongue to remind myself to just back down. I can, and will get him back later.

“Yes, sir.” I say in the same venomous tone.

“Good.” He turns on a dime and is out the door before I have even a chance to open mine.

I take one more deep, honest, breath before stepping into the most challenging role I’ve ever had to play; a guy who has respect for Levi Ackerman-the world’s greatest douche.

Then I step into the sun. Levi’s already ahead of me. He walks with his shoulders back, sunglasses on, chin up, and a stoic expression on his face.

Heads turn, murmurs are exchanged; it makes me sick.

I mean…

Yeah, no, still gross. Can’t fake that.
So I shake my head, settle into a carefree grin, and jog to catch up.

Okay, I can do this.

Every person we pass acknowledges Levi. Some, the more experienced ones I assume, simply give him a respectful nod. Others try to clot our path in attempt at making small talk. To which he cordially declines. He’s not a dick though, which is surprising to admit. Commanding, sure; intimidating, abso-fucking-lutely. Still he’s not a diva about any of it. He offers ‘Hello’s and ‘Fine thanks's and things of that nature. No wonder everyone in this Godforsaken Corporation seems to like him.

He leads the way to a bustling soundstage only to immediately be swarmed by people. By the looks of it, they’re all from the show’s production so I call it safe to zone the fuck out.

There is a perfect set taking up of the majority of the vast area. So seamless that if I were to step into it, I’m half convinced I would be transported to a real FBI headquarters.

A small succession of desks line the light tiled floor. Each one adorned with various knick-knacks specified to their corresponding characters, no doubt. An elevator is visible from small area set back from the main floor. In the corner is a window lined office. The blinds are up, revealing a large black chair sitting behind a large desk. On the black nameplate beside the windowed black door is printed CAPT STEVENS. I.E Levi’s character in the show.

“Kid!” A pair of fingers snap in front of my face.

“Huh?” I answer. Levi sighs in exasperation. There are three men gathered behind him. A tall blond wearing a pleasant smile and petite goatee, a brunet with kind of a fohawk going on, and a slightly shorter sandy blond who I recognize to be Auruo from auditions.

He gives me an unimpressed onceover and, remembering what Levi said, I resist the urge to glower right back. Instead I offer him a smile.

“Kid, this is the crew. Erd,” Tall blond. “Gunter,” Fohawk, got it. “And Aurou, who I believe you met at auditions. Crew this is kid.”

“Hi! Nice to meet you!” I say brightly.

“Hi, Kid.” Gunter responds with an extended hand that I quickly take.

“You got a name there? Or is it just Kid?” Erd asks.

“Er..” I start with a nervous scratch to the back of my head. “Eren Th-um-Jaeger.”

“Well nice to meet you, Eren.”

“We’ll meet you on the set, Levi.” Gunter says as he and the other two turn for who knows what.

“Okay, Sparky,” Levi turns his attention back to me. “I need to go and get myself beautiful.” I snort, but hold back my comment of how impossible that task is. He narrows his eyes in warning. “You can run and get me a coffee. Dark blend, black.”

And for the third time in 24 hours, he’s gone before I even have a chance to catch up.

Where the hell do I find coffee?

Maybe on that buffet table conveniently located in this very sound studio.
By the time I finish fixing up Levi’s coffee (and admittedly stealing a couple pastries off the table) I turn to find him already on set with a woman I recognize but can’t name, and a man who I’m assuming is the director. The actress has long black hair, wide eyes and is wearing corporate casual. The director has a baggy blue button down half tucked in equally baggy tan shorts. His hair is blond and shaggy, and he sports a mustache and petite goatee which he is adamantly scratching at the moment. The desks are all filled and other people stand on the set waiting. Auruo and Gunter are talking amongst themselves by the fake elevator on the set, and I catch Erd from the corner of my eye in big black headphones behind a sound table.

The director nods a last time and leaves the set to crouch comfortably by the camera. Levi turns and sits behind the big desk in the office, the woman sits behind a desk with a scattered pile of papers, and Gunter and Auruo stay by the elevator.

“QUIET ON SET!” Someone, somewhere yells and silence instantly falls.

“In five, four, three.” The cameraman counts down, mouthing the two and the one followed by a signal for action.

Everyone on set seamlessly fades into their characters. The woman frugally flips through the papers, every so often lifting two for comparison. She looks deep in thought and somewhat desperate. Enter Auruo and Gunter.

“Anything new, Kat?” Gunter inquires. Auruo finds his seat and spins it her direction. Gunter pulls up his own and sits backward on it.

“No,” The woman, Kat, replys while tossing up her hands in defeat. “Not a damned thing!”

“Maybe lay off of it for a couple days.” Gunter suggests. “Come back to it with fresh eyes.”

“Maybe.”

“What’s the Cap doing?” Auruo speaks up, nodding to the office. From here I can make out Levi looking through a big file in his hands. Everyone’s heads turn to look into the office. People around them continue to bustle about, as if it were actually a workplace. Though they stay relatively silent through their exchanges, so as to hear the important dialogue.

“Research, probably.” Gunter grunts.

“He’s nothing if not determined.” Kat states simply.

“More like obsessive.” Auruo murmurs. Kat throughs a stapler at him just as Levi emerges from his office. “Ow! It’s not like it’s not tr-” Gunter clears his throat to cut him off.

“Any leads on the Cramer case?” Levi asks seriously. Clearly choosing to ignore whatever he walked in on.

“Just waiting for forensics, sir.” Kat answers. “Should be here within the hour.”

“Keep me posted.” He replies simply and walks toward the elevator. “And Barnes,” He calls from over his shoulder as he waits for the elevator.

“Yes, sir?” Auruo asks warily.
“Don’t give Deroso anymore reasons to hurt you.” He finishes while stepping into the elevator.

“No, sir.” He calls even though the doors have already closed.

Gunter gives a short laugh, replaces his chair behind his desk, and starts on the computer. Kat sticks out her tongue and Auruo sulks his head and sits up to start looking through papers.

“CUT!” Chatter bursts out, the actors fade from their characters, and Levi steps out of the elevator.

Wow, that was truly amazing to watch! I just had the privilege of watching a segment of a story come to life, and I have to admit I’m intrigued. Not that I’ll ever let Levi know, but I may just have to catch up on this show. What can I say, I want to know more. What are they talking about when they said Levi’s character was obsessed? The entire dynamic between the team is great.

“I hope that coffee’s not cold.” Levi says on his way over to me. “Oi, out of my seat.”

“Huh?” I look down at my dangling feet. My toes just brimming the concrete floor. Damn, when did that happen? I was so wrapped up in the scene that I hadn’t really taken note that I had taken residence in Levi’s seat. I quickly hop down. “Oh, sorry.”

He sighs and takes the warm cup from my hands before climbing in the seat himself. He sits on the edge of it so that his legs don’t dangle so much, but he’s still further off the ground than I was. His height deficiency has me smiling to myself.

“What’s that face for?”

“What face?”

“That face you just—nevermind.” He ends by shaking his head. Okay, whatever. Gunter joins us quickly with a finger sandwich in his hand.

“So, Eren, what did you think?” He asks before taking a bite.

“That was amazing!” I answer truthfully. From the corner of my eye I see Levi’s brow rise as he takes a sip from his cup.

“Glad to hear you enjoyed it! Do you watch the show?”


“Oh.” Gunter responds in surprise. “Do mind me asking why not?”

“Um,” I start, again looking at Levi who regards me with interest. What do I say to that? ‘Because I refuse to see anything with this asshat in it.’ No that wouldn’t fly too well with Levi’s whole ‘professionalism’ rule. So I shrug. “Just haven’t gotten around to it I guess.”

“Huh. Well in any case I’m glad you enjoyed it.” He pats me on the back before turning toward the buffet table once more.

“So, what’s the real reason you haven’t watched it?” Levi inquires sardonically.

“I would answer you, but that would break your rule.” I answer in a sickly sweet manor. He looks at me intently.

“I didn’t take you for a rules kind of guy.” What? I mean, generally I’m not, but why say that if you want me to follow your rules? “I’m impressed by your obedience. Maybe you won’t be such a bad
lapdog after all”


Damnit the motherfucker’s testing me! I fix him with a lethal stare. I want to call him out on his sadistic nature, make everyone aware of his assholishness! Will I? Of course not. Because that would be proving him right about my maturity. About my nature. So I will sit this one out. Will smile and bite the bullet to win this battle of pride.

The whole time Levi holds my stare as he finishes off the contents of his cup. Then once he’s done, he hops down, hands me the cup without a glance and heads over to the small congregation on the set.

They shoot the same scene a few more times. There are a few hiccups with lines and blocking, but they all simply laugh about it. My time is pretty much spent on watching and running meaningless tasks for Captain Hardass. From more drinks to running inside the main building to pick up papers to wiping down the fucking buffet table...five fucking times! All of which I do without complaint, hell I’m even sure to throw in a smile each time. Hours pass and finally they wrap up. Which is bittersweet since I truly loved watching the filming and everything that goes into it, but nice because it means I only have a few more minutes on my punch card. Then I can take off this horrid mask.

The moment the car door closes, I do just that.

“Are you a dick to all your employees, or just me?” I jump down his throat before he even finishes buckling in.

“You waste no time do you?” He groans while flipping the ignition.

“What? Am I supposed to be content with being treated like shit all day?”

“Well, it’s a hard knock life, Sparky, get used to it.”

“I can see why Petra left.”

“Listen, brat, if you can handle it, then don’t fucking stay!” Oh, I’ve struck a nerve.

“I was under the impression I didn’t really have a choice.”

“You always have a choice.” He grumbles before ending this little spat by cranking up the radio. The whole rest of the drive, his eyes stay hardened on the road and mine stay trained out the window.

Isabel is nowhere in sight when I enter through the mudroom. Which sucks because I could really go for a conversation without hostile midgets. I slip off my shoes and am about to step out toward the stairs when I get a tsk from the doorway.

“Socks, Jaeger.” Levi drawls.

“What about them?” I ask wiggling my toes between the fabric.

“Switch them out.”

You’ve got to be kidding me. I have to have house socks? Does he enjoy wasting water on cleaning things that don’t need cleaning? “I don’t have any down here.”

“There’s a new pack in the green hamper under the bench.” He explains, already in the process of switching out of his own. I roll my eyes and do as I’m instructed. This guy is insane.
Once that’s done and over with, I again start toward the stairs.

“Hope you’re heading up to change, Sparky.”

“Change?”

“Yeah, preferably something with movement, but I’ll leave that to you.” What? My face must reflect that very thought because Levi simply rolls his eyes and explains. “I’ll meet you down in the gym in 5.”

Well, sort of explains, and what? I groan while dragging my feet up the wooden stairs. Will this day end? What more must I do? The whole while I shrug into basketball shorts and a black tank I mumble about Levi and how much I hate him.

Short, crazy, manipulative, sadistic, cowardly, asshole.

I continue my mantra all the way down to the basement.

Holy fuck, the basement.

It’s huge, of course. Directly in front of the staircase are glass doors leading out to the patio. From here the water of the pool shimmers through the sun glared glass. A pool table sits centered on the wall between the pairs of glass doors, and behind it is a huge sectional couch centered in front of a massive flatscreen. There’s a bar in the right corner of the space. In the hallway behind me I hear the clanking of equipment and guess that must be emanating from the gym.

So I turn my scrawny ass in said direction.

Why are there always a wall of mirrors in home gyms? Like, is it imperative to watch yourself sweat? Gross. Parallel to the mirrors in this room is a bench, behind it is a cycling thing, and in the corner of the room, facing the tv on the opposite wall, is a treadmill. All sorts of weight equipment fill the rest of the large room, but I’ll be damned if I know what any of them are. Levi setting weights on a bar when I come in.

He’s in a tight cool blue athletic top and black athletic shorts. Those muscles I was face to face with in our scene are once again showing themselves off through his shirt. His legs are revealing the same kind of tight muscles. When he looks up at me walking in, he stands fully and runs a hand through his hair; perfectly ruffling it up.

Images of running my fingers through it as I grope at his shirt flash in my mind through no control of my own.

Damnit, what the fuck!?

NO. NO. NO. That's final conscious! Enough with these obscene day dreams, and dream dreams, and thoughts in general!

Hey, there's no harm in lusting?

Hmmm….interesting point, conscious. After all, there’s no point in denying his steamy physique, it’s just mostly cancelled out when he opens his mouth. So, simply through looks, yes; but who he is, nope. Not a snowball’s chance in hell. Better just to drop it.

“You okay there, Sparky?” He deadpans while bending over to add another weight to the bar.
Damn he has a nice ass.

ENOUGH! That was the last thought like that, got that conscious!?

Yeah, sure.

“Fine.” I finally manage, though my voice betrays me at a slightly higher pitch. Still bent, he turns his face toward me to grant me with a raised eyebrow. Quickly, I avert my eyes to study the unknown equipment. I find myself rubbing the back of my neck as I wait for Levi to finish setting the bar. When I see him standing in my peripheral with a cocked hip, I know he’s finished so I turn my eyes back to him.

“We’ll start with kinetic stretching.”

“Kine-what now?”

“All of the pre-workout stretches need to be done in motion to avoid injury as much as possible.”

He explains. Then he shows me by swinging his arms across his chest a few times while shifting his head on his shoulders. I mimic him, concentrating on the stretch in my muscles as I do. Next we each position ourselves beside something hip height. Holding onto it with one hand, we begin swinging our outer legs back and forth as much as we can to stretch our quads and hamstrings. Then turn around and do the same on the otherside. A few side lunges and back bends later, we’re finished.

“Okay, Jaeger, here’s the plan for today; 10 reps-5 weighted squats, 5 burpees, 5 Russian twists, and 5 jumping jacks.”

“What’s a burpee? And how do you do a Russian whatever?” I ask with skepticism.

“Just watch me.” He sighs, brushing me aside to step onto the mat. The bar, which he was weighting up earlier, is set between two bars. He squats underneath it and settles it on the base of his neck and shoulders. Taking a deep breath, he stands and steps forward. He exhales slowly as he effortlessly does his first squat. 9 more later he steps back and sets the bar back on it’s bars. He wastes no time to start on the next set. Hopping into the air, he comes straight down into a pushup which he rolls back onto his feet only to repeat the process. Again, he does another 9 of those, and on the last one, instead of getting back onto his feet, he rolls onto his perfectly sculpted derriere. He balances on it to form a V with bent knees. His elbows are bent at his side, and his back is curved ever so slightly. Then he twists his entire torso from one side to the other, all the while keeping balance and his legs still. 10 times to both sides, and he’s up for the jumping jacks. He makes this look so easy, but when I think about actually doing it I can’t help but cringe. He’s even doing twice what he’s asking me to do, so it can’t be too bad. When he finishes, breath only slightly faster, he gestures me to start.

Taking a deep breath I step onto the mat to settle beneath the bar. It’s heavier than I initially expected, but it’s okay, I still got it. 5 squats, 5 burpee things, 5 twists, and 5 jumping jacks. I run the rep 3 times like cake, 5th time and I start to really feel it, 7th time I do everything while shaking, and the 8th I give up completely as I transition from the Russian twists to the jumping jacks. Instead of springing to my feet, I fall onto my back and stay there catching my breath. A few minutes, maybe a few hours pass before Levi stands over me to pour water on my face.

“I think,” I start through a pant. “I’m dead.”

Levi offers me a hand. Which I simply stare at because, damn, I can’t move. He rolls his eyes. “Get up, kid, you need to stretch it out or it’s gonna be hell tomorrow.”

I groan and reluctantly take his hand. He pulls me up with ease and even steadies me when I get to my feet. “Thanks” I grunt.
“Don’t thank me yet, you still need to stretch.”

“B-b-but wwwwyyyyyy!?!” I whine.

“I already told you, Eren, if you don’t you’ll regret it tomorrow.” He explains before handing me a huge bottle of water. “Here, drink up.”

“All of it?”

“Half of it now, some after stretching, and the rest after the steam room.”

“Steam room?” What he’s got one of those now, too?

“Yeah. Good for post routine recovery.”

Right. Of course. How could I not have known. I down a little more than half of the water before I start stretching. Most of my muscles are still warm and pliable, but my legs and chest in particular hurt like a mother bitch. Levi walks me through different stretches, instructing me on how far to go and how long to hold it. It’s nice because by the time we’re done I feel 1000 times better.

“So...steam room?” I inquire while peaking my head through the hall.

“Bathroom at the end. There’s a temp gage in the shower and eucalyptus scent for the steam under the sink.”

“Are you not-” I stumble off. Why did I even start asking that in the first place? It’s better if he’s not going in there too.

“No, I need a hot shower, then we all need some fucking food.”

I nod in agreement to that. Food sounds magnificent about now.

After fiddling with the steam room settings in the bathroom down the hall, I give up. Opting for a steamy shower beneath the waterfall showerhead. I roll my head around my shoulders as the hot water soothes my aching muscles. This is the good stuff.

40 minutes later I emerge. A fluffy folded towel is laid on the bathroom counter and that definitely wasn’t here before. This shower also has a glass door, let’s hope whoever came in didn’t look or at least that it was too steamy to see anything. Regardless I wrap myself, bundle up my clothes, and quickly make my trek all the way up to my room.

“OWoW!” Isabel calls from the kitchen as I cross the main floor to the stairs. “Lookin good, Eren.”

My face flushes, but thankfully Levi doesn’t seem to be done with his shower yet. Or, I guess he could be, either way he’s not here for which I am grateful. As quickly as I can I pad my way up the stairs, clutching my towel to my waist. I make it to my room without incident. The light streams in freely washing over the blue comforter of my new bed. My new and quite unmade bed. Another thing I know would piss Levi off. All the better just to leave it then.

Still clutching to my towel, I rummage through the dresser for a clean pair of sweats. I find a pair of Aeropostale ones Hannes’s sister, Aunt Pat, got me for Christmas. Not what I would have picked out, but beggars can’t be choosers. Throwing them on the bed behind me, I stand and turn toward in, my towel slipping through my loosened grip.

Then it hits me.
The motherfucking curtains!

My head snaps up and sure enough see a shirtless Levi looking at me from across the gap.

Fuck! I scramble to to curtains, but topple forward as I step on the corner of the towel. It has fallen now, leaving my bare butt exposed, only I’m too mortified to do anything about it at the moment. Hey, I figure I’ve already fucked up. There’s nothing I can do now, and if I try to rush again I’ll probably find myself in an even greater embarrassment. Because that’s what tends to happen. One last groan into the floor and I chance a glance across the void.

The bastard is nowhere to be seen. Thank the fucking Lord!

I take this opportunity to run to the curtain, towel be damned! It’s closed in .2 seconds and I waste no time flopping face first into my bed. Hoping with my every fiber that it will just swallow me up and subsequently save me from myself.

Mainly, though, to save me from a particular raven haired masochist.
Nothing But Surprises

Chapter Summary

Levi's POV.
Levi spends the day trying to make sense of his feelings.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

This kid's going to be the death of me. He's been here only a few weeks, and I don't think I've ever been so easily wound up by another human being in my life. Don't ask me why or how, just something about him gets under my skin. Every other word out of his mouth makes me want to shut him up with my fist, every one in between makes me want to shut him up with my lips. As I said before, not a single other person on this earth has ever affected me this way. The damned brat shoves his way into my thoughts throughout the day. Right now, for instance, I'm supposed to be focusing on these lines, but here I am. It's becoming a real problem, and It's not even in the way one would assume from such a confession. There's no fluff, no pining, rather a sort of concern wrapped in a constant state of irritation. God, that doesn't even make sense, does it?

There's gotta be something to all this.

Yeah, and that's that he is an immature brat who looks for any and every opportunity to pick a fight. And for some reason, I allow it. I stoop to his level and get set off by the most miniscule things.

Which is also confusing.

Ask anyone and they'll agree that being utterly impassive and stoically objective are part of my charm. Along with my dashing good looks, of course. Don't get me wrong, I have an incredible temper, but it takes a lot to trigger it. Well, at least it does for everyone who's not a 6'1, bright eyed, hot head. Again I must ask, what makes him the exception? What is this kid doing to me?

I don't know, but I've read the same line at least a dozen times and still only have the first 3 words memorized. I let my frustration out with a groan and by running a hand through my hair. This needs to stop. I've had this script for over a week and still only have 3/4ths of it committed to memory. Not even to mention that the on location stay in my trailer starts in less than three days. Which mean that I will have to leave the kid here for what could very well end up being a full week. With Hanji of course, and Mikasa if she wants. Hell, even the blond mushroom can stay. I don’t really care, so long as they don’t fucking do anything to fuck up my house.

On that thought, I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that I’ve tapped out all the energy I have to read this thing. I look across my study, and it takes only a moment before I’m on my feet, barreling to my room. I need to clear my head. We’re shooting at least 5 of the scenes today, which is over 10 hours, and I need to be prepared. The kid already left for school-and why the fuck does that matter!?

Maybe because you've been thinking about him nonstop for the last hour.

Yeah, I suppose that makes sense. Can’t very well clear my mind of him if he could be around any corner. I sigh in defeat, cross over to the window and look down to the pool.
Ah, perfect. A few good laps should do it. Cool water, smooth movements, rhythmic breaths; it’s practically meditative in motion. Quickly I shed my clothes in favor of my swim trunks and head all the way down to the cool glistening water that keeps calling my name.

It's soothing. Each stroke in the water. I can actually feel the weight of the world slipping from my shoulders; if only for an hour and a handful of minutes. My alarm goes off, letting me know that I need to get out and get ready for the day. Something I really don’t want to do, but reluctantly push myself to.

No time for the steam room today, so I opt for a warm shower. I continue getting ready on autopilot as my mind wanders in and out of thought.

We're doing an interrogation scene today. Those are always fun because Mike likes to omit parts of our lines in the suspect's script. Says it gives it authenticity. The challenge therein lies with the delivery. We have to time our wording in such a way that their reaction is shown, but they're still able to catch up and say their line on their queue. Otherwise we end up doing a ton of takes because they keep fucking up their lines. Sure that happens a lot anyway, but the magic happens in the moment of surprise. If they're too stupid to stay in character than that moment's ruined. Mike hates it when that happens, and so far nobody who's done that has been invited back.

The guy today, Henry Topinic, might be able to keep up. Though, having worked with him before, I doubt it.

*Eren could probably do a better job than him.*

Dammit, the whole point of that long ass swim was to wipe him from my thoughts.

Though...he probably could. The kid's a natural, I can't wait to seeseshit I'm late!

I don't even bother with buttoning up my navy blue shirt before slipping into my shoes and jogging out to my car. If traffic works with me I should only be like 5 minutes late. Less desirable traffic could be anywhere between 20 minutes to hours, but that's LA for ya. I admit, as I weave through the lanes, that my foot is a little heavier than strictly necessary. Hey, you gotta do what you gotta do. Wouldn't be the first time if I got a ticket and it definitely wouldn't be the last. Luckily though, I park at the studio unscathed and ticket free. By the time I jog into the set, I'm already 14 minutes late precisely. All I can offer Erd when he catches my eye is an apologetic shrug on my way to wardrobe. Which proves to be an incredibly easy process seeing how I forgot to finish buttoning my shirt. Oh well. I switch it out with pretty much the same fucking button down. Though it's much cheaper and slightly stained. As is the norm for the good Captain. He's kind of a slob since all of his energy goes into his job.

Once I'm fully beautified, I join everyone in the set where Mike is already going through notes.

"Nice of you to join us." He grumbles.

"Traffic's a bitch." I state pointedly. He grunts.

"As I was saying," he starts again without a trace of malcontent. "We'll start with 3 and 28. During 11 I want Auruo and Gunter to take lunch. Levi, I’d like Darius to shoot 1 with you while Frieda’s on lunch, and I’m shooting 8 with Auruo, Gunter, and Henry. After which you can lunch while we shoot 9. If there’s time I would like to do 10, but only if we’re able to get to it.”

“When’s Topinic getting here?” Gunter asks.

“That’s a damn good question.” Mike replies with a tinge in his voice. “I’m giving him til 11 to get
here. If he’s not, then we’re going to be a week behind. Now places people!”

The first part of this scene is between the other three, I don’t come in until ‘Yeah great distraction.’

It’s already 8:50 and Mike likes to get interrogations scenes done either second or last. Depending on what he wants to get out of it. The earlier he schedules it, the more energy he expects from the scene. It’s usually the 2nd one we do because apparently he’s able to ‘catch us at our peak’. The later scheduled ones are there to capture a certain exhaustion he’s looking for. Don’t ask me what the fuck he sees that other directors don’t, but there is definitely a madness to Mike’s method. So he wants our raw emotions to show through in lieu with our lines. He mostly caters to the mood on set that day. If everyone is more tired than usual, we tend to do the more intense scenes. Conversely, if the sun is out and there’s a good energy we do either action or light hearted ones.

He’s a strange guy, but I like him. I respect what he does and how he does it. Hell he’s won 3 Emmys, 2 Annies, and even has an Oscar nomination under his belt.

I’ve gotten 6 Emmy nominations, two actual Emmys, one Golden Globe, and a fucking Oscar...nomination, but who’s keeping track?

"Yeah great distraction."

Shit.

"Cut!" Mike calls. "Levi?"

"Yeah." I start as I dry wash my face. I can't fucking believe I missed my queue. "Got it, Mike."

"Okay. From the top people!"

I'll just actually pay attention to the fucking scene this time.

~

Scene 2 goes...smoother than other days. We had to do about 12 takes because either the set was off or lines were fucked up. Admittingly I missed my queue a couple more times.

It happens to the best of us.

Mike has us on break between scenes before he'll even let us on set again. Gunter and Auruo are going over lines and blocking off it the corner. Erd is busy doing who knows what at the sound booth, and Frieda is talking to Mike who looks utterly peeved.

This is guy who, like me, is not easily unsettled.

A young man, errand boy by the looks of it, jogs over to Mike and whispers something in his ear. He doesn't yell, that's not his style. Instead he kicks his chair noisily across the way. The pile of binders and even a full mug of coffee topple off, not leaving much room for speculation on what the boy said. Frieda is beside him and is utterly shocked from his outburst. Poor girl. Mike's also caught the attention of the rest of the crew who decide to circle around him. The boy widens his eyes and runs away. If he's having this reaction it can only mean...

"The bastard’s not coming?" I ask rhetorically. I mean, we all know that's the case.

"Well," he starts back in his usual facade. "Unless any of you can pull an understudy from the hat, we'll just have to tell the network to postpone our airdate a week."
Damn. We're already behind on filming, and to have to redo the sets would take most of the day.

"Mike, it's not the end of the world." Nanaba assures from his side—which she's on a lot of the time. Black apron adorned with makeup smudges, a pair of scissors in one hand, and a the other on her hip; she looks directly at me. "What about Eren?"

She can't be suggesting what I think she's suggesting.

"What about Eren?" I repeat evenly.

"Who the hell is Eren?" Mike jumps in, looking between us with scepticism.

"My P.A."

"The scrawny kid that follows you around like a puppy?"

I roll my eyes in reply. I don't know what he's talking about. If anything the kid's more like a wolf stalking his prey. Everytime I look at him I feel like he's about to rip my throat out. Not that he could, mind you. Because if he’s a wolf, then I’m a fucking panther.

"You should have seen him at his last audition." Nanaba starts again. This time tucking the scissors into her apron pocket before crossing her arms and turning to look seriously at Mike. "Levi stepped in and kept throwing him curveballs, but he hit them all out of the park! Kept up with the improv and stayed in character the whole time"

Okay, Nanaba, not the whole time. He did miss a couple lines and almost said his name instead of the character's. Not to mention that whole improv thing was less about testing his abilities and more about wanting to get him in bed. A casual fuck with a hot guy. That was until I found out who he was, and what a pain in the ass he is.

"Well, Levi, what do you think?" Mike asks.

"Yeah." I sigh and run a hand through my hair. "Give him a read through and go from there. That kid's done nothing but surprise me so far, so what have we got to lose?"

"How fast could he be here?"

"He's in class at the main building."

Mike puts a hand on his hip and leans back to look from Nanaba who gives an encouraging shrug. Then he looks at me expectantly. "Well go get him."

"Excuse me?"

"You heard me, Levi. What have we got to lose, right? We'll move on to 9." he grunts. "Which should give the kid enough prep time for 28 if he's really as good as you say."

I send Nanaba a pointed glare, she sends back an obnoxiously bright smile.

For the record I never personally said he was that great. I believe he might be, but I can't say that with confidence seeing how this would be his absolute first time filming. Beyond a simple call back with a week prep time.

Still I have high hopes for him. It may be that the memorization is a little off, but I'm sure at this point Mike's not expecting perfection.
Even if he is, that’s not going to happen on this kind of a time crunch.

I decide to save myself some sweat by taking a golf cart to the back of the main building. Usually I don’t like using them, but it’s hot and I’m feeling lazy. I wonder how kid’s going to react. I mean, technically speaking he’s not on the clock so he has the liberty to be the same hostile brat he is every other time of day. Still, he's in class, so maybe not?

My passcard lets me into the nice and cool building. Thank God for air conditioning. The school office, so to speak, is in the back on the second floor. Because most of the classrooms and workshops are in the east wing from the 2nd to the 10th floor. Any floor above ranges from teachers to agents’ offices. Though there are a few that spill over. Such as theatre in which they spend a good amount of time in the auditorium. Or any workshop that involves coordination or physicality.

On my approach, the secretary sits up straight and starts twirling her hair.

Sorry hun, but you're not my type.

No, but tall bright eyed brats sure seem to be.

I clear my throat in attempt to keep from arguing with myself, to which she giggles.

Seriously sweetheart, that’s a little over the top.

"I’m looking for a Jaeg-?"

"I’d love to!"

“Um, actually, hun,” I say sweetly. “I’m looking for Eren Jaeger. Or Thorn. Or whatever the fuck it is.”Oops, probably shouldn’t have cussed, but what the hell? Erwin’s not here to stop me, so there. Still I take a moment to smile at the girl again. "What class is he in?"

"Oh. Um..." she starts, snapping to attention like she was on a mission from God. "Voice production, room 248."

"Thanks, hun." I wink.

As I walk away I hear her internally screeching. Comes with the territory, I suppose. Girls and guys screaming my name, chasing me down should I dare go anywhere near home. Rather what was my home for years. The ratty little lot Far, Iz, and I made our own until after the day Iz dragged me to that stupid open set. After Erwin recruited me, I would bike from there everyday to the studio. Obviously we relocated as soon as I had enough to move us all. It’s not even that I want to go to that hellhole again, but to be able to see Mrs. Bella or Eddie again without being swarmed or followed would be nice.

I wonder how Eren feels about having to leaving home behind. I mean after this whole program. After he makes it; will he be alright knowing there are some things he'll have to say goodbye to? Some simplicity he takes for granted now?

I hope so, because should today be a success, his career is is going to be jump started dramatically.

The door opens right as my knuckles are raised to knock. A little blond gasps wide eyed. She manages to squeak a small sorry before throwing someone a worried look over her shoulder.

And who should that someone be, but the very person I am looking for.
The room falls silent. Dead silent. I would actually be a little freaked out if it weren't for the award winning glare being burned into me from across the room.

How cute.

At least I'm not the only one easily wound by the other's presence.

Then again, I'm sure he's like this with everyone. Hot headed, short tempered, but over all incredibly adorkable.

Probably, but it must just be on fucking steroids when it comes to me.

I push that glare further by leaning against the door frame with folded arms and a smug smirk. His jaw clenches and by the looks of it he's biting the inside of his cheek.

Oh, restraint? Maybe the kid's maturing.

But more likely he doesn't want to put on a show for his peers.

"I'll be needing Jaeger for the remainder of the day." I state with as much charm as I can muster. Only breaking eye contact to look to the professor and add, "If that's okay with you, of course."

Might as well make her think she has a say. Wouldn't want to undermine her in front of her kiddies.

Awestruck and shell shocked she nods. The other student's eyes set onto Eren pure hatred.

So I take it he hadn't told his peers about us.

How sad. I'm hurt.

When I turn my attention back to the brat I see he hasn't moved a muscle.

I keep my cheery demeanor, because that's what's expected of me, but I can feel the vein in my head pulsing. I try so hard not to settle into a deadly stare. Not to march over to him and pull him by the ear. So hard because he still isn't fucking moving!

The students are starting to shake their shock; which means that any moment I will be swarmed. In fact they're murmuring amongst themselves now. All it takes is for one of them to start toward me and everyone else will follow.

Nope, like hell I'm dealing with that.

I march to stand beside him at the table he shares with three other people. His azurite eyes stay trained on me all the while I scoop up the notebook and pencil in front of him. Still he doesn't move.

Fuck it. We're close enough that it doesn't matter. I let my features fall into my best scowl. His eyes widen a bit, clearly taken off guard. Well, clearly he didn't think I would take off my mask in front of a crowd. Guess again bucko, I'm not afraid to-what the fuck? Fucking brat settles back in his chair, arms crossed, and nods with a challenge glimmering in those impossible eyes. Damn it all to hell, this ear pulling thing is going to happen!

"MISTER LEVI, SIR, CAN I HAVE AN AUTOGRAPH!?"

Before I even have a chance to move toward him, I close my eyes and let out an exasperated sigh.

Shit.
Annnd here comes the crowd. All of them shouting over each other, and as much as I'd like to hightail it out of here I know I can't. I don't have time for this shit, but I'm not going to be a dick about it either.

We need to leave before the rest of the classes hear them. So I look down at Eren who looks utterly horrified, and I grab his hand.

"Thank you," I start as I pull Eren through the starstruck crowd as fast as possible. "But sadly I just don't have the time to get through everyone. I will come back though!"

Do they listen? Do they take in my words and settle the fuck down?

Of course they don't. They never do. Which is exactly why we have security.

The swarm thickens, pushing us toward the corner instead of the door.

Just as the situation turns dire, I feel Eren tighten his grip on my hand and suddenly I'm being pulled through the door.

Then we run. We run because the crowd follows us into the hallway. Classroom doors pop open, heads peek out, and the swarm grows in numbers.

This is why I hate people. They're fucking animals void of reason.

Eren is at my side, eyes blown open with surprise. So I quicken my pace and pull him with me.

Well I guess not all of them.

Just most of them.

There's a stairwell at the end of the hall, and a bathroom just before it. We're just far enough ahead that if we ducked into the bathroom, they'd probably assume we'd taken the stairs.

Maybe they aren't that dumb, but its worth a try.

I don't so much as slow my pace before I turn into the bathroom, tugging an unprepared kid with me. Thank fucking God the door opened inside instead of out.

"Fuck!" he gasps right before completely toppling to the floor. With me trapped underneath. I'm expecting him to pop right up. To blush and stammer faults, but he doesn't.

Actually he cages me in with his hands on either side of my head using them to prompt himself up.

Well, this is interesting.

"What are you doing here?" he spits. Literally. Disgusting little shit. "I don't work today."

"No you don't." I start. Creeping my hand to the back of his neck, he instantly goes rigid. It's funny, really, how I have such an affect on someone who claims to hate me. His eyes quickly flash to my lips, but he attempts to hide it behind a glare. Cute. Then, in one swift move, I drag him down and reverse our positions. "Not for me anyway. But trust me, kid, you're going to want to take this job."

I push myself up in search of a mirror to straighten out all my creases and unruffle my hair.

Better.
The kid shuffles to his feet and searches my eyes through our reflections.

"So, what exactly *is* this job?"

I smirk. Just like baiting a fish.

"How would you feel about taking on a role for a call out?"

I turn to see him gaping like an idiot, and in an instant he turns into an excited little puppy.

“Wait, are you serious?” He asks, completely confounded.

“Dead.” I answer with indifference and head straight to the door. I hear him shuffling behind me. After peeking my head out to make sure the coast is clear, I motion the kid to follow me as I start in a jog to the elevator.

We are on a time crunch after all, and as good as he is he still might not be able to pull this off on such short notice. It would be difficult for even a lot of more experienced actors.

The best we can do is *try*.

10 minutes later, we’re in my trailer. A fairly massive mobile apartment. There’s a small table and chairs on one side. Across from which is the kitchen. A full sized, black refrigerator is surrounded by cabinets and the counter branches off beside that. On the far side is my bedroom of sorts. The bed is visible, but there’s a breaker with a flat screen mounted on the wall. Across from that is the velvet black couch.

Eren has mounted himself in one corner of it, eagerly going through the script I handed him. That is, of course, after giving me hell over how excessive this whole space was. Well let him scoff now, but if he ever has to travel to location for weeks at a time I bet he’d have a change of heart on modesty. I have kept busy thus far by wiping every visible surface down and pouring us both an iced tea. As I set our glasses on the coffee table I see him murmuring to himself with the script next to him and a notebook prompted on his bent knees. His eyes keep flashing from the script to his paper where he scribbles madly and continues mumbling.

Well, everyone has their own methods.

And his seems to work damn well.

“Levi?” He starts shyly after another few minutes. I hum into my raised (and almost empty) glass. “Um...could you, like…”

“Out with it, Sparky.”

He takes a deep breath, closes his eyes, and physically swallows his pride. “Could you please run through these lines with me?”

I smirk into my dangerously low glass.

Please?

So he does have manners.

“Okay, where do you want to start? Beginning of 28, middle of 8, or 11?”

“Ummm, I really only have been able to get through 28.” He says in defeat.
“Good. 28 is the most important scene to be ready for.” At that he perks up a bit.

The first few times we run it he still uses the script to read from. At least, we’re running lines from his script. The partially omitted one. Don’t think I haven’t been debating with myself on whether or not I should let him in on Mike’s little trick, but as we keep running the scene I think he might actually pull it off. Then he needs the script less and less and before we know it it’s 12:30 and Mike will want to see him before deciding if we’ll do the scene.

The closer to the soundstage we get, the more the poor kid shakes. So I stop just before the entrance and grab him by his bicep.

I start with a reassuring squeeze on his arm. “It’s going to be fine.” He looks away, takes a big gulp, and offers a less than convincing nod. I duck my head to catch his lowered gaze. “Eren,” His azurite eyes stab into me and, Goddammit, I don’t like seeing him look so defeated. “You are going to go in there and fucking rock it. Okay? This is not a pep talk, I’m just telling you what you and I already know. You can do this. Don’t get in your own way.”

Keeping eye contact this time, he nods. Good. I let go immediately and lead the way in.

“So,” Mike starts, marching straight to us once he catches my eye. “You must be Eren.”

He doesn’t sound impressed. In fact he sounds completely skeptical.

“Y-y-yes, sir.” Eren stammers. Mike takes a deep breath through his nose and smiles in content. Yeah, just another strange kink he has. Smelling people then smiling. It’s a bit creepy, really.

“Well then, shall we?” He gestures to the set. I guess he passed Mike’s little scent test. Eren gulps nervously again and strides into the makeshift world of Goliath. “So, Eren,” Mike starts again, leaning forward with his hands folded underneath his chin. “Here’s how it’s going to go. First I want you to go through something you already know like the back of your hand. Could be a monologue, a song, it could be the fucking Hokie Pokie for all I care. Just do something to shake your nerves. Then Levi and Frieda will run through lines with you, and if all goes well, we’ll get blocking set.”

Leave it to Mike to see the obstruction nerves can cause and try to evade them. Though, the kid seems completely lost. He actually looks to me in a panic.

Shit, kid, I don’t know what to offer you.

*You can’t just leave him high and dry.*

Internally groaning, I reluctantly shuffle up to him.

“Hey,” I start lowly. “What’s wrong?”

“I don’t know if I can do this.” He whispers back.

“Of course you can. Nobody here is going to judge you.” I start, but I can tell he’s not taking it. I sigh and place a reassuring hand on his shoulder. “Listen, fear is nothing more than a state of mind.”

His eyes widen tremendously, as if I just uttered the deepest secrets of the cosmos. Then there’s a tiny twitch in his lips and his features soften. “Mikasa always says that.”

*Mother always said that.*
With a sharp inhale, I retract my hand immediately and advert my eyes before turning away.

Of course.

Of fucking course.

Couldn’t go one fucking day without that guilt. Without that heartache.

That's what this is really all about, though, right?

Redemption.

Forgiveness.

Acceptance.

Even if they're all impossible feats, I owe it to us both to try. Once again, it's the best I can do.

So maybe I need to keep reminding myself of that. Of why the brat's with me. Instead of spending my mornings thinking about him. About how his stupid day's going. About his obnoxious being. His smart assness. His actual ass.

No I need to purge myself of thoughts of such nature.

Eren stirs my attention with a clear of his throat.

"Well, everyone, I'm Eren. So...um...nice to meet you all? I mean I know some of you already, but, um," he rubs the back of his neck nervously. "Yeah. Anyway, I have had a song stuck in my head for the last couple of days, so I guess I'll just do that. Feel free to tune me out if my voice upset your eardrums. I won't be offended."

That earns him a few chuckles and a bigger audience. I admit, I'm intrigued. I enjoyed listening to him sing during the preliminary round of auditions. He saunters off the set toward Erd who has a bemused look on his face. He merely moves over and offers up his sound board. What is happening here? Why does Erd know something I don't. Eren smiles coyly, centers himself behind the soundboard, and flicks his fingers across the screen. I can tell by taking a quick sweep of the space that he's captured the audience's attention. He cracks his fingers and settles them over the screen just like a piano.

“I guilty stand before you, I know I misbehaved. I never meant to hurt you."

He bobs his head to the beat of the song. I'm impressed that he can actually play off a smooth touchscreen surface.

“I humbly beg forgiveness;. Hope that my soul be saved, and if I had a final wish, pretty miss, I would only ask this...”

A devious smirk takes up residence on his face, along with hooded eyes. A dangerous combination to my current purging of thoughts.

“I want you to do me with a tommy gun, baby, with a tommy gun, baby, do me. Gun tommy.”

Hot damn.

“If you have to kill me use a tommy gun, baby, use a tommy gun, baby, use me. Gun tommy.”
His brow furrows in concentration while his fingers continue dancing over the screen. A few sour notes sounds and each one earns a flinch from the piano man himself. Still he holds my awe because, damn, I was not expecting this at all.

“There ain't no use appealing. Your justice will prevail. This time I must be punished.”

“No lawyer, no attorney, no chance of breaking bail. So would you grant this final wish, pretty miss, won't you save a little kiss?”

By now the majority of the crowd has started swaying this way and that or at the very least bobbing their heads to his upbeat melody.

“I want you to do me with a tommy gun, baby, with a tommy gun, baby, do me. Gun tommy. If you have to kill me use a tommy gun, baby, use a tommy gun baby, use me. Gun tommy”

Cue piano solo.

“I guilty stand before you. I know I misbehaved, I never meant to hurt you.” He chants lowly in tune with the now hushed music. “I humbly beg forgiveness, hope that my soul be saved, and if I had a final wish, pretty miss, I would only ask this…”

Full volume again.

“I want you to do me with a tommy gun, baby, with a tommy gun, baby, do me. If you have to kill me use a tommy gun, baby, use me.”

“I want you to do me with a tommy gun, baby, with a tommy gun, baby, do me. Gun tommy. If you have to kill me use a tommy gun, baby, use a tommy gun, baby! ...Gun tommy!”

The small crowd claps. Frieda, Gunter, and Nanaba cheer. Aurou looks as though he’s pretending not to be impressed, and Erd gives the kid an encouraging pat on the back.

I can’t help but crack a smile. A tiny one, but I can feel it in the corners of my mouth. And I don’t think I can shake it.

Mike looks mildly impressed, and I know exactly what he’s thinking. He’s thinking, sure the kid can perform, but can he act?

Good question, I sure as hell hope he can. I mean I know he can, I just don’t know if he will. The only thing standing in his way is his own confidence. Hopefully he was able to gain some and get all his nerves out with that song.

"So, Eren," Mike starts. "Show me what you've got."

"Right." The kid's smile droops a bit as his mind begins to overthink the situation. Then he's all sunshine and rainbows and completely faking it. I know because I do the same fucking thing every fucking day when I'm not in the comfort of those I don't have to be fake with. Because this is Hollywood, and too much assholishness will only ever fuck you over. And not in the good way.

"Where do you want me?"

"On set would be fine. Levi, Freida," Mike says while gesturing us to our places on set. Right now we're just reading through in the office, then, assuming everything is spot on, we'll film in the interrogation room. That is built, fully enclosed, attached to the larger set, and is actually accessible through a hall turning out of the office.
We take our places. Eren chooses a chair behind a desk and slouches comfortably. Freida sits across from him with her hands folded on the surface of the table. I choose to lean against the desk behind him, completely out of his sight. I don't know why per say. Just seems like the place the captain would be in this situation. Gaging the suspect as objectively as possible while still having the option to interject.

"So, Tom," Freida, as Kat, begins in a friendly, almost conversational tone. "Can I call you Tom?"

Eren shrugs. "Sure."

"Good. So, Tom, you were acquainted with Veronica Spatche, correct?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"How would you describe your relationship?"

He takes a deep breath and runs a hand through his hair.

"Well, we were close."

"That's what I've heard from her friends and family," Freida begins sweetly. "But what I want to know is exactly how close you were."

"Well, ah..." He starts before twisting his chair slightly to hold my eyes with an almost embarrassed look over his shoulder. "We were...um...intimate."

The fuck is this kid doing?

"I see." Freida says with a skeptical look between us.

"So, why did you kill her?" I casually interject. Originally I was planning on saying it to get him to face me, but since the brat's already adjusting his chair so that he is centered between us, I guess there's no need.

"Whoa," He starts with hands up in defense. "Kill her!?" He looks frantically between us. "You think she was killed?" I raise my eyebrows at Freida's character, silently asking her how she felt about his response. She offers a tiny shrug. Meanwhile Eren let's out a long shaky breath following his gaze to the floor. "Who would want to kill her?"

He asks it more to himself than anyone else.

Hm interesting take on that line, Sparky.

"That's what we're going to find out." Freida answers slowly with a pinch of confusion etched on her brow.

I can't quite read where he's going with his body language. He's hunched over with his elbows on his knees and keeps fiddling his thumbs.

What is he doing with this character?

He's making himself seem weak.

I expected him to make his character cockier. After all he's supposed to be a star athlete at the University. Which really wouldn't be too far a stretch since, luckily, the last couple of weeks training have filled Eren out a bit. I know that's the way Topinic was going to play it. That's the way Mike
wrote it.

Instead, though, he's acting like an embarrassed band geek. A guilt ridden one at that.

I only hope Mike can go with his take.

An awkward silence settles. Eren keeps his eyes to the floor in front of him. Twiddling his thumbs and tapping his feet, he stretches the silence further.

"Jessica was murdered." He states blankly, bringing his entire body to a still. No more fiddling, even his breaths have become shallow and even. With his gaze still fixed to the floor, he wears a mixture of sorrow and fury, and when he next speaks his tone is crisp with both. "And you think I did it."

That was supposed to be a question. Freida, taken off guard, looks at me for some kind of cue, and I can't tell if it's Freida looking to me or Kat looking to her captain. I can't offer her anything either way. Because my eyes snap over to a kid staring at me. Fuck, he looks broken. The fury in his eyes having melted away into pits of defeat. I feel for him. The captain feels for him too. We both know that look. Have both worn the same heavy gaze. This kid is...something. I'm not sure what. I can't tell if he's innocent, guilty, lying, or genuine. I know he's supposed to end up innocent. Supposed to be set up at the perp by being a dissociated ass. But they way this fucking kid is playing it out is throwing me off. As the captain, I don't even know how to respond. Luckily it's not my line to be delivered. It's Freida's, but before she can utter even a syllable he-still holding my eyes-interjects.

"Why would you think that?"

I regard him with scrutiny. My lids are heavy and my features sharpened. I can't read him and I don't like it.

"Well-" Freida stumbles. She looks at me with with confusion. Her eyes flick over to Mike. Mine stay locked on Eren, who now has shifted his, broken and pleading, to Freida. Then Mike grunts. A tell tale sign that he's seen all he wants.

Good or bad, he's done with it.

The take is over.

Pack up and move on.

The sound stage is still silent. Freida looks at Eren with surpise before awkwardly shuffling off the set. Murmurs are exchanged. Some impressed, some less than. If I were to look around at them I'm sure I would see the same look Freida gave him reflected on most of their faces.

Yet I can't.

I can't tear my eyes away from Eren.

He's captivated me in some kind of awe.

Because not many people have been able to catch me off guard. Not many people have been able to make me shift my interpretation of a scene. Make me think as the captain in the moment.

Whether the kid gets in or not, I'm impressed.
Chapter End Notes

What can I say, I have a major kink for musically gifted Eren.

*Tommy Gun, Royal Republic*

Also if you so which to follow me on Tumblr, here's my blog: [sgt-jaeger-meister](http://sgt-jaeger-meister.tumblr.com)
Interrogation

Chapter Summary

Eren proves his skill to Mike and the crew, and joins his friends afterwards to blow off some steam.

Chapter Notes

Heya!
First and foremost, thank you, thank you, thank you all so much to every single one of you who have read or even opened this fic. It really means the world to me, as does every comment/kudo, really truly from the bottom of my heart's heart THANK YOU! I'm sure you all are unfortunately used to my 'post it when I can' schedule that's been happening these last few chapters. Sorry about that, I am really trying to get it done on time. And try again I shall for the next chapter! Anyway, anyone remember Krista???
Man, where the hell has she been? What about the other 104th crew?
Well I missed them, and though it's still not everyone (yet) I am happy with how I have them here.
Please, please, please give me feedback if you have any to give. I want to make sure I'm being consistent, and try as I might, mistakes tend to slip through.

"Guilty or not guilty?"

"Wha-
"Answer the question, kid." Mike demands as he leans back in the chair with folded arms.
Immediately after the read through he brought me to the interrogation room they use for the show.
He sat me down across the cold metal table and took the opposite seat.

Fuck me, this feels just like an actual interrogation. Not that I know what those feel like....

Except that I do and I promised myself never to be in that kind of situation again, yet here I am.

In the same kind of ripped jeans and ragged shirt. Same ol attitude and inaptitude.

Same but fundamentally different.

Obviously, I mean this is just an interview of sorts.

Still...funny how things turn out.

Hopefully this time will be in my favor.

"Guilty" I answer firmly. Mike lets his chair fall on all fours and follows that momentum to lean across the table.
"What makes you say that?"

"W-well," I start. My tongue tastes like sand and I gulp nervously to moisten it up a bit. "It, um, just feels like it's on his mind a lot. In the script I mean."

"Hmm." He leans back again, conveniently casting half his face in the shadow. Even in that I see his scrutiny. "Explain."

"Um, well, as I was reading over the script I just felt his responses too calculated. Too set up to be merely a Red Herring."

"But you know he doesn't end up the perp."

"Yes, but that doesn't mean he didn't do it." I almost snark. He raises his eyebrows. Shit, I don't know why I even started down this road. I should have just gone through the scene in the obvious manner. Because I'm probably just insulting his writing and-shit I'm screwed.

"Well if that's the case, why did you so convincingly play him up as an innocent and hurt puppy? Explain that to me."

Really? He’s practically giving me another opportunity to stick my foot firmly in my mouth. I gulp and try very hard to think over what I'm going to say. "So, consider that Thomas is guilty. And as written, all evidence points to him. What if that’s part of it? Like what if he knows all that’s stacked against him because he put it there? It’s all a part of his game, so wouldn't he do everything to act like he's innocent? Sincerely enough to have the viewers believing it. Obviously the Captain doesn't, but maybe that's what makes it fun."

"I don't understand."

"Okay," I start by matching him and leaning my elbows on the table. "So if Thomas is the murderer, then he's spent over two years convincing everyone around him, including Veronica and her family that he was someone else entirely. And if that's the case, how hard would it be to play up that same image to the cops. Considering the crime and the commitment it would take for him to carry it out, he would have to be completely dissociated. So maybe his entire motivation was boredom? Maybe he wants to see how far he can go. How much he can get away with."

I finish feeling confident in my explanation. That is until we are submerged into silence. Mike just regards me intensely with one hand cupped on his chin.

"Interesting approach." He grunts. His eyes fall intently on the table's surface. After a few silent and tense minutes-I repeat minutes-his eyes shoot widely like he's gotten some kind of revelation. When he speaks it’s through a mischievous gleam."Then again, maybe it's not his first time."

What?

"Now I'm confused, sir."

"Eren," he starts, casting me a satisfied and dark grin. "I want you to try something for me."

Ominous as fuck.

... 

I fidget, trying my best to look completely nervous and awkward. A task I’d have no trouble with as myself, but right now I’m not myself. And Thomas is anything but nervous. He’s cunning and has
been looking forward to this for weeks. To stand in front of his hunter. To make a fool of him. Yes that is Thomas’s real motive here. What my real motive is. I want to watch him let his guard down before I attack.

"So, Tom," Freida, as Kat, begins in a mock friendly tone. "Can I call you Tom?"

No you bitch. I shrug. "Sure."

"Good. So, Tom, you were acquainted with Veronica Spatche, correct?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"How would you describe your relationship?"

I take a deep breath and run a hand through my hair. Then I chance a glance in the two way mirror to my beloved Captain and hold his eyes through my line.

"Well, we were close."

"That's what I've heard from her friends and family," Freida begins sweetly. "But what I want to know is exactly how close you were."

"Well, ah..." I start, averting my eyes out of embarrassment. "We were..um...intimate."

"I see." Freida says.

"What do you see, Detective Daroso?" I ask with accusation. Here we go with the defensive concern. "Why is it necessary to know the details of our relationship? How could that be helpful in finding her!?"

Go for the bait! Test me.

Though I can plainly see I have taken her completely off guard. This isn't in the script, it wasn't rehearsed. I'm just going off what Mike told me.

_Do what feels right._

"What I see is a slimy brat who thinks he can get away with murder." Levi interjects without missing a beat. Impressive and incidentally works in saving his partner from shock.

"Whooa," I start, jumping to my feet with my hands up in defense. "Murder!?" I take my time to look frantically between them with my fingers pulling at my roots. Finally we're getting to the good stuff. "You think she was killed?" I let out a long shaky breath and drop my hands to my side. "Who would want to kill her?"

I direct that question to the Captain with my best puppy dog eyes.

"You." He answers clearly unimpressed with my act. Well I'll just have to up my game a bit. "Me? Why would I-" I start with a bite, but cut off with a whimper.

"Jealousy." Um...not the line I anticipated, but No. "Anger." Nope. "Pity." Well, I pity the mind of the common, so kind of. "Hell maybe you were bored." Bingo Bango, motherfucker. "I've heard about a thousand different reasons why, but at the end of the day the victim is still dead."

My heart is hammering and I'm visibly shaky. Yet I keep my eyes set. Try everything in my power to
keep them focused on the Captain. I need him to know that I’m in control. That his suspicions may be right, but there is nothing he can do about it. Nobody else will see it but he.

“Veronica is dead.” I state with a hollow tone. I need them to see that I am shocked. That I am scared, angry perhaps. Even though I am contrarily exhilarated. I look directly into his cold eyes, holding my own with a glint of malice, then I let the rest of my being fall into a state of utter defeat. After all, I am supposed to be heartbroken over my sweet little Veronica. He regards me at first with pity playing on his face, but almost instantly recognizes my guise. He barely cocks his head and narrows his eyes. It’s almost too bad he won’t be able to do anything about what he sees. It would make this game more interesting. Who knew playing with fire could be so intoxicating? “And you think I did it.”

“Well,” Frieda interjects, momentarily breaking my eye contact with Levi. “That’s what we’re here to find out.” Levi disappears back to watching me in the corner. My eyes follow him through the use of the two way mirror. I’m toying with him, and, judging by the way he lifts his chin, he knows it. “Where were you July 24 between the hours of 5 PM and 9PM?”

“Um, at work?” I answer distantly. My hand rests on the back of my neck while I divert my head to the floor. “I-I-I must have been.”

“Is there anyone who can verify that?” Freida asks with sincere concern in her voice. Looks like I have one detective buying my act.

“Yeah, my manager.” I answer again, this time lifting my head and hunching my shoulders to rest my elbows on my knees. “I have Wednesdays and Saturdays off, those are the days I spend with Nica.” I stop abruptly and physically try to swallow my words. “I mean, spent with Nica. Every other day of the week I work the mid shifts at Tony’s Bar.”

“And about what time do you get off at Tony’s?”

“5:30-6?” I strain. “Just.” I sigh into my palm. Conveying that my grieving mind is having trouble focusing. “-depends on how busy we are.”

“I can understand that.” Frieda nods sweetly. I flash a glance at Levi staring at me through the reflection. Clearly he’s calculating my responses. “What about after work? Do you have anyone to attest to your whereabouts?”

“My sister. I live with her.”

“And you didn’t make any stops on your commute from work to home?”

“Not that I can recall. If I do it’s only for gas, but I usually only have to do that on Tuesdays.”

A knock resonates from the two-way mirror. I know that knock. I’ve been waiting for that knock. It’s a knock that says loud and proud that they’ve got nothing. I’m getting released.

“We’ll be checking on those alibis, Mr. Clancy.”

“So-” I start, turning in my chair to look between Levi and Frieda. “Does that mean I can leave?”

“Yes,” She says simply as she gathers her papers and walks to the door. Stopping in the doorway, she turns back and smiles sweetly once more. “At this time we have no grounds to keep you in custody. You’re free to go.”

At the click of the door, Levi pushes off from the wall. I crumble into my hand prompted up on the
table and move my head in it. Pretending to shake myself from shock, when I feel a cold hand on
my right shoulder and breath on my left cheek. My heart stops in time with my breathing. Shivers run
down my spine and my eyes snap open to our reflections. This isn’t part of the scene. The scene ends
with him following Frieda out without a word. What the fuck is he doing? Levi is also staring at me
through our reflection, head level with mine as he stands close enough that my ear brushes against
his hair. When he speaks I can feel the rumble of his voice in my chest. In character or out, this feels
too close for comfort. Then the hand on my shoulder squeezes hard enough to elicit a small wince.
“Don’t even bother running, no matter where you are I will catch you.”

“CUT!” Mike declares. “Great job! I want to try some different angles, but in the meantime y’all can
go ahead and take 5.”

I sigh in anticipation of the removal of Levi’s hand; only it doesn’t come. He’s straightened himself
up, but his hand is still gripping my shoulder. I awkwardly half shrug to get it off and he takes the
hint. His hand falls away, but it takes its time sliding across my shoulders. A finger even brushes the
hair at the base of my head. Shivers run down my spine again and I try my best to seem unaffected
by it. Then in a moment he’s gone. Turned to find his seat I imagine. I let out a low shaky breath and
run both hands through my hair.

Shake it off, Jaeger. It doesn't mean anything.

I jump up from my seat, and Goddamn my ass is numb from that thing!

Better from the chair than-


Not even finishing that thou-foot meet table leg.

Face meet floor.

Or more accurately hands prepare to be crushed under my weight! Because I do manage to catch
myself right before my nose would have crunched into skull.

Fucking hell. I really do have the grace of a one-eyed, peg-legged goose on acid.

“Immokay. Immokay.” I mumble after regaining vertical status. Levi gives me an over the shoulder
glance coupled with his signature raised eyebrow. My cheeks flush and I offer up my best scowl.
The tiniest hint of concern is etched in his brow and I try to iron that out with my glare.

Bastard.

Who the hell does he think he is? Planting horrific thoughts in my head. Making me trip. Being
concerned. As if he would care if my face shattered on the concrete. Who’s he kidding?

Definately not you.

Right! Exactly and...wait a minute that was fucking sarcasm. Well fuck you conscious. Fuck you.

My stomach growls right on queue calling my attention to it. Now I don’t know if it’s the fact that I
desperately need a distraction from my current train of thoughts or that I haven’t eaten since 1 am this
morning, but I set heart shaped eyes on the buffet table regardless.

Finger sandwiches here I come!
“Wow, Eren!” Frieda intercepts me on my trek to the table of wonders and sanctified distraction. “You did great for a first take! I’m impressed, and can’t wait to do another scene with you!”

“Um-” I start rubbing the back of my neck nervously. Damn. Compliments. What the hell am I supposed to do with them? “Th-thanks.”

She accepts my response and turns toward the table herself.

Phew. I hate it when people do that. I can’t take compliments. I don’t know why. It just makes me feel unworthy, I guess? I don’t know, but I think that’s bacon.

Holy Mother of Ham, it is bacon!

Sure it’s smothered between these red and green things. I think they’re called lettuce and tomatoes?

It’s bacon nonetheless.

Nothing like artery clogging meat to take attention away from picturing another type of...

My eyes flick up to Levi who is slouched awkwardly in his seat.

You know what?

I’ve lost my appetite.

...

By the time we wrap up it’s a little past the halfway mark of my last class. Mike told me to come back to do the other scenes because he wants to review my role again. So they’ve moved on.

K-Rista: Hey Eren! I have ur bag. Do u want me to meet u or I can bring it w me tomorrow?

Aw what a sweetheart.

Seriously if not for her about half the motherfuckers in my classes would have had their faces beaten in by now. She keeps me level-headed.

But here’s my delima: I could just wait for Levi to finish, earn some more hours, rake in a few brownie points with Mike; or I duck out and savor what precious time I would have away from Levi. Excluding classes of course because there are a couple that I’d rather be with him.

“Oi, Sparky!” Ah, yes, thinking of the Devil incarnate, he’s making his way over to me now.

“What is it, sir.” I ask through a very strained smile. All the shit he’s put me through today has caught up with me. Starting from when he woke me up at the asscrack of dawn to run 3 fucking miles with him; to barging into my classroom and essentially ruining any comfort I had made there; to throwing me into the fucking lion’s den with nothing more than my looks and a wooden sword.

True I made it through that with flying colors, and maybe I should be grateful to him for giving me this opportunity in the first place, but fuck it. Another time perhaps, now I prefer to be petty about things. Besides he’s also found a way to invade my thoughts and completely violate them.

*Which is his fault, right?*

Abso-fucking-lutely.
“Well,” He starts, narrowing in on the tenseness of my entire being. “I was going to offer you a full shift, but it looks like you’re ready to pounce, pup.”

Pup!? Really?

Goddammit, why did I go and agree to be proffessional with him?

WWAD?

‘You solve conflicts with words, Eren, and I mean words not laced with sarcasm.’

Okay, Armin, I’ll try it your way. “Not at all, sir.”

“Oh?” He replys while folding his arms and leaning back. His face remains impassive, but the fucker’s eyes are glistening with amusement. The way his lids are hooded over them holds me in a challenge.

*Keep it together, Jaeger.*

“I mean, I would love to stay,” I start, and, fuck, every word out of my mouth tastes bitter. “But I need to get the things I left behind. You know in class. When you stole me away.”

“Is that what I did now?”

“Yes.”

“Hm.”

Ass, don’t Hmm me. “But I do need to get my things, so if you’ll just let me go, Master, I-”

What the hell just came out of my mouth? Levi’s eyebrows shoot up to his hairline and he snorts into a cupped hand over his mouth. “I-I-”

“Master, huh?” He asks through a smile that he is trying in vain to cover with his hand.

“I-I-” I don’t fucking know! My cheeks are red hot, my throat has practically closed, and my tongue feels like sandpaper.

“You know, I thought you didn’t like the whole pet name thing.”

“I don’t!”

“Oh, clearly you do if you’re calling me Master.”

“I didn’t mean it like that, pervert!”

“Sure you didn’t, Sparky.” He starts slowly before giving me a wink and turning to walk away. “I’ll see you later, Eren.”

Prick.

I turn on my heel and march out of the warehouse and into the hot sun.

Fucking pet kink.

Fucking smiling at me like that.
Who does he think he’s kidding? He doesn’t smile!

Fucking calling me by my actual fucking name.

How dare he!

Wait, how many times really has he actually just called me Eren?

4, I think. This would be 5.

Wow, seriously? How have I not really paid attention to that.

It’s always Brat, or Kid, or Jaeger, or fucking Sparky.

It actually sounded kind of nice.

Not that it matters how nice it may or may not have sounded.

Whatever.

I pull my Studio hat over my hair and slide my sunglasses on my nose before walking out of the studio’s gates. Better safe than sorry.

The little cafe Levi dragged me out of when we had our little spat has now become our favorite hang out. Sasha’s parents own the shop and sent me a thousand apologies about the magazine article. They have vowed to keep the paparazzi out as best they could. Giving Krista, I, even Isabel on occasion a place to be without fear of made up scandals in the following day's headlines. Plus Connie and Sasha make for good company. Especially now that I no longer ever really see any of my friends.

Which gives me an idea.

I quickly pull out my phone and press on the name at the very top of my contact list.

“HEY, GREENIE!” Armin answers cheerfully. Greenie? Aw, he misses me! “What’s going on? How are you?”

“Yes, I really do, Eren.” He sighs in the phone.

“I miss you too, Armin.” I start with a sigh myself. “Which, is why I called. Would you be able to meet me at TITAN’s for coffee or something?”

“Sure! Everything okay?”

“Yeah,” Hell yeah! I mean I just got done with FILMING. On an actual fucking set! Ah, but for now I must keep that to myself. “Just miss my best friend’s face.”

“Do you need a ride?”

“Nah, I’m almost there.” In fact I can see the familiar corner from my current vantage point in front of the studio doors.

“Okay, well it’s going to take me a while. I’m just finishing up at the office then I’ll be on my way.”

“Sounds good to me, Bleu. That’s French for Blue.”
“I know, Vert, I know.” He says with exasperation.

“Well, I guess I’ll see you when you get here?”

“Yeah, I’ll call if it’s going to be longer than expected. Did you invite Mikasa?”

“Er-” I stall. No I haven’t. Should I? I miss her to bits, but I don’t know if now’s a good time to see her. At least I don’t know if Isabel is going to show up, but she probably will because it’s Thursday and she has her last two periods free. “I didn’t think about it.”

“Well...did you want to?”

“Um, not really?”

“Dare I ask why not?”

“Isabel is probably going to meet us.”

“Oh. Well then, do you want to come over for dinner or something after?” He asks hopefully. “We could play some games! Or watch some bad movies! We still haven’t watch Kung Fury!”

“Yeah! That would be awesome! If you’re okay with giving me a ride back tonight.” I end defeatedly. I wish I didn’t even have to ask. I don’t want to go back. At least not when I’ll have to be coming from home. From the promise of my bed in my house to the bed I happen to sleep in at his house.

“Of course, Eren. I’ll see you in a bit, just heading out now.”

“Okie dokie Artichokie!”

“God, you are such a dork.”

“Yeah, but you love me anyway.”

We both hang up with a chuckle. Damn I really do miss him.

I sigh, pull the visor of my cap down further, and continue in my trek.

The tiny ding of the bell above the door welcomes me in along with a few turned heads. I drop my head a little and make my way to the little door in the back.

“C’mon Sasha!” Connie starts in as I slink into the kitchen. “I’m pretty sure I said BLT not CBR!”

“Well excuse me for not being able to read your scribbles!” Sasha rebutes with folded arms.

“Well-How could you mix those up!?”

I clear my throat and take off my sunglasses. Suddenly the light is much brighter and the general color of things are no longer tinted blue.

“Oh, Eren! Good to see you!” Sasha says exaggeratedly, using this opportunity to end their argument.

“Um you too.” I reply awkwardly. “Is Krista here?”

“Uh, I don’t know.” She says airily before whipping her head back to Connie. “Hey! Is Krista
here?"

He just rolls his eyes and starts toward me. “Yeah, yeah. She’s round back.”

Through the kitchen there opens up a small room. A lot like a private lounge actually. Apparently this little room acted as a passage to the used book store next door that was once also owned by the Blouses. I guess they were going to connect them, but decided instead that the two should stay separated. Then, of course they sold their little shop to an overpriced boutique. So this remains. Four walls, a few mismatched chairs, and reject tables from the front of the store. The walls back here are raw brick, the chairs and tables have dark wood while the floor has lighter. There’s a small window high on the wall that leads to a lovely view of the back alley lined with garbage.

The wall doubling the kitchen has a big bulletin board filled with miscellaneous things, and next to it is an old school punch clock. The kind that you actually have to push the stamp down with the time in and out.

Not the coolest of hang out places, but, hey, it's ours. Krista is sitting in a chair and leaning over a book on the table. She turns her head to the sound of our steps.

“Eren!” She starts while jumping to her feet. I spot my bag on the floor by her chair moments before her wide doe eyes obscure my vision. “Tell me everything!”

“Hello to you too, Krista.” I say, shrugging back so I have room to walk around her and plop into the chair across the table. I would like to avoid this topic. Mike told me that I couldn’t say a word to anyone until the episode airs. Don’t ask me why, but who am I to argue with a cinematic genius?

A Nobody, that’s who.

Wow, ever the confidence booster, aren’t we conscious?

“So...Why did Levi come and steal you away?” She presses, settling back into her seat but very much leaning on the table to stare me down.

“Hold up a second.” Connie starts; grabbing the back of a chair, twisting it around to sit backwards with his arms resting on the top. “Levi Ackerman, the same Ackerman that practically dragged you out of here by your ear, the same Ackerman who we have collectively decided is an ass took you out of class?”

“Yup!” Krista answers for me without removing her gaze. “Just barged right in during the middle of class. I was on my way to the bathroom, and the next thing I know people are running through the halls screaming his name and Eren is nowhere to be seen. I had to hear from Hannah that he had taken you for the rest of the day. Everyone was talking about it. Most everyone was also piss green with envy. I spent the rest of the day dodging questions about how you knew each other and why he would want you. So, Eren, I think you owe me an explanation for all this commotion.”

"Yeah, man! Spill the beans!"

I groan not so internally. Krista raises her eyebrows waiting. Fuck I don’t know what to tell them. I’m not so good at the whole thinking on my feet thing. Give me a few minutes and I can spin out a flawless story, but on the spot...no.

"Er- well." I nervously rub the back of my neck. "See, he-um..."

"Wow, really trying to get out of this one, huh?" Connie drawls sardonically.
"Fine!" Krista starts throwing her hands up in defeat. "Keep your secret. It's not like we're friends or anything."

"C'mon guys! If I could tell you I would!" I offer regretfully. Great now they know that they aren't supposed to know. Which means they're going to spend the rest of their time with me trying to guess.

"Oh so it has to be a secret. Interesting." Connie says while rubbing thoughtfully at his chin. I roll my eyes.

"Hey," Sasha starts in exasperation as she turns the corner and all but falls into a chair. She then groans and puts her head in her hands.

"Rough day?" Krista asks.

"You don't even know." She grumbles through her hands.

"It's been crazy all day." Connie adds. "Two caterings this morning and a full shop since open."

"Thank God Ymir came back when she did!"

"Ymir!?" I ask hoping to my feet. Ymir! It couldn't be my Ymir, right?

"Do you know her?"

"Maybe." I answer absentmindedly on my way back to the kitchen. Mr. Blouse has taken over for Sasha in the kitchen and various servers are coming in and out. I wait, but I don't see my Ymir. I sigh in both disappointment and relief. I mean I haven't seen her in almost a year and it would be nice to catch up, but I also know how brash she can be so it may not be ideal for her to work at our new home away from home.

"Two frozen Caramel Macchiatos stat!" A server calls while walking through the door.

On the back swing, at the barista station stands a tall brunet with her hair twisted in a signature barrette. Her eyes are hooded as she rolls them and turns her freckled face toward the server. "Yeah, yeah I heard the order."

Damn. That's definitely my Ymir.

My eyes widen and I quickly duck back into our little room.

Just how long has she been working here? How have we missed each other?

"What's with your face?" Connie asks abruptly.

"Nothing." I rush. That was a bit obvious. I clear my throat and try to nonchalantly add, "um, how long has she been working here?"

"Oh so you do know her? " Krista asks as she crosses the room to join me in the foyer. "Which one is she? Why don't you invite her back?"

"For one, she's working." Sasha jumps in for me. "And two, she's working."

"There you have it. " I gesture toward Sasha who gives a small bow.

"Well what position does she work?" Krista presses.
"Barista." Connie shrugs.

"I'll be right back." Krista declares mischievously. Before I can stop her she's marching to the front, waving to Mr. Blouse as she passes. He smiles back. Then she's out the door.

*Tch-tcha. Tchooowww. Yo list-

"This is Green" I answer my phone in a hurry. Still trying to track Krista through the beats of the swinging door. The door swings and I see her at the counter. It swings again and Ymir is leaning over it wearing a smirk and devilish eyes. It swings again and Krista is chuckling in her hands.

"Eren! Are you even listening?" Armin calls my attention back to the thing I'm holding at my ear.

"Um-yeah- sorry what were you saying?"

He sighs heavily. "Forget it, I'm almost there."

There's a short beep and I guess that ends that.

Krista returns a couple minutes later sucking down a frozen chai like that whole exchange was the most unimportant thing to happen to her. Except she's distinctly wearing a shade of pink on her cheeks.

Damn it, Ymir!

I swear to God if she scared off the one friend I've made during this whole ordeal with her raging lesbiemism, strong words will be exchanged.

“What did she say?” I ask with accusation.

“Nothing.” She answers innocently. Nice try, Blondie, but I know Ymir and she always says *something*.

“Really?” I start folding my arms. “She didn’t say anything?”

“Nope.”

“Liar.”

“Excuse me?”

“It’s Ymir, she always makes sure to leave an impression.”

“Well, I kind of mentioned you.” She admits with averted eyes. My face gets red hot. Goddammit. What did she say about me this time?

“And?”

“She just explained your relationship.” She says blandly with a shrug.

“Our what now?”

“Oh, Eren, it’s okay.” She matches my gaze with assurance. What the fuck did she tell this girl? “I *understand*.”

“This is getting interesting.” Sasha mumbles to Connie who is huddled next to her in his backward
“Yeah, who needs TV?” He leans over and replies.

I roll my eyes and hold my hands up in defeat. “You know what? I don’t wanna know.”

“It’s nothing to be ashamed of.” Krista starts again with the assurance.

I groan while running my palm over my face. “I’m sure it’s not. Just like I’m sure that whatever it was is not true.”

“She said you were still torn up about it.”

“Okay! I give! What the fuck did she tell you!?”

“Just about your breakup.”

“My what?” Panic starts to boil in my chest. My breakup. With Jean? She wouldn’t tell that to any random girl who said my name, would she?

No. Bitchy though she is, she would never do that. Not something that could hurt someone. That is if you’re on her good side. Though she did harbor Mikasa for almost a week because of me, so maybe I’m no longer in her good graces.

Krista drops her head and raises her hand to shield her words from Connie and Sasha who were leaning toward us eagerly. “I mean your guy’s breakup. She said you took it pretty rough.”

I snort loudly. _Our_ break up. As and _her_ and _I_. I can’t even hold back the laughing fit that over takes me. Tears actually brim my eyes as I try to reign it in.

Krista looks offended and the other two utterly shocked. I double over, even slide to the floor to lean against the wall because Holy Fucking Shit I cannot believe she said that!

Oh, that’s good.

That’s fucking hilarious.

“Hey, Jaegerbomb,” The lady of the hour starts while peering down at me. I’m still choking back my laughter as I stare up at her. She regards me with amusement plastered on her face. “I’m guessing you got my joke, then?”

Just like that, I’m snorting back giggles and throwing my head back on the wall. When I finally get it together, Ymir is leaning against the wall next to me with one arm hanging lazily against the wall and the other extended down to myself. I take it and immediately pull her into a hug. Which she hates, and I know it.

She squirms loose and shoves me back. I chuckle again and position a hand on my hip.

“So,” I start, giving her a thorough once over. She’s wearing the same uniform as Sasha. Which consists of a short sleeved white button down with black buttons under a fitted black vest and tucked into high waisted black shorts. Not too short of shorts, but enough to keep cool in the boiling hussle of the kitchen. “TITAN’s, huh?”

“Yup, TITAN’s.” She sighs and resumes her post against the wall.

“Hey!” Sasha stands defensively. “What do you mean _TITAN’s_?”
“Calm down, Sugarpants, we weren’t saying anything bad.”

“No, no, Sasha, seriously, just catching up.” I say with vigor.

“Catch up all you want, but leave my store out of it!” She responds by folding her arms and slamming herself back in her chair. “Besides, who’s watching to counter?”

Oh Sasha, c’mon don’t pull rank.

“On it bosslady.” Ymir responds as she turns off the wall with a mock salute. She turns far enough around to send Krista a quick wink and catches me just in time to witness my eyeroll. “Catch ya later, Jaegerbomb.”

Sasha is still huffing in her chair, Connie keeps trying to rub her back but she keep swatting him away, and Krista is adamantly sucking down her drink. Probably in hopes of countering the heat flooding her cheeks.

Huh, Krista too eh?

Maybe.

Though Ymir seems to have that effect on almost everybody. She has no problem speaking her mind and less of a problem winding people up. Girls, boys, it doesn’t really matter because she’s in it for the fun of watching them try to catch up with her. Though she is, as aforementioned, a raging lesbian.

Which is why I don’t think she had a problem dragging me out of the closet.

She has a finely tuned gaydar, and it hasn’t failed yet.

That and she’s known me for years.

Longer than I’ve known Mikasa, actually. Ymir’s also from the system. Though she wasn’t as lucky and Mikasa and I and bounced from house to house til she was legally an adult.

I was thrown into her foster home while the state was ‘figuring out what to do with me’-I.E trying to track down my good for nothing sperm donor. Of course once the finalities of my prepubescent fait were settled, I was promptly taken away and plopped in my first official foster home. The one with Mikasa.

We fell out of touch after that. Not as though we really had a say in the matter. Then came high school. Homeroom, 9th grade. She and I awkwardly forged a friendship. It grew through our four years, and oddly enough solidified after that strange day at the beach.

Friendships are strange that way. They almost just kind of happen.

Like with Krista, or Connie and Sasha. Strange circumstances brought us together and something within each of us just decided to stick with the others’.

“Eren!” All I get to see is a blur of red hair before I’m being strangled from behind.

“Isabel, please let me go.” I struggle to get out.

“Oh,” She immediately releases me. “Sorry.”

She sends me a regretful lopsided grin and crosses an arm to grab the other elbow. She’s in plain jean
capris, combat boots, and a middrift, bright orange tee shirt. A look I believe only she could pull off. The brown leather strap of her backpack crosses over her torso to said bag at her side and in no time she’s shrugging it over her shoulder and hanging on the back of one of the chairs.

Much to my surprise, I see Armin standing in the doorway behind her. He gives me a tiny wave then resumes crossing an arm over his chest to grip his opposite bicep. Looking around at everyone, who has settled comfortably into conversation about their days and what not, he looks like he feels out of place.

I ruffle my hair from the base of my head up and sigh. Well, time to initiate him into my little new crew. I cross over to him, fold my arms comfortably, slap on a smile, and join him in studying my friends.

“So…” I start. He jumps slightly at my voice before turning and gracing me with a halfhearted smile. I sigh again, dropping my arms in favor of pushing him into a chair next to Isabel who is chatting away with Krista.

“Eren, no, I really would rather not.” He mumbles, making to stand up again. I cross my arms and gesture to the table.

*Armin, just talk to them.*

He gulps and looks at me as if to say: *But I don’t have anything to say.*

I rub my hand into my forehead then drag a chair to place on the other side of him in the corner of the table.

“oOh!” Isabel turns on a dime to fix me with wide eyes. Krista sits behind her with a satisfied look on her face. Damnit, Blondie. “Levi didn’t tell me he was working with you today!”

I throw my head back and groan loudly.

Aannndd we’re back to this.

“What?” Armin joins. Shaking his nerves from the social situation to me. “Didn’t you have class today?”

“Pulled him out during second period.” Krista adds knowingly. I glare at her, she raises an eyebrow and settles over the table. “Caused quite the stir.”

“Why?” Armin asks worriedly.

“Don’t know.” Connie starts in now, re-situating in his chair to also fix me with a prompting expression. “Won’t tell us.”

“Did I miss something?” Sasha asks while looking between us in confusion.

“Eren!” Isabel squeals as she clutches her hands together and brings them to rest under her chin. “You have to tell us!”

“There’s really nothing to tell.” I push myself up and away from the table.

“Sure, Eren.” Armin rolls his eyes. “Why didn’t he just get the office to come get you for him?”

“I-er…” Excellent question, Mooshoo brain.
“I mean, why did you just go meet him? Didn't you know you were working today? Doesn’t he give you a strict schedule ahead of time?”

“Yes he does, but-” I go back to nervously scratching the back of my head. Damn him and his elephant memory! I mentioned that to him a couple weeks ago during a long rant and of course he’d pull it out of his hat right now. “It-it wasn’t exactly planned.”

“What do you mean?” Connie jumps in.

“I-”

“So, did Levi plan it?” Sasha joins.

“No, big bro’s too neurotic to be that spontaneous.” Isabel answers bluntly.

“So, what then?” Krista presses.

I’ve backed myself to the wall adjacent to the doorless doorway, and I can’t help but glance at the swinging doors across the kitchen every few seconds to the freedom beckoning me from beyond.

What is this, a group interrogation!?

“It just doesn’t make any sense.” Armin starts to himself. “Why would he-Oh” He looks up at me thoughtfully with a question of _was it what I think it was?_ in his eyes, and I have no doubt that he’s put two and two together. Well, Mike never said anything about lying if someone figured it out so I give him the tiniest of nods. Then an gaping grin appears on his face along with wide eyes sparkling with excitement, and I hope to God nobody else picks up on it. They don’t because they’re all too busy throwing random questions at me.

“Did he take you out?” Connie shrugs out his question, clearly pulling at straws, but it manages to silence everyone in the room. Myself included.

Take me out?

Like a date?

“Connie what in the hell would make you ask such a ridiculous question?” I snap, perhaps a hair too defensively. Isabel squeaks and looks like she’s about to burst at the seams. Sasha is leaning on the table completely, rapidly looking between me and everyone else. Connie has relaxed back, leaving only one arm resting on the back of the chair, and fixes me with raised eyebrows. Armin looks like he’s sat on a pincushion, but doesn’t want anyone to know. And Krista, my lovely little Blond angel, sits back with folded arms and arched eyebrows.

“Well, did he?” She asks matter-a-factly.

“NO!” I throw out my arms in exasperation. My eyes are as wide as they’ll go and my too the best of my ability my features are screaming _ARE YOU FUCKING KIDDING ME?_

Suddenly Isabel deflates with a sigh. Her eyes fall to the table’s surface and she clicks her tongue in what sounds an awful lot like disappointment. I look at her through squinted eyes. What was that for?

Everyone else follows her lead and relax into defeat. All exchanging knowing looks.

“Am I missing something?” I ask, my voice hitching slightly.
“Well,” Isabel starts carefully. “It’s just that...you know-”

No I sure as hell don’t. Which is exactly what I convey as I cross my arms and begin tapping my foot impatiently. My eyebrows have never been higher and I realize my jaw has clenched itself.

They’re treading on thin ice and they don’t even know it.

*Why are you so upset by it anyway?*

Because it’s fucking disgusting.

*Is that why you’re so offended?*

Yes.

*Not because you’ve dreamt along the lines of the same thing?*

I don’t need to defend myself to myself, Okay!?

“What?” I ask, gesturing them to explain themselves. "I know what?"

“Eren, just the way you talk about him sometimes…” Krista adds.

“Seems like there’s some serious pent up frustration between you two.” Connie shrugs blatantly. Yeah, well I can see that. I mean there is. I fucking hate the man. Connie leans on the back of the chair again to look me dead in the eye before wriggling his eyebrows suggestively and adding in a low tone, “Sexually.”

Connie Springer, you are a dead man!
Consequences of Tomorrow

Chapter Summary

The Trio Unites!
For bad movies, bonding, and booze.
And for Eren, booze always leads to trouble.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“GETOFFME!!! I DIDN’T MEAN IT!”

“EREN BACK OFF!”

I hear them, but I’m still seering. I jumped across the table and wrapped my hands in Connie’s pressed white collar literally seconds after he ended that sentence.

Shaking him and struggling to get my hands around his throat, I thrash. Armin and Isabel have seized me by the waist and are slowly succeeding in pulling me back.

“Jesus, dude!” Connie exclaims as soon as he’s able to get to his feet and back away from me. “It was a fucking joke!”

I keep on trying to claw my way across the table, but a strong hand grips me by the collar of my shirt and pulls me back with such force that I end up hitting the bulletin board on the wall behind me. I’m about to jump to my feet and start on the motherfucker who just threw me, but am halted by that very person. Ymir stares daggers down at me. Hip cocked, arms crossed, chin up, arched brow, and ‘don’t even think about it’ written all over her face. I take my sweet time glaring back at her before I give and deflate. At that sight, Armin and Isabel sigh and both decide to lean back on the touching edges of the two tables I was climbing over. Thereby collapsing their weight onto the table which, of course, makes it unbalanced and they both come crashing down. Isabel to the hardwood, and Armin on top of her. There’s an identifiable knock as their skulls collide, and there’s a collective wince from the rest of us.

Isabel mumbles a string of curses while Armin finds various ways of grimacing. The tables have them awkwardly trapped in a V, but before we can make a move to help them up, Mr. Blouse comes barreling in.

“What’s going on in here!?” He demands. I immediately hop to my feet.

Connie and I tensely take a long look at each other.

“Nothing, Mr.Blouse.” Connie starts. “They just tripped into the tables and fell with them.”

“Sorry for making such a ruckus.” I add, thoroughly ashamed of myself.

After all, I’m at fault for their injuries.

I didn’t mean to go ballistic on Connie.
Well I kind of did, but I realize in these 127 seconds of hindsight that it was a stupid thing to jump him over. I mean, really, why did I get so upset by that?

I know it’s a horrible insinuation, but I should have handled it better.

It takes some finagling, and a thousand exchanged apologies to get the fallen ones to their feet. I look around I see how roughed up everyone is. Isabel is rubbing at the swelling bump on her head; Armin at an identical one; Connie is sporting a few red scratch marks around his throat; Sasha is completely disheveled; Krista is seething with her arms crossed in the corner; and Ymir continues to stand at my side with the same threatening expression.

Fuck, I fucked up.

Again.

Really need to get that anger under control there, bud.

I close my eyes and run both hands through my hair. I just need to calm the fuck down.

Taking one more deep breath, I force myself to push out what remains of my misdirected anger.

“I’m sorry, Connie.” I say sincerely when I open my eyes.

He looks at me apprehensively for a moment, then shrugs and bats his hand. “Don’t worry about it, man. I crossed a line. Lesson learned.”

“Yeah but I-”

“Seriously, Eren, forget about it.” He cuts me short and starts toward the kitchen. “Better get going, my shift ended an hour ago.”

Which makes me feel so much worse. Because it means that he stayed after his shift just to hang out with us.

I’m such an ass.

Still at a loss for words, Sasha follows him out.

Krista marches up to me. Not stopping until we are chest to, well stomach. Her little head bent almost completely as she stares up at me from this proximity.

“Well?” She starts dangerously; reminding me of the girl who threw me into a practice room and drilled me to get my shit together for auditions.

“Ah-”

“Don’t ‘Ah’ me!” She snaps, literally, in front of my nose. I look to my side for help, but Ymir just stands there completely impressed. Great, she’s entranced. “What were you thinking?”

“Ah-” I try again, this time looking between Isabel-crossing her arms and narrowing her eyes-and Armin-pinching the bridge of his nose and muttering to himself to stay calm. Both sporting mirrored bruises.

Shit.

“That’s right,” Krista recalls my attention by digging her fingers in my jaw and yanking my face to
meet hers. “You weren’t.”

Damn, this girl is going to make one hell of a mother.

“I’m sorry?” I offer as best I can between my smooched cheeks.

“Damn right you are.” She says bluntly, and lowly, and quietly before releasing my face and storming past me through the door.

“I think I’m in love.” Ymir states matter-of-factly while her eyes follow Krista intently. I attempt to rub the ache out of my jaw as I roll my eyes at her. “What? She’s cute and threatening. Just my type.”

"My God, Ymir!" I groan then scoop up my hat and sunglasses, before making to storm out through the kitchen.

With Armin on my heel, I cut straight through the crowd in the front of the cafe and out into the sun.

I don't stop, trying walk to off my renewed annoyance.

Ymir.

Throwing me against the wall, ogling at my only companion at school.

I guess there's a reason we've been out of touch since Jean and I.

And it's because she never minds her own damn business!

"Eren," Armin starts; jogging a bit to catch up at my side. "Slow down."

I do and sigh again. Damn this day has been one hell of a roller-coaster, and I want off. We walk to the parking garage back at the studio (because Armin has an employee parking pass) in silence.

I'm still stewing over what Connie said.

Sure I shouldn't have jumped across the table in attempt to strangle him, but that last little comment is still crawling under my skin.

'Sexually.'

Whatever, dude.

I know I'm pretty fucking adamant about how much I hate the bastard. How in the hell could he have gotten that from that?

I mean seriously!

After tucking into the car we start continuing in silence.

Armin hasn't said anything. Which means he's probably gearing up for another lecture on keeping my temper in check.

I roll my eyes at myself. Might as well rip the bandaid off quickly.

"You don't need to say it, Armin."

"I wasn't going to say anything." He replies simply, keeping his eyes trained on the road.
"Sure."

"Really, Eren, I have nothing to say." He shrugs. There's no edge to his voice, not even
disappointment. Just a kind of hollow tone. Like he's not the least bit surprised.

Oh how dandy.

Does he really not have any faith in me?

Why should he?

Good point. I haven't done anything to even try to control my outbursts.

"Well, okay. I deserve that." I grumble, more to myself than him.

There's a heavy sigh from the driver's seat. "You know, I'm not saying anything because you already
know what I would say." He pauses to look at me with no hint of malcontent. "Besides, I just want
to have a good night with my best friend."

I smile contently. And with that it's easier to let the events of the day roll off my shoulders.

"So...Kung Fury?" I change the subject with a smirk

"Kung Fury." He affirms enthusiastically.

We both laugh, and, damn I miss this little mushroom shaped blondie. "I'm kind of feeling pizza."

"Dude, you read my fucking mind!" I agree with vigor. "Hanji will probably kill me. That is if Levi
doesn't find out first."

"Is that a no to the pizza then?"

"Fuck no. Order away! I could use some grease dripping happiness in my life."

“You go ahead and make to call. We're home anyway." Indeed we are. He parks on the curb
because, to my pleasant surprise, Mikasa's little accord is parked snuggly in the driveway.

I practically run to the door.

Damn it I hadn't realized how fucking much I miss them! How much I miss our little house. Our little
stained glass window above the door. The bench with all the unused mismatched cubbies
underneath. The general (and normal) disarray. God forbid there are wrinkled blankets thrown on the
couch! If only Levi could see this magnificent little cesspool of normality as I'm about to.

The door creaks as I pull it open. Ah the sweetest sound in all the land.

Followed immediately by a low bark and a forceful tackle onto the doormat.

The alien black mass is pinning me down with his massive paws and flattened front legs. He's
crouching over me, growling lowly.

"MIKASA! THE FUCK IS THIS THING!?" I yell, squirming as best I can to get out from under
this giant black beast.

“Oh calm down, Eren.” Mikasa starts. “Hey, Colossus, off!”
The fucking animal immediately bounds toward her voice. Which comes directly from the sitting mass on the couch. Her hair hangs loosely over the scarf and grey tanktop. She's sitting crisscross applesauce and is nursing what looks to be a bottle of Silverbow.

The black beast effortlessly curls on the couch next to her. He actually takes up the rest of it and still has to have his head in her lap. He’s practically the size of her.

“You went and got a fucking Dire Wolf, Mikasa?” I squeak.

“What?” She shrugs and begins scratching behind his ear. “You were gone.”

She moves from the couch, pushing through the thing’s head, and crosses the living room to pull me into a bone breaking hug.

“How are you, Eren?” She asks over my shoulder. "Do I need to break any bones?"

I hold her tighter and close my eyes. “Imma’right, Mikasa, really. Miss you guys though!

We part, and the damn monster is right at her side. The top of his head is right above her bellybutton, it’s back is just below her hips. True to his name, he is indeed colossal. Like, I actually think she could ride him gallantly into battle.

It’s fur is shaggy, his snout is square and ears are folded. It’s panting and I think I could fit my head in it’s mouth. “Seriously, Mikasa, what the fuck is this thing?”

“He’s an Irish Wolfhound.” She answers as though it's the most obvious thing in the universe. Hardly bending over, she scratches behind his ears. When she speaks again she’s adopted an unfitting baby voice. “And he’s such a good boy. Aren’t you Colossus! Yes you are!”

"Hannes let you get this monster?"

"Yes he did!" She answers in the same baby voice, still scratching at his ears.

"The fuck? He wouldn’t let me get so much as a fish!"

"That's because the last fish you had died within the week."

"Yeah, well how was I supposed to know that the water has to be warm when you put them back in the aquarium?"

"They were tropical fish, Eren." Armin answers while kicking out of his shoes. Colossus doesn't tackle him, instead he crosses the short distance to nudge his head against Armin's chest. Armin obliges and begins scratching at his neck.

I roll my eyes and throw my hands up. "Well whatever. I just think he loves you more than me."

The thing raises his head at me and his ears go back. Better to not piss this monster off.

“Yeah.” She shrugs nonchalantly. "Course he does. I never cause him as much trouble as you."

Well then, guess that answers that.

I cautiously turn my back, ready to sprint through the hallway if I hear him start behind me. He doesn't so I make it to the fridge slightly calmer than before.

"Don't you have anything stronger?" I ask in regard of the less than 7 proof bottles of alcohol.
"Do you need something stronger?" Mikasa inquires with a slight edge to her voice.

I lift my head so that I can easily see over the door to fix her with a glare of absolute exasperation. "Okay then." She accepts without pressing before turning to grab her keys from the little hook beside the door. "I'll be off."

Colossus sits at the door as soon as it closes and whimpers at her departure.

"So you're okay with this?" I skeptically ask Armin while gesturing to the beast.

He shrugs into a heavy sigh. "He's not that bad, really. Just massive and a little in the way kind of all the time."

I look at the it thing with a grimace before finally grabbing a Pepsi and close the fridge.

By the time Mikasa walks through the door; pizza has been ordered, popcorn popped, and what promises to be the greatest short film of all time queued up on Armin's (don't judge him too harshly)Xbox.

I know, I know, I'm definitely a true blue Playstationier. Starting with NAMCO on the PS1. I have never looked back.

But he seems to like the Xbox more. Honestly he plays better on it, and though I can function just fine, the second control stick throws me off. Not to mention it's scared the shit out of me on more than one occasion. It always decided to turn on when I would stumble into the kitchen for a snack half awake. The screen would light up and the fucking satanic voice called out "Xbox on" which I'm sure was code for "Don't go back to sleep, Eren". Point being Armin has terrible taste in gaming systems. Mikasa on the other hand can rock both equally, but she actually usually sticks to Gameboys and old school Nintendos. No idea why. Her favorite being the second generation of Gameboy Advanced. Pokémon Ruby. Everytime she beats it she starts over to try different variants.

Yeah, we are a bit strange when it comes to our individual gaming preferences. Never has there been a better example for the phrase "to each their own".

Pizza arrives as just as my scotch levels over the ice. Armin holds up a hand to reject my offer of booze, Mikasa sticks to her cider, but I fucking go for it. After the day-no the month I've had-I fucking deserve this!

Ooey gooey goodness waits for me in a beautifully crafted, extra large box.

Oh yeah, that was EXTRA large!

Fuck you Hanji, fuck you Levi; tonight I'm doing and eating whatever the fuck I want!

With my paper pizza plate balanced on one of my knees, my other bent so I can rest my arm against it, and my scotch sitting next to me on the dark wood floors; I have been booted to the floor by Mikasa's black Dire Wolfhound thing. He lays across the couch by her side, Armin in the chair (which he reluctantly took after I insisted him to), and I set to the patch of floor between the corner of the couch and the coffee table.

I take a sip.

Okay that is a bit harsh, but the ice will dilute it as it melts.

Armin presses play.
Mikasa lightly kicks my side.

I can't help but smile at the familiarity of it all.

The screen erupts with what I swear is a straight up scene in GTA. Guns shoot, coins ring, cheesy 80s music plays in the background; I can already tell this is the greatest movie in existence.

I take a bite.

SWEET MOTHER TERESA; this is the best fucking thing I have eaten ever!

In my life!

Well no, but after literal weeks of deprivation it's like gooey gold.

40 beautiful minutes, 4 slices of pizza, a bag of popcorn, and 3 1/2 glassees later, the screen goes blue and miscellaneous music begins playing in the background.

"So, Eren," Mikasa starts by pushing the back of my head to get my attention. My vision blurs and an intense feeling of vertigo takes over. Mustn't gag. "How's it going over in shrimpville?"

"Ahh, i'sgood." I slur despite the fact that I'm not at all drunk. Goodness no, definitely not drunk. Drunken as I am not, however, it may be best to avoid talking about Levi. Lest I slur something I'll regret. Not that there's even anything I could say like that. Because there's not. "Yeah, s'not much goin-ah-going on."

Armin looks skeptically at me.

Damn it, he totally reads minds.

I knew it

Damn it, he totally reads minds.

I knew it

I knew it

I knew it

Shit, stop thinking!

Stop thinking about what!?

I don't know just stop!

"Okay!" I accidentally blurt that last bit out.

Mikasa looks down at me, confusion etched in her brow. I give her what I know is a completely lopsided grin. On purpose? Nah, I just can't seem to feel the left side of my face. Weird.

But remember: not drunk.

"Okay..." She continues.

"Mikasa!" Desperate to change topics, I turn around to give her my full attention and hit her knee playfully. Her monster's ears fall back moment. At least I know she'll be fivefolded protection. "Watssup with you, girl?"

"Honestly," She begins, throwing herself onto the arm of the couch with a groan. "Work fucking sucks right now!"

I pout my lips and sniff back tears. I don't wike seeing my wittle Mikasa upset. "M'sorry."
She shakes her head before turning it toward me. A small smile plays on her lips and I try my best to return it. It grows, she lifts up her hand to my head, and there goes that whole vertigo thing again!

"You're drunk." She states blatantly.

"Am not!" I prompt myself on my elbows to answer defensively.

"Uh ah," She starts as I sit up again. Then she grabs the top of my left ear. "Your ears turn red when you're lying."

I shake my head out of her grasp. Oh shit, shouldn't have done that. My stomach flips and for a handful of blinks I see double.

Not fucking drunk.

Maybe a bit tipsy though.

"Whatever." Swatting her hand away I change the subject. "Why'ts happenin at the...um...work place?"

She giggles at my drunken-I mean tipsiness.

Mikasa doesn’t giggle.

Looks like I'm not the only one surfin the alcoholic waves. She wouldn’t be giggling so if she weren’t a bit buzzed.

"Pretty much Rico's being more a bitch than usual." She turns her head to the ceiling, awkwardly twisting her torso with it as her legs stay dangling from the cushion. Colossus moves his head to her lap where she absentmindedly begins petting him. "We started this case where basically one corporation is suing their sister corporation for fucking up their image and for property loss, both intellectual and financial. Because a CEO was indicted for embezzlement, or something like that."

I stare blankly at her, blink a few times, and click out the numbness on my tongue before responding. "M'kasa, I love you t'pieces, but I di'nt 'derstand a word you said."

She shrugs. "Well just know it fucking sucks."

"S'rry."

"It's whatever."

I move to place my chin on the cushion beside her, smiling when she lazily looks at me. She snorts and pushes me away again.

Whee! I'm lightheaded and may or may not throw up again! Thanks sister of mine!

I barely catch myself before hitting the coffee table. Then she gives a heavy sigh.

"Anyway, Levi supposes it'll help me further my position i n the firm if I stick through it."

I snap to attention. Eyebrows furrowed, head cocked, slack jawed, "Levi s'poses?" She prompts herself on her elbows to look at me. "As in Levi? Like Leeeeeeeviiiiiiii?"

"Yes, Eren, as in Leeevii." She mocks. I am not amused.
"Sinse when d'ya know jus what Levi s'poses?"

"Since non of your business." She answers bluntly.

"S'my business!" I start, stumbling to get to my feet. "When did you s-um-sstart talkin to 'im bout work?"

She sits back up and shrugs before reaching for her fifth bottle of hard cider. "Well, first." She begins like it’s the latesst gossip. "One of the newer interns dropped off a lunch for me. It was in simple paperbag with my name written on the front. There was, like, an apple, a PB&J, a juice box, fruit snacks, and cheese its. There was also this note at the bottom." She smacks her lips and looks up to recollect something. "‘Mika, I hope you enjoy this as much as you did when you were 8. -Levi’" a small smile appears on her face, and I d’know if I like it. "Then one day he just shows up at the office. Completely out of the blue.” No, Armin is Blue. Not Levi. She starts with a huff of annoyance, but can tell it's layered over a sort of smusement. "Of course we see celebrities all the time, so naturally Rico swooped in to offer her services no matter what he needed them to be.” Another coy smile and tug at her scarf. "It was actually kind of awesome; he almost completely ignored her once he saw me glaring at him from the conference room where Rico had me stacking up her papers.” A roll of the eyes at that particular part in her story and she’s off again, “I was all ‘What are you doing here.’ and he was like ‘taking you to lunch.’ I told him I wasn’t hungry, but I ended up going anyway. So yeah," She starts, swiping her hair from her face before clutching her scarf. "He bought me a Starbucks gift card because I won’t take his money, and every now and then he shows up with lunch. So, yeah.”

She looks at me apprehensively, I'm pretty sure I look exactly how I feel which is completely fucking confoundeded. My face is also heated more than normal for a drinkeder.

Or whatever. I know what I mean.

“Oh, well, fat’s nice I s’pose.” I respond, itching the back of my head.

“It has been actually.” She half smiles at me, one hand warped in her scarf, the other moving her hair from her face.

Ah, shit. I can’t be mad at that. She looks so fucking scared to be hopeful, yet here she is. Reservationing it for someone who might actually be good for it.

I mean, I-I-I yeah. Maybe I mean that. He’s a prick, but honestly seems guinuine enough about Mikasa, and that’s all I can hope for.

Or I’ll break him.

At the same time, though, I’m jealous.

I can't tell who I'm jealous of.

Levi for spendin a time with my sis? Or sis for spending time with Levi?

Not that I don't spend plenty of time with him as is, but it's never been that, like, intimate, Ya kno?

Not that it should be, because fuck it’s siblings, but I don’t know I’ve a kinda grown semi maybe the tiniest bit fond ish of him.

I pretty much fall back to the floor in thought.
Shit I don't know what's comin out of my mind mouth right now.

*Shake those things away, Jaeger!*

Okay, me!

As the room starts merry-go-rounding, I'm not sure why I actually obeyed the little voice in my head. *Because...Fuck I don't even know.*

Neither do I dude. *What were we thinking about?*

Fuck if I know.

"Eren?" Armin snaps me to attention.

"Huh-what?"

"Are you okay?"

"Ah....yeah?" I answer as I roll my head on my shoulder to look at him.

"And you can see alright?"

"Armin annnnd Armin a two?, 'm see jus fine."

"You sure?"

"Shurre."

"Because one of your contacts has migrated down to your cheek."

A sense of panic sweeps me and I move to swipe it from my cheek. *OH FUCK THAT'S MY EYE!*

I make use of an eyepatch and grimace.

The eyepatch is my hand.

Cause why would I just have an eyepatch on hand? *Ha on hand and it is my hand!*

Ah I be silly.

Without any sort of sympathy, Armin dis'pears down the hall and re'ppears with an extra pair of glasses.

An extra pair with big, dark blue, hipster frames that are scratched to hell.

Twas a phase, dunnot judge.

He throws them at me and plops back in his seat. Putting them on hardly helps my blurred vision. It just looks like there's a lag when I look from one thing to another.
Like a space warp.

Like Donnie Darko.

Swear to God if I see a fucking demonic bunny, I’m calling it!

I jump slightly as I feel a strong pair of arms pull my shoulders from behind into an awkward hug.

"Good night, Eren." Mikasa kisses the top of my head. "I gotta work early, but it was good seeing you! There’s no need to be a stranger, jerk" She squeezes me harder. I grab her arms tightly in attempt to hug her back. I think it works acceptably. "I love you, don't get into trouble."

"I nev'r get to trouble it jus finds a me."

At that she flicks my ear-ow-and pushes herself off the couch to the stairs; the mighty Colossus in her wake.

And I try to stand and-wait - why am I doing that? I hover in a half sitting half standing stance while I try to figure this out with myself. Was I getting up to get a thing of some other thing?

No I think you were going somewhere.

Where the fuck would I go?

The bathroom.

Just at the thought my full bladder makes itself known.

Ah yes, definitely the ol throne of um convenience!

Away!

I make for it, but the idiot I am never changed from that awkward half up half down thing so I fall on my face. Ow, I couldn't even put my hands out to stop. My reflexes are like a baby baby who doesn't know how to uses its-what are they called? Damn it what the fuck are they called? -LIMBS! Yes! Knew I'd get there eventually.

Okay maybe I am a bit drunk.

"You're telling me." Armin responds.

"Yu a 'uckin witsch!" I say, lifting my face off the ground s'much as possible to see him and point my finger at him.

He rolls his eyes and cracks a smile. "I'm not a witch, Eren, you said it outloud."

I stare up unbelieving.

You can't fool us, we know of your sorcery!

So we're a we now?

In this particular instance. Shut up.

"C'mon," he starts as he helps me to my feet. "Let's get you to bed."
"Mkay," I hum lazily. As we get to the hallway it hits me. "No,mno!" I start, pushing myself from him. "I gotta go."

"What? Are you serious?"

"Mhyes." I have the whole shooting whatever tomorrow and fuck I didn't even think about that!

"Why?"

"Scuz! I gotta be back fur the schootiiiiii-the notffing." I barely catch myself.

"The same nothing you did today?"

"Mayabe."

He pinches the bridge of his nose. “Fine. lets go.”

He leads the way to the door.

I stumble along after him. He holds the door open for me. I finally get to him, smiling at him like an idiot, to which he can't help but huff in amusement.

The cool air greets my hot face and OH MY SWEET BABY CUCUMBER- what? - I don't fckn have time to worry bout the diction of my exclimattation!

HAVE TO PEE!

I scurry s’best I can to the porcelain massiah down the hall.

Barely in time, too.

Ahhh thats the ticket.

Armin erupts into a fit of giggles when I swagger back to him. "Eren, you might think about pulling your pants up all the way before you leave the bathroom.

I look at myself down.

Hey look at that.

Dull green boxers peek out behind the flaps of my washout jeans.

But I'm...what am I looking at?

Do I care?

No.

Well, okay.

At a sudden loss of purpose I simply shrug at Armin.

Whatever he said obviously does NOT mean I have concern with.

He shakes his head in exahaspererization. "Whatever, it's your desensey."

Damn right it is. Whatever it was that he just was saying to me about.
Man, yeah I'm fucking drunk.

Somehow I end up in the front seat of Armin's car. Woken cruelly by a bump in the road that disturbed the comfortability of my face on the sweet, beautiful, cool glass window. Wiping away drool dripping off my chin, I starts with a snort. "Rmin!" I whine. "W'ts happeninng!??"

"I'm driving you back."

"But we've been driving fur licke hoursss."

"It's been barely 5 minutes."

"w'Tefer."

"Hey, Eren?"

"Hm." I hum while letting my head roll in his direction.

"What aren't you telling us?"

"Bout wat?"

"Well, what you were doing all day."

Oh, that. No Armin don't make me start that! You can't make my secrets spill. SO pleas don’t ask because I don’t think I can hold it back if you do.

“Rmin!” I hold a finger to my lips. “SShhh, stahp ashking dat.”

“Okay fine. Then what aren’t you telling Mikasa?”

“Wat you mean, Blu?"

“There was something you didn’t want to tell her. Something about Levi?"

“WAT!?!” I lean toward him in shock. “‘re you s’rius?"

“Well,” He shrugs. “You kept changing the subject whenever he was mentioned.”

“I-ah-pft-don’t know whaat chou talkin bout.” I reply weakly while folding my arms. The car slows at a red light and he turns his head to give me the most ridiculously cut through ‘not buying it’ look Ever. I.fuck..I don’t know to respond. The light changes andd the car glides along once more.

Like, no I kept not talking bout him. But that’s because “K, maaybe I fink he’s mi’dly really fuckin smexy.”

My hand flies to cover my mouth. My traitor mouth.

A hanging to you!

FUCK!

My head hits the...the...fuckin... the thing cars have in front of the windshield thing.

I turn to express my fucks when I stop at the look on Armin’s face.

His eyes are anime huge! His face it frozen in showck?
Kind of?

I don’t know it’s like a cross between shock and that face he gets when he’s gotten an A on his face right now.

Horns honk and he snaps to, jerking to forward again.

“Rmin?”

“Hm? Oh that’s...that’s something, Eren.” His voice is higher than I remember. Has he sucked the helium? Why didn’t he share? “So, ah, he’s hot, and?”

Who’s hot? Jean? No, definately yes, but no.

Levi’s hot, though. Yeaahh he’s really, somthing.

“Anndd...Idon know.” I answer throwing my hands in the air. “He’s jus like, reaally hot and.” ‘Of course you can.’ “-somes of the time he’s like sorta shweet.”

I gaze out the window, stuck in replaying memories of him.

‘What? I’m allowed a vice.’

‘He’s talented.’

‘Listen, fear is nothing but a state of mind.’

‘Hey, kid, are you alright?’

‘Spider-man, huh?’

*Cool air, falling leaves, perfect park, and a warm hand wrapped around mine. ‘Looks’- one kiss.’- Like-’ Two kiss. ‘I’m stuck with you.’- Thre-

“Oh?” Armin interupts the drunken rendition of that one haunting dream. “So, what now?”

I groan into my hands. “Armeen! I-I don’t knoooow!”

“What don’t you know?”

“I Dunnot know wat I don’t know! Jus, like, itschs licke reaaaalldly fuckin fucked the fuck up!”

“How so?”

“Blue, C’mon. Itsche LEFI! We hates him, preshiousses! We hates him!” Hehe Gollumn, I think I nailed that.

“I know I know, but, Eren,” He starts in smartay pants tones. “Circumstances have changed, right?”

“So?”

“So, maybe you should cut yourself a break. I not saying you jump into bed with him.” Aww why not?? “Just don’t completely dismiss your feelings. Let he and Mikasa sort out their drama, then take it from there. Nobody’s all bad, and everyone deserves a shot at redemption.”

“Pft, I’ways tha oppomist.” I shake my head.
“Eren, I really don’t think it’s one-sided.”

I snap my head to him, and gawk while he swims back into focus. URGH, seriously need to stop moving so fastly. Asides, what did he say?

“Waddu mean?” I slur. He shrugs and the car pulls to a curb. “Rmen, watter you takin ‘bout?”

He doesn’t answer, just slips out of his seat. I furrow my brows in the spot that he’ll apperate back to aannny moment now.

JESUS! The door behind me opens suddenly and makes me jump.

*Argrrghghah, fucking stahp moving so much!*

“We’re here, Eren.”

“Ya, fink I got that ‘Remin!”

“Touchy.” He grumbles as if I wouldn’t hear.

I think I growl. It felt like I growled.

Armin half supports me while we cross the dimmed street. He really doesn’t need to.

I got me.

To prove it I’ll just duck from his arm.

One, two, three, four steps.

What did I say, I got this.

My foot moves in front of the other, because my body is commiting mutaniy tonight.

Starting with my mothafuckin mouth.

Gravity, and I don’t got this!

“Damn it, Eren!” Armin catches me under my arms.

“Tanks!” I turn my face to his and it looks like his face mucsles are dooper tense. I poke his cheek. He looks at me like I’m some undiscvord insect.

I can’t help but burst into giggles.

“Eren, c’mon.” He sighs as he stops us at a big black box with bright shiny touchable buttons. “Okay, what’s the code?”

“Code? What code?”

He facepalms. “The code to get through the gates!”

“We don need code.” I wave my arms to dismiss the notion. Silly Armin. I stand, clap my hands together before raising them above my head. *Serious time, Jaeger. “Open Seseme!”*

Nothing.
I collapse in disappointment.

That shouldn’t have worked.

I can hear Armin groan in frustration.

“Give me your phone.” He sighs exasperatedly in front of my face. I blink harshly, when did he get so close? I obey him nonetheless, reaching into my back pocket for the tiny touchcomputer that will probably pave the way to Armageddon. I watch him do things to the screen and wait as he puts it to his ear. “Hi, Mr. Arckerman, this is Armin Arlet….This is embarrassing, but could you please open the front gates?” Wait a minute! He’s talking to Levi. My Levi. I push myself off the ground and start toward Armin. I want to talk to him!

“Leevviiii!” I yell to the phone in Armin’s extended hand.

“Yes, we’re outside.”

“Leevi, let us in! I missssssss you!”

“Um…” He looks at me a moment before bringing the phone back to his ear. “Yeah, a little.”

“LEEVIIEEE!!!”

“Thank you.”

The gates move with a loud grind. Yay! I did it!

I run through them. And though it is bout a straight a trek as I am, I manage to make it to the steps where I halt as the subject of the eve leans on the weird turning door.

I gulp.

He’s in boxers and a tee shirt. His hair is a little ruffled over his stone cut expression, and his arms are crossed.

I gape, for I am both frightened and aroused.

Holy shit, I must be fucking trashed.

Aurgh, here goes the queeziness. There’s the vertigo. Why is there I blur walking to me?

“Eren,” It speaks while I feel its arm wrapped under my arm and around my back. My eyes stay closed because all this blurrriness is makin me sick. The thing supporting my weight turn and begins communicating is one sort of language. All I hear are garbles.

Annndd we’re moving.

“Fuck, Eren,” The it starts in my ear. Ah so it sprechens the engliase. “You’re heavier than you look.”

This thing sounds familiar. I take a deep breath and get mint, sandalwood, and the smallest hint of tobacco.

“L’vi?” I ask, daring to open my eyes I get a profile view of a chiseled jaw, straight nose, and silky raven hair swaying with each step. I feel the corners of my mouth pull themselves up.
He sideways glance at me a moment before quietly replying, “I’ve got ya, kid.”

“Wh’re we goin?”

“The bathroom.”

“Basthroom?” I huff. “Lame.”

“Yeah, well, you look like you’re about three seconds away from puking all over.” Puke? Aaurghshg don’t say that. I gag. He sways and speeds up. “Like hell I’m letting you do that on my floors.”


He flicks his eyes at me again and before I have a chance to catch up to the situation, my ass is plopped down. I look lazilly up at my whatever he is. Strange how I’m look up to him.

My head leans back as I snicker to backen roaring laughter.

“What?” He looks at me with a raised brow. Dammit, I tried to hold it back.

I double over in laughter, pausing every so oftern to loook up at his cocked hip and crossed arms. It only makes me laught harder!

“u’re-” I try to start. “U’re-” I am seriously trying to pull it together. “So short.”

And my chest heaves with laughter once more.

All fun and games til my stomach lurches.

My laughter dies and I gag back the burning in the back of my throat.

I turn directly into the toilet by my side, my face hovering over it.

In an instant there’s a hand in my hair and another pulling at my glasses.

I lurch again, and the arm moves to my back as the other assumes the position holding my hair from back my face.

Another lurch and it all comes out.

It’s horrible, but through it all there’s a steady hand tracing circles on my back and a comforting shushing.

“Yup, get it all out.” A soothing voice hums through the room. I lurch again; I can hear him grimacing at my side, but his movements never falter. I start hiccuping when it’s over. He helps me to sit back up to lean against the wall. His hand now moved to my shoulder, the other ready with klenxes to wipe my face. Tears steam path down my cheeks and I am ucking emburessed. My shoulder is squeezed and I’m forced to look at Levi. “You okay, Eren?”

I sniff and make hastly in wiping away my tears. As I do, he removes his hand and stands to walk to the cabinet on the other wall.

My vision is still to fucking blurred (whether it’s from the still drunked me or the nearsighted me is unclear, just like my scope.) I blink a few five thousand times and eventually he’s squatted in front of
me wiping me down with a specific smelling flower that I can’t think of. It’s purple I think. Or maybe blue. I don’t know but it smells nice.

He’s scrubbing at my hairline when I decide to look at the concentratin in his eyes.

Damn, they really are something else. The darkest gray outling and spiderwebbing in the palest blue. They’re just… wow.

“M’thanx.” I mummble contently. He stops in his work and looks straight at me. He blinks a few times, and stands again on a heel. I sigh and close my eyes.

Damn these things feel like led.

I could stay like this- the fuck is that!?

I snap my eyes open to find a fucking toothbrush moving in and out of my mouth. Levi moving it intently and rather closely. His free hand is holding my jaw making it hard for to wiggle out of his reach. Though I try, and I make indicernabible noises, but it doesn’t fucking stop him. Then he yanks my face over the toilet again.

“Spit.” He command monotonely. I obey and in no time he’s in my mouth again.

And not in the fun way.

*Still drunk, are we?*

Shut up.

I spit two more times, then he runs floss round er’y crevice of my mouth and you better believe he made me gargle. I almost threw up again.

But right now there’s a cold towel folded on my forehead and a glass of water being brought to my lips every handful of seconds.

Honestly I don’t know. It could be hours between, could me milisecond. I could have been here for years. This could be a sick illustion of an old me witth demensia! Oh God, what’s going on.

I choke on the water being poured down my throat.

Sputtering coughs cox my eyes open.

Levi is sitting between my spread eagle legs. He starts patting my back when I double over to get the fuckin liquid out of my lungs!

“Drowning in a sip of water? Wow, Jaeger, that’s one for the record’s book.” He quips as I lean back up.

“Sh’up!”

“What was that?”

“Argh, nuffing.” I give. I don’t want to this. Not right now. Right now I want bedsleep.

“Oh, Sparky, let’s get you a bed.”

Read my mind.
Must have learned from Armin.

Sorcerers.

He helps me to my feet, steadying me with a hand on my chest and another looped under my arm. I stumble with him a short distance to the room practically next door. The lights stay off while we maneuver through with only the fading bathroom light to guide us. Luckily the bed is not far at all and I am plopped in it in no time.

As I bury my head deeper in the pillow, I feel a weight by my side.

I look up to see Levi’s shadowed face looking down at me. Still not an emotion shows, but when he speaks it’s softly, “Are you gonna make it?”

I snort and take a long blink. “I’ll be fine.”

He nods, and makes to stand by pushing off with his hands.

No.

Don’t go.

I don’t want him to leave.

So I trap it before it can to. He looks down at me now propping myself up with intensity.

My hand slides up his arm so I can pull him back down.

Back to me.

Once he’s close enough I lace my fingers in his hair, the buzz of his undercut brushes my palm.

His arm has moved to my side to support himself. The other stays in my grasp.

He’s letting this happen.

I pull my lips to his into what was supposed to be a chaste kiss, but the moment his soft lips brushed mine I wanted more than that. And I think so did he.

The hand of the arm I held moves to cup my face, our mouth slant closer together.

Exchanging heat as I move to deepen it. Tracing the seam of his lips with my tongue as I sit up further to put more of myself in this kiss.

I want him.

Right now.

Because this is all I crave in this moment.

Fuck the consequences of tomorrow.

Chapter End Notes
Okay, so..Drunk Eren.
He was really flipping hard to write and I am so sorry if it was too hard to follow. But it had to be done.
Also as always THANK YOU ALL SO MUCH FOR EVERYTHING!!!!
Seriously if it weren't for you this wouldn't be here.
It means the galaxy to me and really, truly, deeply keeps me going.
So again, I humbly raise a glass to you all and toast to your greatness.

Hey! I have been tracking this as fic: No Business Like Show Business and my blog is sgt-jaeger-meister if you're interested in taking a peek
Yesterday's Tomorrow

Chapter Summary

Eren's had time to reflect on what he's been able to put together from that night. However, with new complications in his enrollment coming up, just how much will he be able to piece together before having to go directly to the source?

Every inch of me felt heavy like lead, yet liquid as butter on a hot roll. The only problem being that the sadistic part of my mind pulled me from subconsciousness. A groan came from the deepest parts of my soul.

I didn’t want to get up.

Because getting up meant moving from the warm haven I had become one with.

That and I may have been able to escape from the dull pulse building behind my eyes.

I pulled what I had come to realize was my pillow tightly to my forehead. Because maybe smothering myself would bring me back.

My stomach twisted uncomfortably and my attempts at self suffocation were halted.

I hate the morning of a hangover. By far the worst part. You’re pulled from incredible relaxation to a dormant existence in a body that’s trying to battle itself.

It twisted again and I half opened my eyes in order to muster the strength to push myself up. Blinding and blurry green numbers greeted me on the nightstand.

9:02.

My feet swung from the bed to the plush carpet, my head fell lazily into my hands, another indiscernible sound waited just behind my lips.

So maybe there's some stock to be held in that whole 'beer before liquor' theory.

The foreign room came into focus as I found my glasses on the night stand.

I remember questioning where I was.

Also, I didn't remember having my glasses with me.

Weird.

That mystery, however, was momentarily halted being solved until after I had downed the bottle of what I was desperately hoping was actual Advil with a giant glass of what I hoped was actual water.

Don’t worry, both were what they claimed to be.

My stomach twisted again and I needed to move. That or I was going to vomit right there and Levi would have had my ass.
Then it hit me like a bus running a red light.

Fuck.

*Levi.*

Shit.

I remember pleading with myself.

*Please please please tell me what I think happened didn’t happen.*

That it was just a dream. A really, really, really, indisputably fucked up dream.

That I was just imagined faint lingering scent of his musk which hung in the air. That it was just my sadistic mind conjuring a fake memory to fuck with me.

But I knew.

Yes I knew.

I still know.

What’s worse is that I can’t remember what came after the kiss. Just ghosts of memories. Traces of touches, whispers of something more.

Not to mention a sore back and legs. Though, to be fair, the rest of me ached as well, just not as prominently as those.

Still I swear to God almighty, if anything else-

If I-

Fuck, I’ll leave right now. Forget about this damn program, the stupid show, my promising future.

If what I’m afraid of actually-

I’ll leave it all behind.

I decided that then and I’m holding myself to it til I do find out.

All that thinking was most definitely not helping curb the pounding in my skull. I massaged my temples and rose to my feet; swaying a bit as my legs protested my weight. The contents of my stomach rose to my throat so my legs were forced just to deal and take me to the bathroom. As soon as I threw the door open, I caught myself by leaning against it. My legs buckled and my bladder made an appearance to inform me that it too was moments from bursting. Clearly a more urgent matter than my queasy tummy.

Yes I said tummy. Yes I revert to a 5 year old when I don’t feel well.

Luckily tending to that bladder thing first had helped my tummy thing enough that I was fairly certain I no longer needed to puke. Which was awesome because that’s like my least favorite thing to do.

Not that it’s really anyone’s favorite.
Anyway, as I rinsed my hands I decided to splash my face a few times to maybe shock myself out of zombie mode. It kind of worked. Though I still looked undead with my sunken eyes and pasty skin. With a sigh I followed my momentum to run my wet fingers through my grease layered hair. Between that and the layer of cold sweat covering my body it really didn’t take much of a debate to decide on a shower. Though that required going up to my own bathroom. With my own products and a quick escape to my room.

But the very thought of crossing the massive house without running into Levi was terrifying.

Shaking my hands dry, I made my way down the hall as silently as humanly possible. I slowed on my approach to the corner turning into the dining room.

Clear.

I maneuvered around the dark stained chairs to peak my head around the crossing corner.

Okay, stairway seemed clear.

The floating steps were carefully taken two at a time as I padded my way up.

Almost there.

I turned to practically sprint across the bridge of a hall to the promise of safety waiting in my room on the other side.


“Yeah.” I droned automatically. I contested with a sigh and turned to him in defeat. Why? I’ve been going over it again and again and still can’t answer that question. Anyway, I couldn’t help but duck my head to pinch at the bridge of my nose. “Yeah, s-sorry about—” I opened my eyes and thank God he looked crisp and more importantly, clothed. With another heavy sigh and avoided eye contact, I attempted to continue with as much normality as I could. Which as it happened was not much. “-uh...about, um, th-that.”

I know; smooth as crunchy peanut butter.

Then he looked at me intently, features on his face softened in sync with the hammering in my head. I remember silently pleading with him. Don’t say anything. Please don’t say anything.

Don’t bring it up.

“Are you feeling better?”

Am I what? That- that was not what I expected to hear him say. The way he said it, too, so sincere it still throws me off balance. Like, my breath actually caught in my throat. For only an instant, of course, before I was gulping away the dryness in my it.

“Ahm, yeah.” I squeaked. He raised his eyebrows and brought his hands to rest on his hips. I cleared my throat and shrugged back to lean against the railing. “Yeah, totally.” Totally? “Uh- feeling up to, um up to snuff.” I continued probably too nonchalantly. “Never better.”
God, my fumbling is painful to remember.

He stared at me indiscernibly for a hot second.

“Glad to hear it.” He deadpanned before starting a trek down the stairs. “Clean yourself up, Sparky, you fucking reek.” I rolled my eyes. Prick. “Also, we’re late.”

Shit.

With a spark to my heel, I hurried to the bathroom and the steaming shower that awaited.

That was 10 days, 23 hours, and 21 minutes ago precisely.

Every time I’ve replayed that morning has been like watching a train wreck over and over and over again, but I can’t help it. I am still trying to make sense of it all. As I mentioned before, I still don’t know for certain what happened that night and I’m hoping that some detail will give me the key to unlocking those memories. Or that I’ll be able to find enough of a variant in the realm of reality to convince myself that none of it happened.

No luck so far on that front.

Fucking hell. I’ve hardly been able to look in the mirror, I’m so disgusted with myself. I was barely able to make it through filming that day, but apparently that made for fantastic footage and I was praised on my characterization.

Unless out of absolute necessity, I went out of my way to avoid him.

He didn’t seem to notice either way.

Fucking prick. One would think that if something had happened, that he would maybe act a little differently.

But he didn’t.

Then that would mean nothing happened, right?

Wrong. Actually that’s what convinces me most. Because if it were something as little as a simple kiss, he may not act much differently, but differently nonetheless.

Come to think of it he would’ve been annoyed with my obvious behavior. Especially on set, and he would have been very vocal about it.

Instead, he was the epitome of indifference.

Which I guess was just different enough to impact me.

Damn, that may be just the solidification I’ve been looking for.

“Eren!” A hurried command is hissed with a pair of fingers snapping in front of my nose.

“Huh?” I try to bring myself back to the living moment and blink a few times to get the classroom back into focus.

“Pay attention.” Krista whispers again, pointing to the professor with her bright pink pen.

Right. Less wallowing in regrets and more wallowing in looming schoolwork.
Which is exactly what I’ve been doing, isn’t it.

Wallowing.

Nearly two weeks-two what should have been blissful weeks-wasted on wallowing in questions that I know can only be answered by one person.

One person who has been gone these 10 days, 23 hours, and 31 minutes, and who won’t be back in the state for another 4 days, 11 hours and 16 minutes.

See what I mean? I have spent so much fucking time thinking about all of this that I’m obsessively calculating how much time has passed and how much longer I have to figure it out before having to resort to talking. Because I’ve executively decided that I must come to a conclusion before those 4 days, 11 hours, and now 14 minutes or else I, no doubt, will be denied a clean escape.

Because I’d have to talk to him about it, which would mean he’d have solid reasoning for my leaving and thus will without a doubt find a way to hold it as leverage to keep me in.

Though with 10 days, 23 hours, and 37 minutes behind me and only 4 days, 11 hours, and 17 minutes ahead, my odds are not looking good.

I shake my head and force my hand to start catching up on the notes being presented on the colorful smartboard.

“So,” Krista starts as we finish packing up our things when class finally ends. “Are you doing alright?”

I shrug my bag onto my shoulder.

‘Are you feeling better?’

“Hmm-what?” I pull myself from that echoing memory in time to put together her question. “Oh, yeah I’m good.”

She looks at me apprehensively as we start down the hall. “Are you sure?”

...maybe his plane will crash... Oh shit, she just said something again. “Hm?” Let’s see, she just asked me if I was alright and judging by the look on her face I don’t think she believes me. “Yeah, yeah.”

I hope that was the right answer.

“Because you’ve seemed a little distracted lately.”

“Mhm.” Damn it, started zoning again. “Yeah, no. Just tired I guess.” Seems believable enough, right?

“Sure...whatever you say.” She replies skeptically before dropping off into silence. She’s clearly baiting me to spill my thoughts, but not today ma’am. Not any day with this particular stream of thoughts, actually.

“You still coming over for refreshing pool water and pizza later?” I switch subjects. She sighs heavily in defeat.

“If by ‘refreshing pool water and pizza’ you mean to put our act together, then yes.”
“Yeah, yeah. Work work work.” I bat sarcastically. “But Sasha and Connie are coming too.”

“Eren,” Oh here goes. “We really need to finish this project. It’s $\frac{1}{3}$ of our semester grade.”

“It’s just the proposal, so technically it’s $\frac{1}{3}$ of $\frac{1}{3}$ of our grade.” I quip, and it earns me a punch in the arm. “Okay, okay I get it.” I laugh as I rub at the newly sore spot on my arm. “We’ll get it done, Sasha and Connie can offer feedback.” She looks at me with doubt. “We’ll get it done, I promise.”

“I’m holding you to that.” She warns.

“You still brought your swimsuit didn’t you.”

“Shut up.”

I laugh just as we reach our destination for killing time.

Hanji unofficially gave us the code to the staff courtyard on the main level. Luckily nobody’s ever in there so we haven’t yet had to explain our presence where it ought not be.

It’s nice.

A little corporate oasis with a small waterfall fountain in the center of the lush green grass surrounding it. There is a set of cool black tables on either side of it, connected to each other by geometric pathways leading to the four entrances from glass doors centered in glass walls lining separate hallways.

There we fill time between classes with schoolwork and lighthearted conversations. This time we end our session in what has become a full fledged battle of throwing trail mix at eachother.

Hey, she started it.

And as I clear the hallway after dumping the remaining contents of my snack bag on her head, I feel it’s safe to say I ended it.

When she settles into her seat next to mine in Voice Production, she ends up having the final say by flicking one last sunflower seed right on target at my forehead.

I pout and she bursts into laughter. Capturing the attention of the rest of the class shuffling in.

Most of which send us both glares.

Specifically me.

Ever since Levi pulled me out of class and started the legendary run of the idiots, I have become quite the object of loathing.

Don’t get me wrong, the first few days after the affair I was completely bombarded with questions and admiration, but lost that when I refused to answer anyone. I’m also apparently ‘too full of myself’ because I ‘try too hard to pretend like I’m not swept up with Levi’. Yeah, I repeat, idiots.

And fucking assholes. I mean what the fuck is the point in getting so wrapped up in what I may or may not be. Like how the fuck dare they say I’m too full of myself. How would they know? None of them fucking know me!

Whatever, I’ve gotten used to the glaring and death notes that make their way into my bag.
Shit like:

_Get over yourself. Nobody likes you._

Noted. Good thing I don’t like anyone here. Save Krista, of course.

_You don’t deserve Levi Ackerman. I’ll kill you if you even start thinking otherwise._

If anything it’s more like he doesn’t deserve me. Besides, anonymous, I’d like to see you try.

_If you hurt his sister, I’ll fucking end you._

Oh lord, looks like somebody can read shit articles from shit magazines; and again, bring it.

_I don’t care what Levi Ackerman might see in you, but you are nothing more than scum. And your ugly as fuck. You really should just kill yourself._

Seriously? A) Once again I don’t give a fuck what Levi may or may not see in me; B) I may not have the greatest self-esteem, but I know I’m at least a couple notches more than ugly; and C) Why the fuck would you ever say that to anyone ever!? That’s fucking bullshit. No matter what beef you may have with someone, saying something like that is un-fucking-acceptable. I hope you get struck by lightning.

_Ur worthless. I hope u get hit by a trunk._

Tell me something I don’t know, anonymous. Also, I have no idea how I’d be hit by a truck, but I guess I’ll start avoiding antique shops….Okay, they probably meant a _truck_ , but the ‘n’ looks a hell of a lot like a ‘c’ so, really, it’s up to interpretation. And since I interpret them to be fucking stupid either way, why not top it off with more stupidity?

They only get more ridiculous.

I’ve kept them all though in case I’m in need of a quick laugh.

Let me tell you, they’ve been pretty useful this last 11 days and 35 minutes.

“Good morning, everyone!” Miss Limon begins, and so queues my next session of wallowing away in repetitive thought until my fingers get all pruny.

...

“Mister Jaeger.” I think I just heard my name. Oh well, I’ll just go back to doodling in the margins of my notebook. “Mister Jaeger?”

Hmm, there’s that murmur again.

“Eren!” Shit, someone was saying my name. I look up slightly startled. Much to my surprise, Armin stands nervously in the doorway, clearly embarrassed in himself for blurting out my name the way he did. Even Miss Limon looks surprised in him.

“Hm, what?” I ask, dropping my pen to the desk. He rolls his eyes, clearly annoyed with the lack of attention I’m giving to this class. What can I say, it’s boring and I have much to figure out.

“This young man says that the Regime director needs to see you.” My poor professor informs me in a high pitched voice. I’m sure she’s confused as to why she has to keep giving me up.
Wait a minute, did she say the *Regime* Director?

Isn’t that Zackley?

My eyebrows shoot to my hairline, my face falls, and I’m sure I’ve lost all color in my cheeks. I look to Armin to tell me in some small way that it’s not who I think it is.

He only nods sympathetically.

Shit. I gulp and shakily begin packing my things.

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. What does he want?
What did I do?
Why right now?
What’s going on?
Does this mean I’m out?
That’s what it is, isn’t it? He’s heard about all the commotion Levi and I caused and he’s done with me.

Fucking hell.

*I thought you were ready to turn your back on it all if you had to.*

Oh there you are, conscious, you little asshole.

Yeah, okay, but that at least would be on my own terms.

Every step toward the door feels as though I’m trudging through thick mud. My head is pounding and Armin is only making it worse with his best attempt at an encouraging smile.

Damn, even he knows it’s bad.

The click of the door echoes in the empty hallway.

“What’s going on, Armin?” I turn to him as soon as we start walking.

“I-I don’t know, Eren.” He shrugs solemnly. I exhale slowly. “Erwin’s downstairs waiting for us.”

“Erwin?” I squeak. Fuck, him too?

“I’m sure it’ll be okay.” He tries, oh does he try to reassure me.

I run my hands through my hair, pushing on my skull as if I could rub out the pulsing within it.

I’m fucking screwed, aren’t I?

*Maybe not.*

Oh, *now* you’re a fucking optimist?

We spend the rest of the short trip in uncomfortable silence. Armin clearly trying his best to come up with something to quell my apprehension, but whatever attempts have died on his lips.
I wouldn’t believe them anyway.

Out into the overcasted day, he leads the way to a large black car, and opens the back door for me.

What? He gestures me in with a nod, and though I squint at him in confusion, I duck in.

“Hello, Eren.” Erwin scares me half to death once I actually scoot in. He sits across from me and holy shit I am in a limousine! A small one, but one all the same.

Armin slides in next to me completely nonchalantly.

“Um, hi.” I respond awkwardly.

“How have you been?” He sits forward, giving me his full attention, and it’s weird. Shouldn’t he maybe be telling me what the fuck is happening?

“Um, well I was doing okay.”

“And now?” He raises his caterpillar eyebrows.

“Now I don’t even know what’s happening.” I widen my eyes and throw open my hands.

“Ah, yes.” He sits back in his seat and brings his also massive hand to his chin. This guy is surprisingly huge. Just big. Not that you would really expect it either. It’s only when you’re right next to him (or across from him) that you realize that he is basically 1.5 times larger than a normal guy. Maybe you’re just puny. “Well there are some-” He drops his hand and looks at me like he’s trying to figure out a way to say whatever it is he wants to say. “-concerns about the conditions of your enrollment.”

“What kind of concerns?” I prod cautiously.

He sets me with a serious gaze. I gulp. “What is the extent of your involvement in the production of Goliath?”

What? “I-I don’t understand.”

“To put it simply, have you been cast for any part of the show?”

I gulp again and glance to my side to see Armin looking at me with a mix of shock and more apprehension. I look back at Erwin and his relentless stare.

“Yes.” Armin gasps and Erwin lifts his chin. “But-but it was just one episode, and why would that matter now anyway? Isn’t the point of this program to get me into filming?”

“Calm down, Eren.” Erwin smiles. “I just need to know what we’re going in with.”

“Going into what?”

“Well, as I’m sure Mr. Arlet has told you, you’ve been summoned to meet with Zackley.”

“So, does that mean I’m out?”

“I wouldn’t jump straight to that conclusion,” But it is a possibility, great. “It’s just good to go into his meetings prepared.”

I nod slowly.
Armin looks at me like he knows something I don’t. Which, honestly, covers a lot of ground, but right now it looks like something bad.

Did I break some kind of rule?

Is there some kind of rule about that?

Why would there be, though?

Isn’t that what we’re fucking working toward anyway?

The car halts in front of a building I wish I didn’t recognize.

The MP studio.

I groan into my hands before reluctantly following both Armin and Erwin out. It’s a much smaller building than the others. Just a sleek, steel skyscraper with the same black REGIME scripted on the top. The MP emblem of an outlined unicorn head is etched above the entrance. Why a unicorn? I have no fucking clue, but I speculate that it’s because the talent here is as realistic as their mascot. Which is to say, a hopeful dream, but ultimately non existent.

It’s also, of course, were Jean spends a good chunk of his time.

Because this entire situation wasn’t stressful enough.

Why not add the very real possibility of seeing a despised ex?

Why not throw in the prospect of him being here when I’m kicked out?

Why not just add to the humiliation?

Armin pats my shoulder sympathetically, but I can’t seem to raise my eyes from the ground.

“How didn’t you tell me?” He asks quietly.

“I guess I wanted it to be a surprise.” I shrug.

“Didn’t you know that the program is for amateurs?”

Oh shit. I rub at my forehead with clenched eyes. “No, I didn’t even-”

How could I not have thought of that?

“It’s okay, Eren, I’m sure Mr. Smith can figure it out.”

“Why are we here? ” I finally look over to him. “Why not at the Garrison? Or, fuck, anywhere else?”

“I guess fate hates you.” He shrugs simply. I roll my eyes and punch him in the bicep. He only laughs.

“Ass.” I try to say with the straightest of faces, but fail miserably and am soon chuckling along with him while we step into the elevator. The button to the top floor is pressed and my laughter dies.

The top floor is the executive suite. Otherwise known as ‘the place to be’, and Jean is definitely going to be there. Unless he’s too busy with whoever the fuck he’s screwing now. White hot anger
flashes through me just as the bell tolls and the doors slide open.

The first thing I see is a huge red L couch. There’s a matching, perfectly square abacus centered between them. There is a wall of windows behind the longest part of the L, on the wall across from it is a giant TV. The wall in which the elevator is sandwiched is lined with fucking Macs with stereo headphone hanging between each one. Directly across from us is a raised office. The likes of which have drawn blinds in the windows that take up ¾ of the wall. Underneath are huge beanbags in front of bookshelves. Don’t give these buffoons too much credit, they’re filled mostly with cds and blu rays. Fucking rich bastards. Their program seems to get most of the funding which is fucking bullshit.

And who should be waiting in the corner of the L but...Hitch?

“If it’s not Aaron Thorn bury.” She drawls while dramatically crossing her arms and legs. There’s a lanky boy sharing the couch who just looks uncomfortable. I would be too if I was sporting that slick bowl cut.

“Really grasping at straws there, Hitch.” I roll my eyes. "Thorn bury? Really?"

Well if that’s supposed to be an insult, the joke’s on her; I fucking love The Wild Thornburys.

Donnie speaks to me on a deep spiritual level.

“Whatever, Aaron.” She tries drawing out an ‘Aar’.

“It’s an E not an A you fu-”

“Eren.” Erwin interjects warningly.

-cktard. I finish to myself. I simply cut her a glare and follow them to the stairs to the looming office and their drawn blinds.

As we near the top, I can hear muffled voices going back and forth rather heatedly. Erwin, though, pays it no mind and opens the door without hesitation.

“-Why punish him for my-” He cuts off, and I know who it is before I even look. In fact it’s the exact reason why I’m focusing on the particular design of this doorframe. Really interesting with the smooth black metal and the-

“ Eren.” Armin whispers and nudges me forward so that I’m just barely in front of Erwin. Damn, I guess I can’t avoid it at this point. So I dare turn my face. Our eyes instantly lock.

Aren’t you supposed to be gone? I still have 4 days 9 hours and 43 minutes of freedom. Or at least I did.

For a moment—with his lips parted and wider eyes than usual—he looks genuinely sorry.

For what exactly? For cutting my staycation away from him short? For what happened before he left? Or what is happening? What’s about to happen? I gulp, he does the same before regaining his composer and turning his attention to Erwin who is still standing in the doorway with his hand on the handle.

“Ah, Erwin, Eren, it’s good of you to come.” Zackley greets us pleasantly. Erwin nods, I try smiling. Zackley then looks back at Levi who is back to looking at me. “It may be best if I speak to Eren alone.”
That gets his attention and his head whips to Zackley with venom. He looks back at him waringly.

Levi turns on his heel and walks briskly toward me. My breath catches and my heart races. Why is he coming at me?

_Because you’re in front of the door._

Huh?

Right.

Not me. The door I happen to be standing in front of.

I try jumping out of the way, but it’s too late. His hand lightly runs from the top of my wrist to the tips of my fingers as he brushes past me. I can’t help turning my head to allow my eyes to follow him out. My mouth is agape, and part of me wants to run after him and demand an explanation, but the rest of me wants to pretend it didn’t happen.

Still the gesture has set a flame which follows the path he drew down my hand.

And it’s kind of reassuring. That he was here defending me. And right now I’ll take that comfort. I won’t question it. At least not until I get through this.

“Eren?” Erwin calls me back to the moment. Fuck, I just watched Levi walk away in front of everyone. Including Armin, who is looking at me worriedly. I nod, accepting my fate with Zackley and turn toward him.

“Mr. Jaeger.” Zackley begins with a gesture to the seat across from him. I sit, and the door clicks as the final nail in my coffin.

“Yes, sir?” I swallow my nerves as best as I can, and make eye contact. I have to show him that I am an adult and a Goddamn professional.

“I’m sure you’re wondering why I’ve asked you here.” He begins by speaking over his hands. I nod. I’m holding back the bursting urge to shake by twiddling my fingers and tapping my heel noiselessly. Hopefully it’s not too noticeable. “Mr. Jaeger, the program I have allowed you to be a part of is intended for amateurs.”

“I understand, sir.”

“So you knew that before agreeing to be cast on _Goliath?_” He relaxes his arms to the desktop to look me squarely in the eyes.

“N-no, sir.” My leg has started shaking faster. I have to clear my throat before I speak again. “I was unaware, but I understand now, sir.”

“Hm.” He tilts his head up. “Unfortunately, Mr. Jaeger, it may just be too late for your understanding.” I close my eyes to keep back the tears behind them. My fists are clenched and I have to bite my lip. _No._ After a deep breath, I force my tears back and my eyes open. _Be an adult. Be professional._ “Seeing how the episode is already set to air later this week.”

“Understood, sir.” I nod, but I can’t seem to lift my eyes from the surface of his desk.

“I expected more of a fight from you.” He huffs. I look up at him and the challenge gleaming behind those stupid round glasses. “I thought you wanted this more than anything.”
“I do.” I answer with affirmation.

“Oh?”

“Yes, sir, but I understand that I messed up.” Messed up? Nice, very professional.

“So you’re going to let this ‘mess up’ ruin all you have already worked for?”

What is he playing at? Didn’t he just say I’m out? “Sir, I thought you just said-”

“I said it might be too late,” He raises one finger in the air and settles that elbow on the desk. “I never said it was too late.”

“I-um-what?”

“Convince me.” With open palms, he leans back in his chair. “Why should I let you be the exception to this rule?”

What? Convince him? How the hell am I supposed to do that?

“Well, um, sir, I was able to land a major speaking role in a popular show in a single afternoon after only 90 minutes of looking at the script.” I rush out. Damn that might have been a bit boastful.

So? Isn’t that the point?

“If you’re so good, why do you even need to be in my program?”

Yeah, it was a little cocky. I gulp. Just be honest, Jaeger. “Because I know I still have a lot to learn, and I know that there is no better place to learn it.”

“There are plenty of other schools, what makes you think you’re good enough for this one?”

“I don’t, sir, I’m just grateful for having the chance to try to be.”

“Very diplomatic,” He stands and crosses to my side of the desk. “There may be hope for you yet.”

“Sir?” I gulp.

“Eren, if I allow you to stay it is going to get very hard for you.” He leans on the desk in front of me and crosses his arms. “Your peers will either love you or loath you.” Too late for that. “Even more than they might already after that little incident with Mr. Ackerman.” Oh shit. “Not to mention how the media will go after you, especially after the first disaster. They’ll be sure to use that as a springboard, and you need to be very very careful of how you act and the way you speak.” That will be a little difficult, but I can figure it out. “You will be responsible, not only for your image and that of everyone you know, but in upholding this studio’s standards.” I hold his eye contact with determination and nod. “I have seen the episode you filmed,” Oh no. It sucked, didn’t it? I can’t breathe. “I have to admit, I’m impressed.” Some of the tension I’ve twisted up is released and oxygen is moving again. “I am willing to bend the rules for you because I believe that you have the potential to be a very promising investment, and I want to see that investment through. If I do, I need your word that you will be my Golden Child so to speak.” Weird way to put it, but I get the picture. “Can you do that?”

Wait, does that mean that I’m not out!? “Yes, sir!”

“That means professional representation,” Got it. “top marks,” ...that could be a problem. “And absolutely no confrontations.”
Oh shit, that I can’t guarantee. “Yes, sir.”

“Well then, Mr. Jaeger,” He extends a hand. “I expect great things from you.”

I grab it with both hands and jump to my feet. I’m going to burst with excitement. “Yes, sir! Th- thank you, sir!”

There is an inkling of a smile behind his glorious beard and he releases my hand and gestures to the door. I practically- but I don’t-skip there. Just as I’m about to step through it he adds ominously. “Don’t dissapoint me, Eren.”

I gulp and begin down the stairs. Erwin is lounging on the couch with his arms resting on the back. Armin is sitting on the very edge of the couch like it’s a pin cushion between Erwin and Levi.

Levi is lounging back like Erwin, except that he’s tiny so he looks more like he’s lying down at an angle. Hitch is practically in his lap, twirling her hair, and yammering on and on and he’s not even looking at her. Actually, surprise surprise, he’s looking directly at me as I practically hop down the stairs. At first he starts, rocking to the edge like he was about to jump to his feet, but upon seeing my light as air demeanor he stays seated.

Hitch puts her hand on his bicep and glares at me. I glare right back. Not because I care that she actually put her hand on him like that. I couldn’t care less about that. But just because she’s so fucking pathetic and also is a real bitch.

He looks from my glare, to her hand, then back to me with a raised eyebrow.

“Am I to assume everything went well, Eren?” Erwin calls my attention brightly. I almost forgot I am bursting at the fucking seams!

Yeah, yes,” I start excitedly, and I also have lost control of my arms as they flail wildly. “It’s-wow-great!”

I’m very happy to hear that.” He smiles widely. Armin shoots me a thumbs up, Hitch snarls, the lanky bowl dude even offers an awkward grin, and Levi actually lets out a long breath and relaxes into his spot more. I can’t help but notice how Hitches hand is still on his arm. Why hasn’t he done anything to remove it?

Not that it matters, but did whatever the fuck happened between us actually mean anything to him? Thinking of which, what the fuck did happen between us?

“I’m going to take a piss.” He announces and shrugs out of Hitches grasp.

I cross over the Armin on the couch, and carefully track Levi in my peripheral.

“So, what happened, Eren?” Armin asks enthusiastically.

“I-”

“I think it best we don’t discuss the details here.” Erwin interjects with a nod to our guests. Couldn’t agree more, commander, sir! Plus Jean could literally pop up at any second so we should hightail it.

We start toward the elevator without Levi.

A tingle dances from the top of my wrist to the tips of my fingers. What the fuck was that about anyway? And what happened?
I need to know.

“Um, I need to go to the bathroom real quick. Meet you downstairs?”

Armin looks at me puzzled and Erwin nods. There’s a hallway that goes behind the elevators which lead to the restroom. One massive, and ridiculously nice one if memory serves.

I try the door knob and it’s locked.

“Someone’s in here.” Levi drawls from the other side. I try again, because I want him to open the damn door. “Patience is a fucking virtue.” I jiggle it again, hear him sigh and march. At last the door knob turns. “I said-”

I push through and shut the door behind me. He looks slightly surprised, but quickly sets back with crossed arms. My heart is racing and heat is rising to my face. “What happened?”

“What do you mean, brat?” He answers sarcastically. Oh you bastard.

“You know exactly what I’m talking about.”

“’fraid not, Sparky, I’m not a mind reader.” He shrugs into letting his hands rest on his hips. “You’ll have to be specific.”

He just wants me to say it. Dick! I move and before I can think, I have him pinned against the wall.

“You know what, you fucking bastard.” I hiss lowly.

He just looks at me deviously. A small smirk plays at his lips when he sees that I’m actually looking at them.

 Fuck why was I looking at his lips!?

“I think the real question is, what do you think happened?” He cocks his head slightly. I snarl, but push myself back.

“I-I don’t remember.” I admit with averted eyes.

“You don’t?” I shake my head. He sighs and when I look up is running a hand through his hair.

"Not." I sigh. "Not everything."

“Well, what do you remember?”

I don’t want to, but can’t fucking help looking in his eyes that seem to be swimming with emotions.

“Remember kissing you.” I mumble.

“Pouncing on me would be more accurate.” He rubs the back of his neck.

“Did not!”

“Oh, you did.”

“Whatever, I also remember you kissing me back!”

“Yeah,” He admits easily before drawing his lower lip through his teeth. I gulp. “I did.”
“Then what happened?” My heart is pulsing so loudly that I hardly can hear my own voice.

“Then,” He takes a deep breath. “I pushed you away and you passed out.”

“You pushed me away?” I ask in disbelief.

“What the fuck kind of person do you think I am?” He bites back.

“So, that’s it?” I ask dumbfounded. All the time I’ve fucking wasted on this and that’s all that happened.

“Did you want something more to have happened?” His eyebrows raise and he steps toward me.

“W-w-what?” I step back. He steps forward. I step back. “Why the fuck would I ever want that?”

He shrugs. “I think that’s between you and yourself, but it doesn’t answer my question.”

“No.” I step back. He steps forward.

“Oh, really?” He steps forward. I step back into the opposite wall. “Then why did you kiss me?”

“I was drunk.”

“Drinking inhibits one to act on something they wouldn’t otherwise.”

“The fuck does that mean?”

He steps closer, one arm miraculously rests on the wall beside my head, the other by my waist. “It means the alcohol gave you the means, not the desire.” He leans closer, and it’s not fair that he still smells so intoxicating. My eyes move from his eyes set to my lips to his own thin lips. “That was all you.”

I widen my eyes, then narrow them, then close them.

I can’t help it.

I can’t fucking help it as I bring my hand to the back of his head and slam our mouths together. He instantly pulls me closer at my waist and curls his fingers in my hair. My other arm does the same in wrapping around his back.

I hate this man.

He leans up to better access my wet lips.

Sloppy, rough kisses are nice and all, but I want more. So I bite his lower lip. Not hard but enough to slip my tongue in to move along his. Then I pull him even closer, and he moans.

And I decide that I like hearing that.

I like having this man, that I still very much hate, moan because of me.

He tightens his hold in my hair and pulls me back ever so slightly. His tongue curls at my upper lip and he follows it with his teeth before pulling me back to hungrily lap at his mouth.

God, I hate this man.

My hand begins moving down his back and I’m just about to reach his perfect and taunt a-holy shit.
He rolls his hips to alert me to the uncomfortable strain in my jeans.

I gasp and shamefully moan.

I fucking hate this man.

He smiles into our kiss, but keeps moving his lips with mine. My back is pushed further into the wall despite the fact that he keeps pulling at me.

Okay, this simply is not fair.

He doesn’t get to make me into putty. It’s supposed to be the other way around.

So I counter by moving both of my hands to cup his ass and pull him up. He growls and bites at my lower lip. I roll my hips and we both moan. Causing for us both to break away and catch a breath.

We stay like that for a minute. Panting with our arms wrapped around each other.

What the fuck did I just do?

He pulls away.

What the fuck did I just do!?

His hand loosens in my hair in favor of tracing my jawline to my lips.

What the fuck did I just do!?

I let him go like he’s a white hot flame that I’ve gotten too close to. Too bad I’m backed against the wall, so there’s not much I can do in the way of escaping.

Levi pushes back to lean solely on the arm over my shoulder.

I clench my jaw, narrow my eyes, and turn my face to the floor.

WHAT THE FUCK DID I JUST DO!?

I can feel him searching me, in my peripheral I can see him look to the ceiling.

He huffs loudly and shakes his head. My nostrils flare.

“Really, Eren?” He says with an edge. I turn my blue and green flamed eyes to his cold steel ones.

As if he has the fucking right to sound the least bit upset.

I hate him.

Do you?

I do!

Really?

YES! I FUCKING HATE HIM!

If you say so.
You bet I fucking say so!

The door burst open and both our heads snap to the intruder.

Damn I can’t believe I didn’t lock it.

Why the fuck didn’t I lock it!?

“E-Eren?” Fucking perfect! Fucking wonderful! Fuck! I knew it was only a matter of time before he’d pop up! And of course it was right now. Of course he’d find me like this.

Levi bites on his lower lip and scoffs. He looks at me one more time, I don’t return the favor. Then he’s pushing himself off the wall and storming past Jean. I lean my head on the wall with closed eyes and a deep breath.

Absolutely no confrontations.

I open my eyes and turn to leave.

“What the fuck was that!?” He starts yelling.

“Not fucking now, Horseface.” I shove past him and sprint to the stairs.

“EREN!” The stairwell door slams to drown him out momentarily before it’s thrown open again and the stamping of his feet are chasing me down. “Eren, wait!”

I stop on the landing four floors down and turn around to face him. “What, Jean?”

His steps slow and he stops a couple steps above me. Typical.

“Mind telling me what I just walked in on?” He leans on his railing hand.

“Mind keeping your abnormally long nose out of other people’s business?”

“For one fucking minute, Eren, could we just talk?”

“Oh now you want to talk!?” I bite loudly. “Now that it involves the possibility of me with someone else!”

“Are you with him?” He asks like he might actually be hurt if I were.

“No.” I answer honestly. Because a) it’s Levi, so fucking never and b) I don’t know, I guess something in me doesn’t want to lie just to hurt him.

“Are you with anyone?”

I turn my face away and clench my jaw. Why does he still affect me this way? “No.”

“Good.” I look over to see him relax and smirk. “I thought I might have to crack some skulls.”

“What do you want, Jean?” I ask seriously. He steps down. Not fucking this stepping toward me thing again.

“I don’t know, Eren.” He steps down again so that we are on the same level. Now that he’s this close I recognize the short sleeved black button down he’s wearing. It was once my black button down. “I just realize how much I hate the thought of you being with anyone else.”
What the fuck, Jean? Why are you doing this to me?

“Yeah?” I step toward him with a cock of my head and daggers in my eyes. “That’s funny, I remember feeling the same about you, but you shattered that pretty fucking quickly. So, frankly, I don’t give a shit how you feel. In fact you have lost the right to feel anything for me.”

I turn on a dime through the door and leave him in the stairwell.

This time he doesn’t follow.
Chapter Summary

How is Eren supposed to cope with everything that has happened? With everything he made happen? Apparently he doesn't have an answer either.

Chapter Notes

Warning: Eren's got some anger problems

One thing about myself that I can say with absolute certainty is that I am probably the most stubborn person I know. For example, I once ate Raisin Bran every morning for 5 solid weeks, and I fucking hate raisins. Something about the texture really gets to me. Anyway, when I was about 11 Mikasa tried to point out this little fact because I made face as she poured herself a bowl. In response, I aggressively grabbed the box and poured myself a bigger one. She watched with raised eyebrows as I gagged my way through it. So much sass packed into such a tiny child. Anyway, not only am I a stubborn little shit, I am also extremely competitive. Especially when it comes to Mikasa, and of course I didn’t want to be out done over a stupid thing like cereal. Because for some reason it really mattered to me.

For five fucking weeks I kept it up. At first I tried convincing myself that I really did like them. I just needed to get over the texture thing and it’d be fine. I was no wimp. I could power through!

That lasted all of 2 weeks before it became an act of pure spite.

Dedication has never really been a problem, but admitting defeat...well that’s nearly impossible. Even when I cracked and milk ran like a waterfall down my chin after getting a particularly huge raisin, I never fessed up to my disgust for the dried, wrinkled, poor excuse for food.

So believe me when I say that I can’t stand the position I’m in. Because I am stubborn and the prospect of going back on everything I’ve already built up to prevent this exact thing from happening kills. My brain says one thing, and I can’t help doing the opposite. Not that this hasn’t been a problem in the past, but never like this.

And, fuck, I’m unexplainably mad at myself. If I met myself on the street, I would beat the shit out of me.

Yes, for what happened. For my helplessness in stopping it. Okay, for actually making it happen. Mostly, though, I am pissed because every inch of my body he touched is burning. My lips are still tingling, and it’s taking all of my willpower not to jump him as I feel his eyes burning into me from across the car. And that, that is what’s boiling my blood.

“Eren,” Armin starts as we step outside to the Scouting Studio. “You haven’t said a word since we left MP.”
I open my mouth to respond, but I choke on the words I don’t know how to use under the silver eyes I don’t know how to unseen. He may not be looking at me, but as he steps out behind us, his ears are pricked up like a predator listening for prey.

What have I done?

I wasn’t drunk.

I wasn’t desperate.

I wasn’t depressed.

I have no crutch for this one.

‘That was all you.’

I am so fucking angry.

And so fucking stubborn.

Because maybe if I wasn’t it wouldn’t be this big of a deal. If I wasn’t so bent keeping him in the role of villain, this would probably be easier to shake off.

While these conflicting thoughts roll around in my consciousness, I’m holding my tongue to the roof of my mouth and keep clenching and unclenching my jaw.

Armin is still beside me, waiting for some kind of response that I can’t give.

Red begins blurring my vision.

So I do the one thing I can, which basically consists of digging my nails into my palm and going as rigid as possible so that I don’t do something incredibly stupid.

Like begin swinging at Levi.

Or worse and pulling him to me.

Fuck, I need to figure this out.

Because I refuse to feel any of these feelings for him.

Yet I do.

I need to remove myself from his presence immediately.

My pace quickens and before I know it I’m jogging toward the stairs at the end of the hall.

There’s some time left in my last class and I want to be alone.

The bathroom on the fifth floor is hardly ever used. Plus it has a lock.

*It would be so easy to pull him into it and pick up where you left off.*

SHUT UP!

I slam the door to the stairwell behind me and take the steps two at a time.
My face is on fire from this anger boiling in my stomach.
What have I done?
Why?
Why the fuck did I do that?
What the fuck was he playing at?
What the fuck am I doing playing along?
And Goddammit, why- why did Jean have to be there!?

Jean.

And just like that a whole new kind of anger invites itself in.
Because as much as I hate myself, I hate him more.

My pace doesn’t falter in the slightest by the time I throw open the door to the fifth floor and head to the executive bathroom I shouldn’t know exist.

Thank you Hanji.

As soon as the lock clicks I slip to the floor and lean my head on the back of the door.
Panting heavily I rest my sweaty forehead in my hands and groan.

What the fuck did I ever do to you, Universe?
Why do you hate me so?
And most of all, what now?
How do I get past this?

I’ve kind of locked myself in position with Zackly. Besides, if I left now, it would be like I was running from him. Which, maybe I would be, but we’ve already gone over my stubbornness.

But how am I going to face Mikasa?

How can I?

I fucked up this time. Like really, really fucked up.

But when was the last time you got that passion swept by a kiss?

SHUT UP!

I pull at my roots and bolt to my feet.

Shut up, shut up, shut up! I don’t need any fucking commentary!

Jesus, Eren, give yourself a break.

How? How could I do that when I hate myself so much?
And when I want him more.

My body is brimming with lust. It makes me sick, but I can't help it. Can't help the fact that it is disobeying my thoughts.

I’m so fucking pathetic.

Without thinking, my knuckles meet the smooth tile wall.

Letting myself stoop to the same level as those squealing fangirls.

And back to Mikasa.

How could I expect her to ever forgive me?

Will she explode?

Or worse, will she just cut me out the same way she cut him out?

My hits start coming faster.

Not to even fucking mention all the bullshit Jean tried to pull.

And faster.

I mean, does he think I’m a fucking idiot?

That I would fall back into his arms, just like that?

And harder still; like I am trying to crack the stupid tiles, and, fuck, maybe I am.

Who the fuck was he trying to fool?

Blood is now trickling down the side of my hand. What’s worse is that all I feel is a dull ache.

“Eren,” Krista’s voice carries through the heavy door. Because only she would figure out where I’m hiding. “You okay?”

I stop suddenly and absentmindedly begin wiping off the scraps of blood on my jeans.

Oh shit that’s going to stain.

“Eren?”

Cold water shocks back the feeling in my hands and holy fuck it stings. Really badly.

Though that’s not nearly as concerning as how obvious it is that I lost it. I wince as I shake my hands damp and more as I try my best to wipe any speckles of blood that made its way to the smooth pale wall.

Another hurried knock echoes followed by the obvious jiggling of the handle.

Oh doesn’t this seem familiar.

I shake my head, and open the door. Without a word she pushes through the small crack in the door to wrap her arms around my waist and rests her head on my chest.
“You don’t have to talk about it.” She tells me before letting me go.

“Talk about what? I’m fine.” I say defensively.

She only sighs, and drops her head in her defeat.

I feel a little bad about snapping, but also I just want to go back to beating things.

Which reminds me...I shove my hands into my pockets as casually as possible and without wincing at the scabbards of skin I probably scrapped off.

Why am I such a self-destructive imbecile?

Before she has a chance to say anything else, I step past her into the hall.

“Where are you going?” She calls at my back.

“To class, I guess.”

“Mr. Smith wanted me to bring you up to his office.”

I turn and look at her in utter bewilderment. “What?”

Are you fucking kidding me?

“He, um,” She tucks her hair behind her ear. “He wants to see us both.”

I slump and sulk to the elevator without another word.

Great.

Awesome.

I love being forced into uncomfortable situations.

Krista is definitely better at reading people than I am because she doesn’t even try to say anything to me in the elevator. Instead she provides an unusually comfortable silence.

I sigh and look down to her. She rewards me with a bright smile and a playful nudge of her elbow. It’s enough to at least crack a smile on my face. She chuckles right before the door opens, but stops as my face falls.

The doors open to his office.

No hallway. No sweet secretary to postpone the inevitable.

Nope, just straight to the lions’ den.

I gulp nervously when I catch sight of Levi. He’s standing in front of the window with his hands tucked into the pockets of his incredibly expensive black slacks. He looks at me over his shoulder as I step from the sweet safety of that steel box. Something indiscernible pierces me from his steel gaze. A hint of that storm that continuously sweeps me away rises before he returns his focus on the streets below.

I avert my eyes to the side and unintentionally back down to Krista who looks at me with furrowed brows.
She’s good at reading people, remember?

I turn away from her, straight to Armin, whose even better at reading me.

Why am I surrounded by tiny blondes with incredible-what could arguably be-ESP?

Instead of furrowed brows, however, he greets me with a sympathetic smile.

Then his eyes flicker over to Levi for the tiniest of moments.

Well isn’t this fanfriggintastic.

"Eren," Erwin calls everyone’s attention. Everyone but Levi who at most twitches his head toward Erwin’s voice. “While I am glad that you are still with us in the Scouting Regime, I can’t help but be cautiously optimistic.”

“Er-” How do I respond to that?

“You are walking a thin line between being a student and being an employee, does that make sense?”

“Sort of.”

“Which is tricky because in all actuality you should only be one or the other.”

“Right…”

“And Zackly is making you the exception, why do you think that is?”

“Because he wants to make me his Golden Child or something weird like that.”

“He wants to make an example of you. Either you will or you won’t, and no matter which way you fall he wins.”

“Now you’re losing me.”

“If you pass his little experiment, he gets credit for your success.”

“A regular Justin Bieber to his Usher.” Levi mumbles without moving an inch.

"Fuck you.” I bite.

“If you fail,” Erwin continues where he left off as if he didn’t hear either of our comments. “He finally has an excuse to cut the Scouting Program entirely.”

“Wait, what?”

“He’s been looking for ways to cut my program, almost since we started. If it wasn’t you it’d be something else.”

“So I’m pretty much a pawn.”

“No.” Levi answers solidly. He turns to me; I go rigid. "You're nothing like that."

The seriousness in his voice sends a shiver down my spine.

“Quite the opposite, actually.” Erwin seamlessly finishes for him. He truly seems to be Levi’s Armin.
“You’re invaluable. Because, believe it or not, you are an incredible talent. By keeping you enrolled, you’d be a student prodigy, and through your success behind the camera, you’d be the crown jewel of the studio. Enrollment will increase, ratings, sponsors, everything. You have the power to bring so much more to this program!”

Whoa.

I literally swoon at that, because what?

How can I bring that much to his empire?

He’s met me. I just don’t get it.

Ask every foster parent I’ve ever had.

Ask Hannes.

Ask Mikasa.

Hell, ask Levi; I’m nothing if not a disappointment.

How is this going to be any different?

Beside that, I can’t bear this responsibility. From what I gather, this entire program is Erwin’s baby. If I fail, the entire thing will crumble.

“Don’t inflate his head too much, Erwin.” Levi starts. “The sound of his tiny little brain rattling around is already deafening.” His entire being cuts me like a blade. He stands with a straight back, his hands are still in his pockets, and there’s such a dissonance in his voice like this entire meeting is a waste of his time. As if I’m just a waste of his time.

Well, good.

Fine.

He’s a waste of my time, too.

And he is.

I mean, how much time and effort have a wasted thinking about this prick?

“I’m sorry, Eren. It is unfair of him to put you such a position.” Erwin begins once more. “Regardless, it’s the position that you’re in.”

The door chimes behind me, making me jump.

“AAAAHHH, Mon Loup!!” In an instant I am enveloped in a bone crushing hug. Will they ever not be overly excited to see me? “Don’t worry, dear, Erwin told me all about all the things and we won’t let you down!”

“What?”

“Why do you think I called so many people here?” Erwin asks when I look at him in confusion. 

Because most of us were already with you? “I will do everything to help you succeed.”
“uh-ah,” Hanji waves a finger at him. “I believe you mean we will do everything to help him succeed.”

“Same difference, Shitty glasses.” Levi quips.

“Someone’s grumpy.”

“I’m always grumpy.”

“True, but you seem particularly edgy today.”

I gulp and change the subject. “Erm, so how are you all going to help?”

“Huh?” They turn their attention back to me and push their glasses back up their nose before answering. “Well I plan on running you through hoops of fire!”

My eyes widen and they chuckle.

“Hanji, please.” Erwin starts. “Eren, everyone here has been assigned tasks to help you.”

He gestures to the present company. Hanji looks ready to pounce, Armin and Krista look at me with support in their eyes, and Levi...well Levi looks like he has a thousand and one places he’d rather be.

I, too, wish he were in any one of those places.

_Maybe one of those places is back in that bathroom._

Maybe.

_Maybe you’d rather be there, too._

A spark of electricity runs down my spine and I have to take a deep breath to reign in my composer.

No. I don’t.

Something flashes in his cold eyes, which makes me realize that I’ve been staring at them far too long.

Clearing my throat I look back at Erwin who has apparently been speaking this whole time.

“-obviously. You’ll both begin meeting here twice a week so I know it will actually be getting done.” Both? “Well, not here, but one of the practice rooms.”

“Wait, with who?”

“With me, Dipshit.” Levi answers harshly. “Maybe instead of staring at me with puppy dog eyes,” Everyone in the room seems to simultaneously lose their breath. “You should pay attention when someone is talking to you.”

_Excuse me?_

Dead silence settles as red blurs my vision.

How fucking dare you!?

How dare you humiliate me!
No confrontations.

My hands curl into fists by my side.

No confrontations.

Blood begins trickling slowly from my raw knuckles as the rough fabric of my jeans scrape against them.

Don’t fucking do it.

My breath is coming in huffs.

Levi looks at my fists and his face sharpens. It’s harsh in a completely different way. Like he’s mad at me. Not sharp and distant; not even tinged on hurt or offended; but mad.

His hands are still in his pockets.

“Eren.” Armin punctures the silence with a calm warning.

It’s not enough to break my focus.

Levi slowly walks till he’s standing right in front of me.

Taunting me further.

He doesn’t think I’ll do anything.

He’s toying with me.

Doesn’t he know better than to play with fire?

My anger boils over and as I take a jab at him, all I see is red.

He doesn’t even move as he catches my wrist.

I think I growl as he pulls at it for a closer look at my fist, and his jaw clenches at the sight of my knuckles.


“Tch.” He looks back at me with disinterest, and drops my wrist. “Why are we spending so much time on a brat with absolutely no self control.”

His eyes are cruel, and I know he’s talking about SO much more than taking another swing at him.

As he calmly walks to the elevator, my wrist is burning where he held it.

Something is fundamentally wrong with me.

“I’ll say this once, Eren.” Erwin starts lowly once the elevator begins its descent. “Whatever is going on between you two-”

“Nothing’s going on between us!”

“-whatever animosity,” He again goes on like I never said anything. “Needs to be let go of. Or at the very least, put aside.”
“But nothing’s-”

“Am I clear.”

I take a look around the room at all the people who are looking at me with genuine concern. I sigh. “Yes, sir.”

“Good.” He says with a smile. “So,” I guess that’s the end of that conversation. “Back to business. Hanji,” They’ve taken to lounging in the small couch across the room. “Perhaps you should take over tutoring Eren.”

“Hmm?” They look from the space Levi was just occupying to between Erwin and myself. “Kay. Can do, sir!” They salute to him and send me a wink.

“Mr. Arlet has taken on the responsibility of coaching you on your public appearance, and handling the media.” He nods at Erwin and I seriously. Which really doesn’t surprise me since he always takes tasks seriously, whatever it is. “Krista has already agreed to helping you keep up with your classes.” I look over to her as she blushes slightly. “You will be getting an entirely new schedule to follow. Hopefully you won’t have to be pulled from any of your classes, but that depends on how your classmates respond to you.” Which probably won’t be great. “Do you have a current passport?”

“Huh?” Passport? “Um, no?”

"Yes you do, Eren." Armin sighs.

Oh, we did plan on going to Mexico a few years back, but that never happened. Still I got the stupid thing, I just have no idea where it is. “oh... right. I think it's still current.”

"Good.”

"Vundabar!” Hanji sings. I can’t help but smile at their enthusiasm.

I shrug. I have a thousand questions, but I don’t feel like asking any of them right now. Especially since I’ve got so many other ones I need to answer for myself.

"I know this is a lot to take in." You're telling me, pal. Oh wait, this thing not the Levi thing...right. "We'll check in when you get back."

"Get back from where?"

"Didn't Levi tell you?" No, but it's not like he had the time. "Mike wanted you on set in Vancouver."

"Vancouver?" I feel like he could've squeezed that in. "When? Before or after sucking on you tongue?" "What would've happened if I didn't have a passport?"

"I guess it's a good thing you do."

Erwin Smith, I don't know what to think of you.

Armin, Krista, and I enjoy an awkwardly silent ride down the many levels of this enormous building. Krista clears her throat a couple floors from the lobby. "So, Vancouver should be fun."

Defeat brings me to hang my head with a sigh.
The door chimes and we step into the sleek lobby with the uncomfortable chairs and bitchy secretary.

"Do you want me to take you home?" Armin asks by my side.

I hesitate to answer, because I want to go home. I just want to curl up on my own worn chair and watch the Neverending Story. Because I used to watch it with my mom whenever I was sick, and it's my go to feel good movie.

But I can’t go home. Not when Mikasa’s there. I can’t see her; I’m not ready to.

Yet, even though the alternative is the lesser of two hells, it's not where I want to be either.

Screw that.

But I need to pack. And find my fucking passport.

Because apparently that's a thing, and I don’t seem to have much of a choice.

Maybe I’ll also try my hand at catching up with all the things that have happened today.

I wave goodbye to Krista, slug my backpack over one shoulder, and follow Armin to the car.

The drive back is spent in light hearted conversation. I spin the tale of being cast on the show, explain why I couldn’t tell (he didn’t seem to mind), but as the conversation turns to my impending trip I go rigid. It feels as though a chunk of ice has slid into my stomach.

“’It’ll be nippy so pack a few jackets.” Armin goes on about the probable weather.

“Hm.” I begin to drone absentmindedly. “Yeah, I’ll have to find one.”

“Do you have a script at all?”

“What?” I hadn’t even thought of that yet. “No, I-I honestly didn’t know if I’d actually be on the show ever again. I mean we talked about it briefly, but this whole thing has taken me completely off guard.”

“Erwin said he thought Levi would have told you.” Armin begins curiously. “I wonder why he didn’t.”

I turn my eyes to the passing city and grumble,”Yeah. Well he must have had other things on his mind.”

Like saving my ass from Zackly.

And me groping his in the bathroom right after.

Damn it, what have I done?

I curl my knuckles and wince at the small sting.

What’s wrong with me?

Armin offers to walk me in, but I wave him off. I can hardly keep up with words of any sort at the moment, plus it would be that much harder to make my way to my room as noiselessly as possible.

Which is necessary because I see Levi’s Mercedes pulled in the driveway.
No sign whatsoever of Isabel to use as a buffer.

Just my luck, per the norm.

The front door hardly groans when I push it open just enough to squeeze myself through.

I have to admit it’s a bigger gap than it would have been just a month ago. I’ve filled out a bit from all the fucking exercise he puts me through. At least there’s visible progress from all that hell, like the beginnings of an actual six pack and defined biceps. Not to mention being able to run up the stairs without being winded.

I peel my shoes off by the heel, switch out my socks, and slide on the pads of my feet all the way to the base of the stairs. The top step squeals so loudly it actually echoes through the quiet house. I close my eyes and wince when I hear a stir from the direction of Levi’s study, but nothing more ever comes.

Huh, okay?

Usually he would make some sort of comment like “Is that you, Sparky?” , or, “Do you have to be so fucking loud?” , even occasionally, “Welcome home, brat.”

The silence irks me.

It really shouldn’t, but it does.

So I make a point to stomp the rest of the way to my room.

Fuck him.

I don’t know why it’s such a big deal, but fuck him.

I fall on my too big bed and stare at the too high ceiling.

This room is too damn big.

Why does this asshat have to be so damn rich?

*With the lights out*, I sigh loudly as my phone begins wailing. Awesome. *it’s les-.*

“Yo.”

“Eren!” Mikasa’s voice rings through.

“What’s up, Red?” I try to begin casually.

“Armin just told me what happened today,” She starts in a tone that is both concerned and annoyed. A sound only she, and every mother, can pull off.

“Yeah?” I sit up and pinch the bridge of my nose as guilt rises from my stomach. *Not everything that’s happened today.*

“Yes. Were you going to even tell me?”

“Mikasa, I literally just found out.” I snark. “This all literally just fucking happened.”

“There’s no need to cuss, Eren.” She returns. “Vancouver is pretty sudden, what about class?”
“Oh my God, Mikasa, I don’t know."

“Won’t you fall behind?”

“Probably.”

“Then say no.”

“I can’t do that.”

“Why not? Your grades need to come first, Eren.”

This is bullshit. I don’t have time for a lecture.

“I don’t want to do this now.” I snap. “I’m finding my passport-”

“You don’t even have your passport?”

“I’m packing my bags-”

“You don’t have clothes for that kind of weather. It’s Canada, Eren.”

“-and I’m going.”

There’s a long silence.

“Okay, fine, you’re going.” I can practically see her throwing her hands (or rather free hand) in the air.

I sigh. “Thank you.” I begin pacing. “So, how are you?”

“Good as ever I guess. You?”


“Rico’s a bitch as always, Annie and Bert are off again, and I’m back to coffee runs on top of all the other shit I’m supposed to do.”

“Sounds magnificent.”


I stop breathing. How’s Levi? Well he seems pissed. “Umm...I don’t really know, he’s been gone the last couple weeks.”

“I know, but Armin said he was back.”

Dammit, Armin.

“Oh, yeah, I guess he seemed good.”

No, once again he seems pissed.

“Okay, good.”

“Why?”
“I don’t know, because I kind of care.”

“Why?” I ask with an edge.

“Because he’s still blood and I just do.” She answers defensively. I guess that’s fair, but it does quite the opposite in curbing my guilt.

“Okay.” I reply blankly because I don’t know how else to respond to that.

“I’m pretty sure Hannes has our passports locked away somewhere, by the way.”

“Yeah?” Nice subject change.

“Yeah, we could go over for dinner if you want? You haven’t seen him in a while...”

More guilt. She’s right, I haven’t. Not that I’ve had much time, but I definitely should have made some for him. “Okay, but tomorrow. I’m completely beat.”

More emotionally than physically, but I did run 2 miles this morning. Which is actually a mile less than what Levi makes me run, but he wasn’t here so fuck it.

“I’m holding you to that.”

“Okay. 7?”

“7 it is. I’ll let him know.”

“Alrighty. Love you, sis.”

“Love you too, jerk.”

Click.

Well that didn’t go as bad as it could have. I think I sounded convincing enough.

Though I am shaking like a maraca on speed.

A steamy shower may help calm me down and clear my head. If only for a little while.

As I open my door, I look across the hall in time to catch a shadow move under the door on the other side.

I run into the bathroom and quickly lock the door behind me.

The raw skin on my hands burns badly when the hot water trickles over them.

What the fuck, past me?

Couldn’t you control yourself for once?

Obviously not.

I’m an idiot.

No arguments there.

Not only for putting myself in such an uncomfortable and utterly fucked up situation, but for putting
him in one as well.

Now that my hot head as simmered down I realize how unfair that was.

“Really, Eren?” His voice quietly rings in my ears.

I’m an inconsiderate jerk, and as the water begins to lose it’s heat, I feel a lump in my throat because I know I have to face him. Eventually.

Remember how I’m not good at admitting defeat….well when it comes to apologizing it’s 10,000x worse.

The stubbornness in me is a much stronger force than humility, but Levi may actually best me on both those fronts.

So I wonder how this is going to work.

Will we keep avoiding each other like the plague until we have to work together? Or will we burst into underhanded remarks and heated arguments whenever we see each other?

Important questions that only can be answered in practice.

I reluctantly turn the knob of the rainfall showerhead and grab for the unusually, but much appreciated, plush towel to begin patting myself dry.

Wrapping the towel around my waist, I cautiously crack the door to make sure the coast is clear. Only just outside it I find a small bottle of Betadine and cotton balls.

A tiny smile quirks the corner of my mouth as I look as my red knuckles.

It’s just like the Advil and the water the morning after the first...incident.

Why does he do things like this?

When I scoop it all up I notice a note taped to the side of the bottle.

*Just dab a little on and let it dry for a minute. Just try not to hurt yourself anymore, Sparky.*

I set it on the counter while I go change into a regular pair of loose shorts and a tee shirt.

It stings worse than a bitch as I follow the vague instructions, but as it dries it cools off and honestly feels a bit better.

Huh, who’d have known.

*Levi.*

Well, yeah. It was a rhetorical question.

The house is lit in hues of oranges and pinks from the setting sun through the giant glass wall. It almost feels like a cloud as I walk across the bridge. Might as well be since this stupidity must be a dream. I don’t know why the fuck I’m letting my feet take me to the door of his study. I rap a door twice with no response. Then I gulp down the boulder in my throat and crack it open.

It of course is absolutely massive. The corner of tall windows cast long shadows from all the furniture in the room. There’s a dark wooden desk centered on the opposite wall with a cool leather,
yet deeply cushioned dark blue chair behind it and smaller ones in front. Behind both is a long
dresser of the same dark wood, but with streaks of turquoise and blues blended in with the grooves
of the wood. It’s beautiful the way they’re reflecting in the glow of the light. A crystal container
filled less than halfway sits on a silver tray surrounded by matching tumblers. He seems to have a
thing for containers filled with alcohol on top of dresser things.

The wall off the window to my right is filled to the brim with books. Floor to ¾ to the top. The gap
between it and the high ceiling is filled with various artifacts, no doubt from traveling.

There’s a dark blue therapy couch next to it matching the desk chairs. In the other corner to my left is
a regular matching leather couch underneath an odd, but absolutely stunning painting.

Still, in all this space, Levi is nowhere to be seen. There does seem to be something off the last
corner of the room where the wall kind of ends just short of connecting. When I close in on it I
realize it’s actually an open door to a walk in closet.

There’s a dim light through it from what I imagine to be another opening.

I gulp.

I still have a chance to turn back around and hightail it to my room.

But I’ve come this far.

I still don’t really understand why, but I have and it’s too late to turn back now.

Stubborn, remember?

I tip toe through the closet almost the size of my room at home with a round couch thingy in the
middle.

I freeze when I get to the other doorway.

Levi crosses slowly from, what I can only assume is his bathroom, and his shirt is very much
unbuttoned.

My heart is pounding so hard and fast that I wouldn’t be surprised if he can hear it.

*Mission abort, mission abort!*

Okay, it’s not too late.

I’m turning back.

In my haste, however I run directly into whatever the fuck is in the middle of the closet.

“*Fuck.*” I breathe.

On flick the lights and stop goes my heart.

I clench my eyes as he clears his throat.

Then, mustering up whatever courage I posses, I slowly turn to him.

He clears his throat again, and I guess maybe I should actually open my eyes and look at him.
When I do he raises his eyebrows for an explanation.

And I can feel his soft lips against mine.

“Ummmm.” I start off smooth as can be.

“Ummmm?” He repeats, placing his hands on his hips and inadvertently sliding his shirt open a little more.

*Except maybe it was very much advertently.*

Either way it’s distracting.

Especially with the dreamlight of sunset silhouetting him through his windows.

And when I remember the way he fit in my arms.

“Ummm, I-uh.” I stumble again. What are words?

“You-uh? Spit it out, Sparky.”

Fuck, why am I here looking at the strip of exposed skin between crisp white fabric?

It's only making me want to run my hands over him and make my way back to his firm ass.

I clench and unclench my hands subconsciously, and...oh yeah...that's why I'm here.

“Well, th-thanks for, uh.” I’m a blabbering mess. For lack of words I show him the back of one of my hands. “The, um, whatever you gave me.”

“Don’t mention it.” He deadpans.

Feeling guilty and angry and completely lustful, I gulp again.

*Apologize, dumbass.*

“So when were you doing to tell me about Vancouver?” I bite.

*Great job.*

He moves and crosses his arms. Bye-bye pecs.

“Maybe I wasn’t.”

“So you were just going to completely fuck me over?”

“After whatever game you were playing today, I was seriously considering it.”

“Game!?”

I step toward him with closed fists.

Picking fights with each other it is.

“What else would you call it?”

“I don’t know, a moment of weakness?”
“I’ve never been someone’s weakness before.” He drawls sardonically.

“You’re not my—that’s not what-Whatever!” I don’t need to take this. “Thanks again.” I turn to storm out.

“I get why you beat your knuckles to a bloody pulp” He states to my back.

I stop in my tracks.

“What?” I ask defensively.

“I get it.” He repeats solemnly. I turn back around to see him walk over to me and take a seat on the giant round...whatever the fuck this is. He sighs and looks away in the distance. “You were angry. So angry you didn’t know how else to get rid of it.” My face falls along with my defense. I’m stunned at his accuracy, and can only ask how exactly he knows that. “You weren’t trying to hurt yourself, it’s just a side effect of a fucked up outlet.”

Still stunned I fall on to the thing next to him with my head bowed and my hands in my lap.

“Yeah.” I mumble.

“Yeah.” He repeats, and I understand. There’s only one way he could know this so well; he’s been there. We sit in silence for a few moments. Both our minds elsewhere, both our elbows on our knees. Then he sighs and stands up. I follow his movements with my eyes. Much to my distaste, he buttons shirt back up and runs a hand through his silky hair. ‘I’m going outside.’ He says blatantly.

Then he turns back through the doorway to his room and in a few muffled steps I hear the click of a door.

I bring a hand to my neck and look to the ceiling.

That was weird.

Oddly comforting, but weird.

The vibrant oranges have given way to soft hues of blues and pinks. Their light peers through the tall windows in Levi’s room as I step through the door. A few steps and my suspicions of the bathroom are proven true. I don’t step in, but the marble counter-top swimming with blues and greens sparkle in the remaining light.

Beautiful.

His bed seems bigger than a simple California King. It is neatly made with a thousand pillows and black comforter neatly tucked in at the corners.

For some reason I get a wave of butterflies when I look at it, and my hand skims the silky surface. Then I walk to the window to admire the skyline.

The city glows and vibrates below us. Cars and people buzzing around. It goes on and on almost far as I can see from this vantage. The almost being the sliver of rolling hills in the far far distance.

Damn I need to get out of this city. To those rolling hills out of the craziness of this for just awhile.

For the first time today I’m really looking forward to Vancouver.

And maybe being stuck with Levi won’t be the absolute worst thing ever.
I don’t know, but it’s things like that, or the roof of Regime, or before my impromptu audition for the show; times like those that make me think that he’s an alright guy. That spending time with him wouldn’t be so bad.

When I watch him act, I know he has so much to teach me. If only I’m willing to learn, and I am.

If only I can get rid of this pride.

In line with these thought I look down at the patio where I see him sitting on one of the benches. A tiny glow of ember flits above his fingers, which he brings to hang from his lips.

I remember the last time I saw him smoking.

He came to find me.

To see if I was okay.

Even with the fresh bruise I put across his jaw.

Despite the hate I had shown for him.

He still came to check on me.

“I only do it when I’m stressed.”

“So, you’re stressed right now?”

“You stress me out, kid.”

It’s a weird feeling; having that kind of effect on someone who really has no reason to care about me.
Aviatophobia

Chapter Summary

Eren discovers a fear he never knew he had. Luckily Levi is there to help.

‘Welcome to Air Canada’s nonstop service from Los Angeles to Vancouver…’ My eyes are tightly shut. Breathe. Breathe. ‘...our estimated arrival is 10:30 pacific standard time...” 3 hours. It’s only 3 hours. I can do this. "...at this time we’d like to remind you to make sure your seatbelts are fastened and that your seat and table tray are in the upright position..." My eyes spring open while I frantically tighten the thick belt over my hips. Good to go. However, in this first class space seat, I have no idea whether or not it is all the way up. I take another deep breath, grip the edge of the arms of my seat, and try focusing on the smooth leather stitches on the back of the seat in front of me. “We will be taking off in just a few minutes, so sit back, enjoy your flight, and once again thank you for choosing Air Canada.”

I slowly let out another deep breath.

“You okay there, Sparky?” Levi drones by my side.

“Yeah, yeah.” I gulp heavily. “I-I-I’m f-fine.”

In my peripheral I see his head turn to me. “Is this your first time flying?”

“Shut up!” I turn my face to his, and he merely shrugs.

“No need to get so defensive.” He rolls his head back on the soft red pillow hanging over the top of his seat. His fingers mindlessly begin pressing buttons on the side of the armrest as he closes his eyes. I turn my attention to my own set of buttons. There are heat controls for the seat, volume control for the tv that sits on a swivel off the front of the arm beside the window. Because for some God forsaken reason I decided to take the window seat. The second greatest regret of the day so far. Right behind not knocking a certain sadistic midget to the ground for forcing me to run at the asscrack of dawn in the rain. His reasoning being that my routine “won’t be consistent’ once we land. Which I don’t know if that is really a good thing since I’m being forced to share Levi’s trailer. The trailer that, if memory serves, only has one bed.

‘Flight attendants prepare for take off.’

Shit.


I just need to visualize something comforting. Like puppies. Or Armin. Playing Video games with Mikasa; throwing things at Krista to keep awake in class; A ball of fire...

Twisted steel...

A naked baby screaming for it’s mother!

Nope.
So much nope.

I need to get out of this death trap.

My fingers desperately struggle with my seatbelt. Why did I have to tighten it so Goddamn much?

A soft, cool something grabs my stumbling hand making me still immediately.

At a loss for breath and nothing but the pounding of my heart ringing in my ears, I turn my head and meet warm grey eyes.

“Eren, calm down.” He starts with a small squeeze to my hand. It’s cold against my unusually warm one, but the difference feels comforting in a way. “It’ll be fine.”

His eyes are so sincere. Filled with such assurance, such warmth, that my breathing starts again and I allow myself to relax into his grasp.

“O-okay.” I stutter. He gives another small squeeze of my hand then begins to pull it back. The plane starts speeding down the runway, and I can’t help but recapture it tightly. He looks back to me with a quirked eyebrow just as I turn my head forward and close my eyes.

I keep hold of his hand with my right while my left curls over the edge of the other arm, both of which I grip like a vice.

The wheels bounce once, I squeeze his hand tighter. They bounce again, and this time they don’t come back to the pavement. The rush of the shaky incline has tensed up every single muscle in my body. After about a minute, the plane finally levels out.

“Damn kid, you have quite the death grip.”

I open my eyes and look down at our hands, and, yes, there’s a very visible indentation of my fingers digging into his smooth pale skin.

Wait a minute...

I am holding his hand!

I pull away immediately. His eyes furrow for a moment, then without a word he faces forward again; clenching and unclenching his fingers a few times.

I try gulping down this lump that has formed in my throat. Maybe it will help get rid of the heat in my cheeks. And the fluttering in my stomach; which must just be left over from take off.

Sure, sure, whatever makes you feel better.

At the ring of the seatbelt sign, Levi leans back in his seat and a foot rest follows it.

The greatness of my cushioned leather seat is much more noticeable when I’m not busy freaking out.

I rub my forehead and subsequently push my glasses from my nose. The rough tape in the corner scratches at my left temple and I wish I wasn’t far too lazy to put my contacts back in after my shower this morning. Said laziness is also why I’m in a pair of slightly too big jeans that end up setting right on my hips. Like right on them, as in ready to fall down at any sudden movement. It doesn’t help with the-slightly tighter than usual-blue hoodie over my worn Lion King tee shirt. That’s right, I said Lion King. Not an ideal outfit, but I was exhausted and in a hurry so I grabbed the closest things to me.
Pushing my glasses back up my nose, I look back at Levi lounging comfortably with earbuds in and eyes closed. Huh, I wonder if I can make myself that relaxed.

The panel of buttons is intimidating. I press the one that looks like it’ll heat my back and butt, then try imitating Levi by leaning back. Only my seat doesn’t move. I try leaning forward to slam back on it harder, but it doesn't budge. Levi opens one eye as I slam my back once more.

“You need to unlock it, dumbass.” He says while taking out one earbud.

“Huh?” I don’t recall locking it.

He sighs and sits up as far as he can without kicking down the foot rest.

Then my body seizes because as he is reaching across from me to get to the panel, his arm and hand lightly slide over my lap. I can tell it’s unintentional by the angle of his position and he makes no acknowledgements that it happened. Doesn’t even bat an eye as he falls back in his seat and replaces his earbud.

Obviously not a big deal.

So cheeks you need to cool the fuck off.

I avert my eyes to the window.

Which is a bad idea as the thick fluff of the clouds only serve as a reminder that we are thousands of miles above the safety of solid ground.

Twisted steel.

I gulp and decide to lean back in my newly unlocked seat.

Which is getting comfortably hot; I put my feet up to start feeling that heat on my back. I sigh and relax into it.

Yes. This is nice.

Needn’t worry now.

Nope.

It’s rather toasty.

Yup.

Hey, you know what else probably gets pretty toasty?

Don't even say it.

Explosions.

Fuck you brain.

Fuck you so much.

With that thought, this laying back thing’s not going to work. Maybe if I walk around a little bit. Actually, I could probably manage to go to the restroom.
Yeah, get some blood flowing in your legs and prevent the chance of peeing your pants should we come crashing down!

Okay, enough of that.

My seatbelt clicks easily, which is interesting seeing how it was like a fucking hunter’s knot before take off. Levi’s eyes flutter open to watch me as I step past him.

The lavatory is actually cleaner than I expected it to be. Even if the tiny sink makes it hard to wash my hands, it has helped me reign in my anxiety. A little.

When I am on my way back to my seat, I see Levi sitting up with a couple shot bottles and two cups of ice.

Well that should be nice for him.

I roll my eyes and squeeze my way past as best as I can without spilling anything.

Once my belt is securely fastened, one of those ice glasses is set on my table tray. Diluted brown liquid fills it almost halfway. I look from the glass to the man who set it there. He nods at it before bringing his matching one to his lips.

He makes a face when he sets it back on his tray.

“Man, that’s cheap.”

“What is this?” I ask skeptically.

“What does it look like, Sparky?”

"Of course I know what it is , you ass." I sniff the mysterious liquid. Well, maybe I don't know what it is exactly, but I can recognize scotch when I see it. "I mean why are you giving it to me? I'm not exactly 21.”

"You look like you could use a drink." He shrugs. "Besides, Canada’s drinking age is 18, this is a Canadian airline, and technically we're off American soil." Now that he mentions it, I really could use a drink, and I mean I did give him a chance to take it back. He settles back in his seat. Just as I bring the plastic cup to my lips, he adds, “Just give me some warning before you jump me this time.”

It burns! Oh shit, I snort and choke on my drink and it fucking burns the back of my throat.

I start sputtering coughs and try shaking dry since my clumsy self spit and spelt everything all over. I send down a deadly glare to the man lying with lightly closed eyes.

“Asshole.” I mumble.

The corner of his mouth twitches up.

I roll my eyes.

God, I hate this man.

And the sleeves of my sweatshirt are wet beyond the quick fix of merely shaking them dry.

Awesome.
I pull it over my head, and I can feel the cool cabin air quite a ways up my stomach as my shirt slides up with it. Damn, this is why I don’t wear tighter-than-usual sweaters. Trying to leave myself exposed for the absolute least amount of time possible, I end up catching my glasses on the collar and attempt to squirm the rest of the way. Which only tangles my arms with each other, and this has got to be the most difficult sweatshirt in the world.

To top it off, the scotch soaked sleeves have thoroughly rubbed my forehead and my hair. Gross, now I’m going to smell like an alcoholic.

With an exasperated sigh I finally pull it over my head. My eyes immediately cut over to Levi who regards me with amusement.

“What?” I snap as I square my glasses back on my nose and glare.

“Just enjoying the show.” He drawls with a smirk and an appreciative once-over.

My cheeks heat up and I pull the ends of my shirt down as much as physically possible.

“Perv.” I grumble.

“Lion King?” He nods to my chest, completely ignoring what I said.

“Yeah, so?” I start defensively. “It happens to be a classic.”

He looks me up and down for a beat, then shakes his head.

“You’re fucking adorable.” He says simply as he lets his eyes flutter shut once more.

I blink unbelieving for a couple seconds. How do I-? What am I supposed to-?

Shit, I can’t even respond to that beyond the heat that is spreading from my cheeks to my ears to the back of my neck.

I gulp, face forward, and slam what remains of my drink.

I’m very careful not to look at Levi the rest of the flight. I mean, besides the few times that I happened to glance over simply to make sure he was not looking at me.

For the most part he wasn’t, but there were a couple times that he caught my eyes with a smirk.

‘Good morning!’... ‘Looks like we’re right on time! The seatbelt sign will be turned back on in just a few minutes as we begin our descent. We ask that you now make your way back to your seats and return your seat and table in the upright position. And again, thank you for flying Air Canada!’

The drink is wearing off. Nerves fill my chest beyond my control.

Isn’t it like 92.3% of plane crashes happen during landing???

That sounds like a made up number.

Whatever, I know it’s a high percentage, and what if this is one in that statistic?

I readjust my seat, tighten my belt again, and close my eyes.

“Just look at those mountains.” Levi’s smooth voice washes over me. I hesitantly open my eyes to
the view outside my window. He’s leaning into my space for a better vantage point. I try not to think about it.

Dark grey, rainstorm skies stretch beyond the deeper blue mountains in the distance. They sit to over shadow the cityscape below buzzing between the perfectly plotted intersections. A cool river runs through it, and as we descend further, it grows wider. The plane shakes and I clasp my eyes shut again.

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

There’s a heavy sigh at my side and a cold hand slides softly over my own.

My heart hammers faster.


So I do. One deep breath in, one deep breath out.

Repeat.

His fingers curl into my palm.

Honestly it’s not helping the fluttering in my chest, but the heat in my cheeks provide a nice distraction since I’m concentrating my efforts on cooling them off.

And clearly the alcohol hasn’t completely worn out since I’m allowing myself to stay in his hold.

I slow my breathing and shake my head. The plane jolts and I lean back with my free hand combing back my hair.

He starts rubbing small circles on the back of my hand.

Pushing my glasses back up my nose, I look at him with panic in my eyes. He keeps his head forward, which inexplicably disappoints me. I want to see those reassuring eyes. Maybe even hear him tell me that it will be okay. Why do I feel so dependant on him right now?

My terror falls as I hear him start humming lowly.

The corner of my mouth twitches up, I take a deep breath, lean back, and close my eyes to listen to his soothing melody. I think I’ve heard this song before, but I can’t place it. For now, though, I’m content with not trying to. I’m okay with letting my mind fall silent to focus on the rise and fall of his voice. Before I know it the tires hit the pavement roughly. I jump in my seat, Levi squeezes my hand without even a break in his melody. Despite how tensed my body is, or how tightly shut my eyes have become, I try to keep myself concentrated on it.

Okay, we’ve landed, this is good.

Look at how not exploded you are!

Yeah, I guess I did make it unscathed.

The plane slows to the terminal, and Levi falls silent.

Well, folks, welcome to Vancouver! The local time is 10:30, and there’s a bit of rain coming down right now with a temperature of 8°C (that’s about 46°F for all you Americans on board)’ Oh, this pilot fancies himself a comedian. Har, har. * So if this is your last stop, grab an umbrella and try to
stay dry! For all those just passing through, check out the restaurants and shops in the food court! We ask you to stay seated and buckled until the seat belt sign is off. We also ask that all those catching the connecting flight to Hong Kong be let off first, after which we will vacate from front to back. It was a pleasure flying you all, and thank you for choosing Air Canada.

The seatbelt sign dings as soon as the plane jerks to a stop. No sooner, the clicking of metal rings throughout the plane and people begin shuffling out.

“Not that this isn’t sweet,” Levi begins blatantly. “But if we want to actually get off this plane you’re going to have to let go of my hand.”

“Hu–” I pull out of his hand faster than lightning. “Shit.”

He makes a show of rolling his eyes while unbuckling.

I wait until his back is turned before I get up to follow, since I can feel my entire being transforming into a tomato.

What the fuck is wrong with me?

Well-

Don’t answer that question.

“LEVI ACKERMAN!?” A squeal erupts from our side as we are crossing across the shopping and food court. Levi closes his eyes with an exasperated sigh, but stops nonetheless.

He slaps on a serene expression as the girl and what looks like her brother jog up to him.

“Um–” The girl, maybe 15 or so, begins with averted eyes and pink cheeks. She starts digging into the floor with a pointed toe.

“Misther Darknesth, sthir,” The young boy under a mop of yellow hair begins with the most adorable lisp. He’s missing one of his front teeth when he smiles brightly and extends his pad of paper to Levi. Wait, did he just call him ‘Mr. Darkness’? “Can I hafe your totograpfh, pleasthe!?”

I smile as Levi graciously accepts the scribbled notebook and pulls a pen from the inner pocket of his jacket.

“It would be my pleasure.” He starts while bending a knee to his level. (It should be noted that he is practically the same height with a straight back as the kid when he does.) “What did you say your name was?”

“I didn’t,” I widen my eyes and suppress a snort. This kid is sharp as a tack. “But you can call me Billy!”

Levi chuckles, “Okay, Billy,” Levi has completely abandoned his general public persona in favor of relaxing into this sincere man. “And, what is your favorite thing to do?”

“I like ‘tending fhat I’m the masther of nightmaresth, just like the ‘Rinsthe of Darknesth!” Both our eyebrows raise to our hairline. Adorable though he may be, damn. I look down to the back of Levi’s head. What the fuck kind of movie was this kid watching?

“Hm, well I think you’d be an excellent Prince of Darkness. Maybe for Halloween, eh?” He scribbles on the sheet, and over his shoulder I see a small character drawing. I can’t make much of it
out before the boy pulls it out of his hands with a wide smile. He hugs it to his chest tightly.

“Fhank you! Fhank you! Fhank you, Misther Darknesth!”

“You’re welcome, Billy.” He chuckles. “Now,” He leans closer to Billy like he’s going to tell him a secret, but turns his gaze up to the girl who has been staring at him completely starstruck. “Is this your sister?”

“Yeah, that’s Emily. She’s in love with you.” He states matter of factly.


“Hi, Emily, how are you?”

“G-good.”

“Do you-”

“CAN I GET A PICTURE WITH YOU!” She blurts out.

“OH! Can I be in it too?” Billy starts jumping up and down.

By now there have been a few passerbys that have stopped to watch. Hopefully we can wrap this up before there’s another swarm incident.

“No, Billy, I don’t want you in it.” She glares down at him.

“I’m telling mom.” He narrows his eyes as the words come out blankly.

“Fine.”

“Misther?” Billy is now pushing a phone in my hand. “Pleathe tafe the picture.”

“Um, sure.” I shrug.

“Actually,” Emily starts shyly. She looks at me for a second but looks away again with red cheeks. “Could you be in it too?”

What?
I blink a few times because I must have imagined that, right? Why would she want a picture with me? “Uh-”

“C’mon, Eren.” Levi pulls me by my shirt so that I end up right next to Emily. When I look at him, he’s wearing a sadistic smirk on his face and sparkling amusement in his eyes. There’s the asshole I know. “She wants you in the picture.”

Billy runs over to us and stands directly in front of Levi, apparently having shoved the phone in someone else’s hands.

I’m so disoriented. What is happening?

“Okay, on three.” The stranger begins. “One.” Levi puts an arm around the girl’s waist and has the other one resting on Billy’s shoulder. I look at him in panic, he tilts his head to her shoulder. Huh? “Two.” Unsure of what else to do I put my arm around them. “Three!” There are a series of clicks.
“Okay, um the guy on the left, you should try to smile.”

The left? Shit, that’s me!

I plaster on a stage smile, which I have heard is very charming, and we try again.

When the stranger hands back the phone, Emily has sprung out of our arms in a state of embarrassment.

“Thank you!” She smiles brightly looking between the both of us, and her cheek get impossibly redder. Then she’s turning to skip back to wherever they came from.

“Bye Misters!” Billy waves enthusiastically as he follows his sister.

Levi recalls my attention with an exasperated sigh and his usual slate blank face.

Maybe he was faking the entire thing. I look back to watch the kids talking excitedly to who I can only presume are their parents. Well, at least they seem happy. Even if I was in the picture. Why did she want me in the picture? I’m a literal nobody.

For now.

I sigh and turn around to Levi, who obviously waits for no one because he’s already on the other side of the hall.

“Slow down O’Prince of Darkness!” I call while half jogging to catch up to him. He doesn’t. It doesn’t take too much longer to make our way through the airport since neither of us so much as attempt conversation and nobody else tries to stop us. Once I see the not so distant city beyond the glass doors it finally dawns on me that I am in fucking Canada! I have actually left L.A for the first time in my life!

With a smile on my face and a pep in my step, I pick up my pace.

Someone opens the door to come in and I immediately stop.

The hairs on my body are standing on edge as I suppress a shiver.

Fuck. I’m in Canada.

Canada.

“C’mon, Jaeger.” Levi starts when he reaches my side. “Aren’t afraid of a little rain are you?”

He lifts the collar of his jacket before stepping out into the downpour.

No, Levi, it’s not the rain I’m afraid of; it’s the 23 degree drop in temperature.

My sweatshirt draped over my arm is still bit damp and seriously reeks of alcohol, but is it worth saving myself from freezing to death?

As quickly as I can I pull it over my head. Yes this is much better. Still freezing, but better.

I gulp. By now Levi has a large blue umbrella over himself and his things. He rolls his head on his shoulder to look back at me through the glass doors. Taking a deep breath, I open the door and step through.
I really hate to admit it, even to myself, but seems I am a California Cliché.

There is no hesitation when I squeeze myself as close to Levi as possible for protection under the umbrella. He lets out the lowest of chuckles and I set my eyes from stun to kill.

Walking this close to him is uncomfortable to say the least. Our suitcases awkwardly bump into each other as I fight to stay sheltered. The struggle- *the struggle* -is oh so real.

Thankfully there’s a car waiting for us at the curb. A man has the trunk popped to help us pack our things quickly. He hands the keys to Levi who leaves me in the rain to cross the the driver’s side. I jump to open the passenger door before I have a chance to get too wet. At least my pants are dry this time, I don’t feel like dealing with Levi if I were to repeat what happened the last time I got into his car during a downpour. However, the rebellious part of my brain has me reopening the door to fix that frame of thought. Because why shouldn’t I? But I miss my opportunity as he sits and closes the umbrella out the door before setting it on a towel laid on the floor in the back. I don’t even want to know why that was already all laid out. Then he looks over to me.

“Oh, so you aren’t going to be a little shit this time.” He starts the car and adds. “Good boy.”

The accelerator is slammed before I even get the chance to respond. Instead I’m gripping the ‘*oh shit*’ bar and have my other hand on the dashboard.

We skid out of the parking lot. Skid because there’s a couple fucking inches of water on the street, and Levi’s a psychopath!

“Jesus, Levi, slow down!”

The corner of his mouth twitches up, and he complies.

Slamming on the brakes so that we hydroplane into the clover exit to the highway.

“*FUCK!*” I scream.

Well if the flight didn’t kill me, this certainly will.

He gets us onto the highway smoothly and finally continues at a fairly reasonable speed.

“Oh c’mon,” He starts then flicks his eyes over to me to add through an evil half smile. “Don’t you trust me?”

I glare, he gives a short laugh which I promptly drown out with the stereo.

“So, I didn’t know you were afraid of flying.” Levi starts by lowering the volume a few songs later.

“Neither did I.” I reply honestly before I even try to pick a fight. “I have never gone anywhere before.” He hums thoughtfully. Reminding me of the soothing melody he had hummed during the landing. I clear my throat, and it comes out before I have a chance to stop it. “Thanks.”

My eyes widen when I look over to him in panic. I didn’t mean to say anything in the first place, please don’t make it worse by asking what I’m thankful for.

“You’re welcome.” He replies completely unphased. That’s that. No specification. No smug remark. Just solid affirmation that he knows exactly what I’m talking about. That he knows exactly what I’m talking about and he’s not judging me. Not mocking me. That, despite all the shit I’d probably be giving him if our roles were reversed, he did what he did unconditionally.
And that makes me feel like a piece of shit. Because in every situation thus far, he’s never become the villain I’ve painted him to be. He’s an ass, there’s no question of that, but true villainy? No. Everything I’ve seen of him has pointed to quite the opposite.

Except his original crime.

Yet even in abandoning Mikasa, he must have believed he was in the right. Because that’s the type of man I’ve come to know him to be. He was still wrong in doing so, but...I don’t know, maybe I’m just looking for reasons to excuse this incredible desire to slide my hand over his thigh. Justification for the way I have come to feel for him. Which I don’t exactly know how that even is! I should hate him! I’ve hated him for SO long, and in that regard he still very much deserves it.

Yet...

I admire his strength of character.

His honesty and consideration.

His challenge.

He’s an enigma wrapped in a mystery shoved into a tiny, steamy, package of muscles and charisma. And it is such thoughts that have me casually lean forward enough to begin drowning them out by raising the volume of the speakers once more. He gives me an indiscernible look as I do, and I can’t help but shy away from him toward the window as much as possible.

Not too much longer, by some sort of miracle, we get to our destination in silence and more importantly in one piece. Physically. Emotionally I’m still torn.

Our destination being somewhat outside of the city itself to a studio with an expanse of warehouses behind it all. Levi pulls us through the gate into a nearly full parking lot.

The rain is still lightly drizzling when I step out. I shiver and breathe into my hands.

“Oi, brat!” I look over the top of the car to the head that barely clears it. “Mike’s waiting for us.”

I nod and jog after him. For someone with such short legs, he’s a surprisingly fast walker.

We find Mike in Warehouse 13. (I make a mental note to admire that geeky fact later.) He’s talking with the crew with headphones around his neck and a clipboard by his side. He sniffs the air, then turns to us.

Did he just smell us?

I wonder if he’s one of those people with Synesthesia.

Would it be weird to ask him?

What do I even smell like?

“I was wondering how long it would take you to get here.” He says with a smile. “Eren, I’m glad you could come up.”

I rub the back of my neck nervously, desperately hoping he didn’t catch me sniffing at myself. Though, mission accomplished and I do NOT smell like BO. No, I just smell like a musky drunk with a hint of vanilla.
“Do you wanna tell the kid why you pretty much summoned him here, Mike?” Levi asks for me. Ah, yes, that too is something I should be concerned with.

“I guess that could be helpful.” He grumbles, and looks at his clipboard. “I don’t have any time right now to go into the details, but how about I meet you around 7 this evening?”

“Yeah, sure.” I nod.

“Here,” He pulls a folded over script from the back of his waistband, and I try not to think about that when he hands it to me. “Might as well get a head start on this.” He turns his attention to Levi and speaks with a slight tinge in his voice. “Levi, I need you back here in an hour.”

He nods and turns to lead the way into the hustle of the studio. We find our way to his trailer and, to my surprise, my things are sitting right beside the inside of the door.

He shrugs out of his jacket, goes through his whole sock routine, and scrutinizes me until I do the same. As predicted, getting out of my sweatshirt is a battle in which my shirt actually makes it to the back of my head.

My glasses also fall the ground in the process. I scramble to pick them up, and when I put the on I immediately look at Levi while straightening back up. Instead of the amused expression I found earlier, he meets my eyes with a storm brewing in his.

As I pad my way past him to the couch, I find myself with the feeling of ice slipping to the bottom of my stomach.

I guess things are different when we’re actually alone together. Tense. Cold. Without even a car stereo to drown out the awkward silence.

Unlike in public when it’s easy to be lighthearted and flirty.

Because when we’re alone, the elephant in the room is hard to avoid.

Still we do at all costs. Rather, I sure as hell do.

Which is why, I think, things are so tense between us.

He wants some kind of explanation for my actions, some kind of resolution; and I can give him neither.

It’s not that simple. I’m at war with myself over him.

I’m sure the hand holding thing has only made it all worse.

I’d be pissed at me too. But it’s not like I am doing it on purpose!

I am still trying to operate under the pretense of hating him.

Because I still do hate him.

For some things.

For others, though...hell, I don’t even know.

I guess in another time, in another place, I would probably be falling for him.
And hard.

He looks at me a half a second longer before he begins to walk across the trailer. His shirt flies off without breaking pace. Black and red splotches of ink ripple on his back with his movements.

“W-what are you doing?” I sputter, unable to peel my eyes away.

“I’m taking a shower. I hate traveling.” He runs a hand in his hair and rests it on the back of his head. Which shows off his muscles in a way that is really not fair given my current dilemma. “You’re taking one, too, as soon as I’m done.”

“What?” I gape at him. “Why? I took one before we left!”

“Because traveling always makes you gross, and because I said so.” He crosses his arms and pops a hip. Damn that is even hotter than before. I gulp while he looks me over. “Unless,” He moves from his place until he’s directly in front of me. I can’t keep track of my sporadic heart beats as he hooks his thumbs in the waistband of the pants that, need I remind you, hang right on my hips. With one effortless move, they could come crashing down to my ankles. He keeps his eyes on my waist as he steps closer. “You want to save water and join me.”

He meets my eyes through lids hooded over stormy grey irises. I bite my lip.

Yes I would very much like to join him.

“Eren.” Levi drawls from his place right outside the bathroom, all the way across the trailer. Because he hasn’t actually moved at all.

"Huh?” I snap out of my little daydream with a few blinks.

His arms are still crossed as he looks me up and down.

Then he hangs his head and sighs. “Nothing, just don’t touch anything until you clean yourself up.”

He turns, before he disappears through the door I catch another glimpse of splashes of ink on his shoulder and side. I really would like a closer look at those. I’ve seen it before when he was swimming. Not that I was watching him. He just happened to be out there when I wanted to watch the skyline.

Right.

Still all I’ve been able to make out are letters across his ribs and a pair of crossed swords on his left shoulder. The rest...well just a part of the mystery he’s already been established with.

Folding my sweatshirt over my arm, I begin to look around. It’s the exact same as I remember it. Cool steel kitchen right in front of the door, bedroom of sorts behind this section of a wall with the TV on it. The bathroom Levi just disappeared into is just on the other side of the kitchen.

From which are very distinct sounds of running water. I wonder how those hot droplets feel running down his-no.

Seriously, no, I’m just making this so much harder on myself!

The TV’s on a notch below full volume when he finally steps back out.

My body goes rigid on the couch as the fading steam brushes past me. My heart stops with every soft step toward my back. I don’t even know what it is I’m supposed to be watching anymore. I just keep
my eyes trained on the screen.

Levi doesn’t pay me any mind as he steps past me to the little room.

Focus on the screen, Eren.

Don’t you dare follow him into that room.

*Why not? I mean he is right there, and don’t you remember how perfect you fit together? Not to mention what you already know he can do with his mouth-*

No.

Stop.

I jump to my feet, grip one of the belt loops on my jeans so they don’t trip me by falling to the floor, and run into the bathroom on the other side.

Get ahold of yourself, Jaeger! I’m just confused and incredibly sleep deprived. I need to take a shower and he’ll probably be gone by the time I’m done.

After I place my glasses on the edge of the sink, I shake my head and begin undressing. The heat of his shower still hangs in the air before I even turn the faucet.

Under the hot stream of soft water my mind falls silent.

I bask in this tranquility. This heat.

Whatever dirt or grime from traveling rinses away, and moreover I forget that it is at least 15 degrees colder outside of this steamy haven.

I breathe it in and relax with the exhale.

A melody I haven’t been able to shake from my mind rises to my lips.

At first in a low hum, but as recognition from some part of my brain sparks, the actual lyrics turn into a soft song against the beat of the shower.

*I wanna hold hands with you*

*But that’s all I want to do right now*

My hands mindlessly work the shampoo in my hair into a lather.

*And I wanna get close to you*

I turn my chin up to let the hot water run the suds from my hair.

*Cause your hands and lips still know their way around*

Why is this song stuck in my head?

*And I know I like to draw at night; it starts to get surreal*

When was the last time I even heard this?

*But the less time that I spend with you, the less you need to heal*
Did I listen to it on the plane?

I wanna sleep next to…

The plane.

Levi.

This was the song he was humming while we landed; while he held my hand.

...you.
More of a Treat than a Trick

Chapter Notes

First off, thank you all for your words of encouragement! They really, REALLY meant a lot to me! I don't know what I did to attract such amazing people to this fic, but I am so glad I did! You are all amazing and wonderful balls of greatness, and don't let anyone ever tell you otherwise!

... Anyway.
Little late to the Halloween party, but better late than never!
Because it IS my favorite holiday, and why should the boys suffer because I can't keep to a deadline?
..*EDIT*...
Hey, so apparently proof reading at 5 am isn't a fail safe method of editing. Haha, who'd have thunk?
So I have edited little things. Mainly in the end.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I wonder,” The man behind the Titan mask began lowly. “Will you see the light leave their eyes before your last breath?” The captain lurched in the taller man’s grasp. The razor sharp knife shifted closer to his artery. A dark chuckle rang between the two. “Tsk, tsk, don’t make me kill you before they get here, David.”

Regardless of the blade on his pulse, the smaller man snarled at his name and refused to look away from the crude monster in front of him.

The monster’s face was sculpted with a hooked nose, a lipless mouth that took on an unusual, jagged shape, and pointed ears as it curved around his face. His long brown hair hung over the false face to the middle of his neck. Behind the sunken eye sockets, emerald eyes burned, and David held those eyes. Held them because he had dreamt of those eyes for the last 5 years. Yet, somehow, they were wrong. This was not his Titan, and he knew it.

Still, the spark in them felt familiar, even his voice rang somewhere in his memory.

A memory just beyond his grasp of recollection.

“Who are you?” David got out in a husky, dehydrated voice.

“Oh, now,” The monster started with a cock of his head. He took a step closer, backing his captive further into the corner of the cold, abandoned lot. “Where’s the fun in telling you that?”

“Is this all a game to you?”

“What else would it be?” He steps closer still, the captain’s nose brushing against the cold plastic.

“You’re sick.”

“So I’ve been told.”
“CAPTAIN!” A voice called at the monster’s back, and in one breath, he’d moved behind David with a hand across his neck and the blade teetering dangerously over his pulse.

Just like that, the Titan stared down the barrels of four .45’s. Presumable fully loaded with 12 rounds each.

*Any second now they’ll command that I drop my weapon.*

“Whoa now, take it easy.” The man with short dark brown hair began steadily. “Just lower your weapon.”

*Pigs are so predictable.*

The woman- *Kat was it?*- tensed her shoulders and twitched her trigger finger.

The blade tilted into the captain’s neck, earning the echo of cocked pistols as well as a sharp wince from the captain himself as a series of tiny droplets began trickling beneath cool steel.

And though none could see, the man behind the face of a Titan smiled.

“Make. Me.” He challenged darkly.

The four agents exchanged nervous glances between each other and their captain, too helpless to give an order. At least any order they’d be able to follow.

Still, David did just that.

To shoot.

He would die, he knew, and so did they.

And naturally, none were willing to lose their captain regardless of his wishes.

*Once again...too predictable.*

"What now?" The captain gruffed against the blade; against the warm liquid dripping down his throat. "Kill me? Even if you do, there’s no way you’re making it out."

"On contraire, Mon ami," his breath ghosts over the shell of his ear. "I won't be killing you today."

"Then why all this?"

The Titan titled his mask half off; revealing his face to the back of David's head; before leaning in close enough that his nose was in his hair. "Because," When he spoke it was merely a whisper. Lips grazing the shell with every harsh syllable. "We've been playing cat and mouse for too long, and I'm growing bored." His finger laced themselves into the captain’s raven hair in order to pull his head back roughly - knife following the angle to the pulse point directly beneath his jawline. His lips grazing his temple. "It's time we up the anty and start the real game."

His fingers fell away to pull his mask back over the rest of his face.

"Captain, your orders!" The Sandy blond, *oaf of an agent*, yelled. His hands shaking the pistol ever so slightly. The Titan rolled his eyes at being reminded of their company. The captain, however, said nothing. He was lost in careful consideration. He knew that this game would destroy everything and everyone around him. That this monster was as ruthless as he was dangerous, and he'd already proved to be pretty damned so. People would die. The system would crumble. The city would burn.
He couldn't have that.
He'd rather die.
But they wouldn't kill him.
No matter what he said, they couldn't.
And truth be told, he didn't want to die. Despite these truths he'd surmised, he couldn't help but selfishly wish to play his game. Prepare to fight another day.
Fuck, just live another day.
Still, he could end this all. Just throw himself across the blade on his pulse. That way he'd free them to finish the job. There'd be no way for the monster to escape if he took himself out of the equation.
As if the culprit read his mind, fingers wound themselves in his hair once more to hold him securely in place.
"Tch, it's not going to be that easy, captain."
He grumbles in his ear before lifting his monstrous face to the rest of the squad. "Agents, it has been fun, but I'm afraid our time has run short," he tugs the captain’s hair down roughly. "Pun intended."
"You little shit." David growled so lowly, only the Titan could hear him.
"You must be some kind of stupid." The man with the short dark hair started again. "There's no way you're getting out of here, we've got you surrounded."
The Titan laughed as shadows moved behind the idiots in front of him. "I think you'll find it quite the opposite."
The four agents found themselves disarmed and at gunpoint. Each shadow masked behind their targets. Three of the sculpted faces were skinless and one wild with pointed teeth.
Titans.
With their guns on the ground and their hands behind their heads, the squad set all their focus on the ring leader. He flattened the blade along the captain’s neck and lightly ran it across as he brought his hand to his side. The knife was buckled away all while his fingers still had grip in David's hair. The Titans simultaneously struck blows on the backs of their respective agents' heads, and they all came tumbling down. With one hand still holding the captain in place the monster took off his mask completely. He moved his lips back to David's temple.
"Til next time, oh captain," He placed a soft kiss to the skin. "My captain."
With that he struck a blow to his skull.
The last thing Captain David Stevens saw before his world turned black were burning emerald eyes above a dark twisted smile.
~
"And.....that's a wrap!" Mike's voice echoes through the studio.
Chatter erupts immediately as I run a hand through my hair with a satisfied smile. It has been
grueling week, but that was our final take before the weekend. Now we have the rest of tonight for Halloween, and tomorrow for recovery from Halloween. Not that I'll be doing anything exciting tonight. Which sucks as Halloween is one of my favorite holidays (second only to Christmas).

But really, what would I even do?

I haven't been without Mikasa and Armin since the year before the Blue Ninjas. Besides, it's not as though I'm in particularly stimulating company.

At that thought my feet are swept from under me and my ass hits the pavement with a loud thunk.

“See you next fall.” Begins the company in question as he stands above me. He then steps over me; kicking my legs by accident, I’m sure. “Pun intended.”

Seems I may have struck a nerve with my impromptu line. Even as I rub the ache out of my ass on the way to wardrobe, I smile at the sight of him huffing away.

Worth it.

Being with him and the rest of the crew exclusively on location, has shown me how wound up I can make him. I hadn't realized how much power I have until Frieda was trying to get a rise out of him by calling him an angry little man and......nothing really happened.

Okay, not nothing, but nothing compared to the heat I got when I jumped in on the insult. To her he merely rolled his eyes, but to me those eyes were on fire.

He doubled my laps around the set and made me scrub the bathroom. Which, for the record, is much bigger than a bathroom in a trailer should be.

“Eren!” Frieda jogs up behind me, just as I pull my shirt off my head. I’ve lost my shyness as the days have gone on. Things go too quickly and I’ve found my laziness outweighs my modesty. At least until I actually get my own dressing room. So I just smile for her to continue. “You’re coming out with us right?”

“Uh.” I wasn’t planning to and I don’t have anything better to do. Still it would be weird without Mikasa or Armin, and in all honesty I think I’d rather stay in. “Actually I-”

“Aurou drawls as he barges past me to hang his suit on the rack behind me.

I roll my eyes. Levi may be an asshole, but he doesn’t just spew his mouth like an imbecile. Plus, I know for a fact that Levi can back up his threats; Aurou? Yeah right! Maybe if I were incredibly drunk.

“Oh come on!” Gunter starts coming around the corner in my defense. “Let the kid have some fun!”

“Actually, I probably shouldn’t.”

“You’ve been working your ass off, kid,” Erd starts, leaning in the doorframe. Because everyone’s just popping out of nowhere! “And there wasn’t much there to begin with. Give yourself a break.”

“So will you, Eren?” Frieda asks again with a bright smile.

“I’d love to,” But I’d rather stay in and watch a scary movie. I awkwardly rub the back of my neck. “But I’ll have to ask Levi...”
Perfect cop-out, Eren. Use somebody else as an excuse.

“You know he doesn’t own you, right?” Gunter says.

Actually, he kinda does, but now I’m just pissed about that whole thing all over again, thanks Gunter. I narrow my eyes. “I know that.”

“Then what’s stopping you?” He challenges.

“Nothing.”

“So you’ll go?”

“Definitely.”

Dammit! That did not go the way I meant it to.

Oh well, it could be fun, right?

“Now it’s a party!” Frieda beams.

“Still,” I begin scratching my still bare shoulder. “I probably should tell him.”

“Who, Levi?” She folds her arms and smiles suspiciously. “Yes. Yes, you should do that.”

“Yeah…”

“And, since you’re in his care and all, he’ll just have to come out, too.” She shrugs innocently. The other three just shake their heads and huff doubtfully.

“I must have missed the joke.”

“He doesn’t really go out.” Erd explains.

“Not that we don’t invite him.” Gunter shrugs.

“Hey, I’m sure he’s got better things to do.” Aurou jumps in as his defense.

“But I’m sure once he knows you’re going…” Frieda says suggestively.

“Ah, no.” I put my hands out and step back; desperately hoping my body isn’t as red as I think it is. “Why-why would that matter?”

“C’mon, Eren.” Frieda sighs sweetly.

“W-what!?” I start defensively. “It’s not like… I-I mean… He’s so…”

“So, what now?” Levi inquires from the other side of the doorway. Everyone jumps, and Frieda’s face gets beat red as he steps past us both, hangs his suit, and turns around with crossed arms. His eyes flick over my body before turning to Frieda. Suddenly incredibly self-conscious, I tug my tee shirt over my head as quickly as possible. I can feel a tinge of red in my cheeks. Fuck this asshole for making me blush so easily.

“Levi! You should come out with us too!” She exclaims unphased by his presence, and brings her folded hands to her chin. “Everyone is going out tonight for halloween! Even Eren said he’ll go!”

“Is that so?” He raises an eyebrow while holding my eyes over her shoulder. Because he’s barely a
hair taller than she is. I gulp and he looks back to her. “Well who could say no to that?”

“You could.” I mumble before I can think better about it. With the glare he pins me with, I wish my mind was faster than my mouth.

“Besides, like you said,” He with a sly smile that makes my cheeks burn hotter. “I really should keep an eye on this brat.”

“Perfect!” She says sweetly, but the red in her face gives away her embarrassment over the fact that if he heard her say that, he definitely heard everything after. “We were just going to take a car into town and walk, let’s meet, say 7?”

“Fine.” Aurou grunts.

“Sure!” Gunter smiles.

I nod and Levi shrugs.

“Should we take one car?”

“Frieda, I-” Erd starts.

“Orr should we pull out all the stops and get a limo?”

“Frieda, we don’t-”

“I suppose that could be a bit excessive for such a small thing…”

“Frieda…” He folds his arms.

“Yes, you’re right, go big or go home!”

He sighs. “Whatever you say, dear.”

She smiles and pulls him down to kiss his cheek. He wraps an arm around her waist and begins leading her through the door.

“Okay.” She starts over her shoulder. “In front of the studio. Don’t forget we’re meeting at-”

“Yeah, yeah.” Gunter says, throwing his hands over his head as he follows them out. “7. We got it.”

Aurou rolls his eyes and follows. Levi starts slowly after them, but turns around and loosely pinches my shirt.

“Oh and, Eren,” He begins lowly. Using his hold, he pulls me closer to him. I hold my breath as he smirks. “You’re shirt’s on backwards.”

He turns so quickly, I can still smell the mint hanging where he just stood.

I sigh and look down at my chest.

Shit. He’s right.

Mentally kicking myself, I correct it and almost defensively pull my red plaid button down over it as I step out toward the trailer.

According to my phone it is now 5:36, which means I have less than an hour and a half to find a
costume of some sort.

Fuck. How the hell am I supposed to find something before then?

I sigh and decide it’ll be better to worry about that after a steamy shower.

The crew is still closing up shop as I step past our set.

The set of the show that I’m on.

I’m on a show.

Not only that, I’m actually a pretty damn big part in it now.

We’ve already shot two episodes and I can’t believe the way Mike(and apparently Hanji) has written me in. I’ve become the main psycho of this season.

Man, I wish I could just use my Titan mask as my costume.

“Hey, Eren!” Nanaba says as I get closer to where she’s packing up. “What are you up to?”

“Not much.” I shrug with my hands in my pockets. “Just trying to figure out what exactly I’m going to do for Halloween.”

“Aren’t you going out with us?”

“Yeah, but I have absolutely nothing to wear.”

“You’re kidding, right?” She deadpans with raised eyebrows. “You do realize you are living at a studio right now.”

“Yeah, but-”

“But nothing, Eren, for one night I can pull some strings. Come find me in an hour.”

Before I can refuse she winks and turns away.

Does this mean I could wear my Titan mask?

Probably not. If anything it’ll be something unused and forgotten about, but I’m not one to complain about that.

I purposely take the scenic route back, hoping by some miracle that Levi won’t be there when I do.

“That was a mistake then,” Looks like it was too much to ask for. “And would be an even greater mistake now!”

Oh?

My interest is officially peaked.

I noiselessly close the trailer door behind me. The back of Levi’s head doesn’t stir from resting on the back of the couch.

“But, Leeviiii!” A barely audible, but familiar voice whines from the other side of the line. “Everyone loved it! You’re REEAALLY good!”
“Drop it, Iz.”

“What’s the matter, Rev?” A less familiar guy's voice cuts in. “You aren’t self-conscious, are you?”

“Fuck you, Farlan.”

Ew, Farlan. He still rubs me the wrong way.

“Oh I see, you’re saving those hips for Eren.” What!? If there was liquid in my mouth, this would be a definite spit take. As it is, however, some indiscernible noise escapes me and I trip over my own shoes. Levi jumps to his feet and begins staring me down. “He’s right there, isn’t he?”

“Yup.”

“Oh!” Isabel jumps in again. “Hi Eren!”

“Iz says hi, but I’m guessing you already heard that.”

“Uh.” I swallow down a boulder. He turns the phone away from his ear and taps the screen.

“Oh, no! We weren't talking about anything horrible, Eren!” Her voice rings over the speaker. Because he couldn’t just be a normal person and hang the fuck up.

“Hi, Isabel.” My voice cracks as I try restarting this, now four way conversation.

“How are you doing up there!?” Her voice echoes loudly on speakerphone. “Big Bro isn’t giving you too much trouble, I hope.”

Levi leans into one hip and raises his eyebrow, waiting for an answer.

“No? I-I guess not.”

“Yeah, I bet....” Farlan rudely butts in.

“If anything, he’s the trouble.” Levi husks.

“I’m sure he is.”

Enough of this asshole’s innuendos. “I’m taking a shower.”

“Sounds like an invitation, Rev, you gonna RSVP?”

“Goodbye Farlan.” Levi deadpans.

“HAPPY HALLOWEEN YOU T-” Isabel manages to shout before the call is clicked to silence.

We don’t say anything. Just hold each other’s eyes, well aware of the gap between us.

“I’m just going to-Um-” I start pointing to the bathroom behind me without breaking eye contact. “That.”

“Yeah.”

“Yeah.” My eyes fall to the floor and I nod. “Okay.”

I turn on my heal and spend the entirety of my shower contemplating what exactly it is they were talking about and how it involves Levi’s hips.
True to my word, I find Nanaba after I clean myself up. Less than an hour, but I all but ran out of the bathroom while Levi’s back was turned. Infact that’s exactly what I did. Sprinted, more like, and forgot my shoes in the process.

And it’s still Canada.

Fuck my life and my stupidity.

Nanaba’s camped outside wardrobe in a full black catsuit. “Nice shoes.”

“You like? They’re gouche.”

She laughs and shakes her head. “Okay, hun, shoes and a one night rental coming up.” She gestures for me to follow her as she begins weaving through the hallways. For lack of other options, I follow. “Just don’t spill anything on it. Or tear it. Or, you know, better just not to move when you’re wearing it.” I gulp. Maybe this isn’t such a good idea. “I’m kidding.” She looks over her shoulder as we get to a cold grey door. “Kind of.”

She unlocks it and the giant lights above a giant mirror flicker on. The rest of the room is huge. Racks of clothes fill the entire space. From ball gowns to tattered rags.

“This is–” The corner of my mouth twitches up as I lose my words by going over all the possibilities.

“I’m thinking….” Nanaba starts dancing her fingertips over the hangers. “hmm, this.” She throws something over her arm, and goes further back. “And…this.” She adds something else and keeps weaving through the expanse of costumes. “Oh…Oh yes….mhmm…yes, this’ll do nicely.” I start to squirm in anticipation. Not that I don’t trust Nanaba, because she knows what she’s doing and has impeccable taste. I just don’t like not seeing what she’s seeing. Suddenly there’s a pair of dark brown leather pants in my face. “Put those on.”

“Ahhh…” I mean, leather? I hold them to my waist, and see that they seem to also be pretty damn tight.

“Trust me, Eren.”

“Okay…” I hardly have wiggled my way to my hips when I get a face full of shirt. It’s loose, off white, and has a huge V neck. Apparently I’m going for a long over lean look. It seems I have underestimated the V of this neck because it goes halfway down my chest.

“Here.” Nanaba appears from literally nowhere, and makes me jump. She holds out a maroon velvet, renaissance looking long sleeved over shirt with sharp shoulders. Once I shrug into it, she begins lacing the front of it and pulls a thick black belt through the long loops that hang off the shirt on my hips. Complete with tall black leather booths, I get it now that I’m looking into the mirror.

“Now sit your ass down, Charming.”

Ouch.

“Could you maybe not say that?” I snap. Prince Charming. Jean would eat this up. “Sorry, just-my, uh, evil ex boyfriend used to call me that.”

“Okay. I’ll stick with Eren, then.” She starts working on my hair. “I can grab something else if you want.”
That would probably be best…

Actually, you know what?

No!

Fuck him!

“Hell no, I look good!”

I see her smile in the mirror as she keeps fiddling with my hair.

I do look pretty charming, and it has nothing to do with him.

Not to mention I honestly wouldn’t have thought I’d look this good in leather and velvet.

In an actual outfit.

Like, a full one.

“Okay, sweetie, off to the ball.” She pushes my head forward playfully.

“Tee-friggin-Hee, Nanaba.” I stand to follow her out and pull out my phone. 7:23. “Shit, we’re late!”

“Yes, but fashionably.” She secures a headband of cat ears and begins drawing on her makeup.

“What’s the matter? Afraid you’ll miss your dance with the prince?”

I roll my eyes playfully and sit back down to wait for her.

I wonder if Levi even went.

Is he waiting for me?

Why do I care if he did?

*Because you do. Stop fucking questioning it!*

Geese, conscious. Rude.

“Oh, Ready, your highness?” Nanaba asks after smacking her cherry red-stained lips one last time over her faux kitty canines.

Oh the irony in that statement.

“After you, Dutchess.” I bend my elbow and she takes it.

Mike is waiting for us in front of the studio. He clearly doesn’t carry as much enthusiasm for Halloween as we do because the extent of his costume is a headband of wolf ears that pretty much match his hair, and canines as well.

That’s it.

He’s still wearing the same off white button down half tucked into dark jeans.

“Have I been replaced?” He asks Nanaba when we get up to the car.
She just sticks her tongue out at him and slides through the door he holds open for her.

His lips quirk up and he sends me a wink before walking to the driver’s side.

I slide into the back of his Sudan.

Looks like Levi didn’t wait for me.

Or he just isn’t going.

Neither of which makes me feel better.

*Oh well, Jaeger. Get a hold of yourself, you’re going out to have fun!*

Right!

I think.

The bar has been completely rented out for the cast and crew, and it is definitely hopping.

Music is playing fairly loudly, everyone’s in costume, and within seconds of stepping in, I’m hijacked by a Frieda in ruby slippers.

“Eren, you look so handsome!” She hugs me and immediately begins pulling me toward a corner booth. I recognize Gunter by his dark spiky hair; sporting a pretty impressive Dracula cape and fangs. He’s talking to a man in the corner dressed head to toe black that I don’t recognize. Auruo is dressed in a monkey suit with a cravat, and Erd has embraced his inner hippie with a braided half ponytail and lots of fringe.

“Look who it is!” Frieda begins announcing me.

“Why, it’s none other than, Charming himself!” Erd beams.

I internally wince. The stranger in black also snaps at the pet name and his black lined eyes widen when they settle on me.

“Levi?” No, my eyes are not deceiving me! It is him. He’s in a crisp collared button up that is very much not buttoned completely up. Which perfectly shows off the thick leather collar tightened around his throat. On his right hand he wears a black fingerless glove and a spiked bracelet on that same wrist. A couple chains hang loosely from the belt of his tight (but not quite skinny) black jeans. Did I mention the eyeliner? Yes? How about the earrings? No? Well, his right ear has them going from a ruby red rose in the lobe to a tiny chain connecting the top piercing on his cartledge to the top middle one and a red stud in between. His left ear is a silver skull on the lobe and one single black stud above it.

“You seem surprised.” He looks me up and down slowly. “*Charming.*”

He says it spitefully-almost accusatory-and my face gets hot. So I do the only thing I know how to do: awkwardly change topic. “What do I have to do to get a drink in this place, eh?”

“What do you want?” Frieda asks.

“Whiskey sour?”

“I would’ve gone with a Shirley Temple.” Levi says into his glass. I glare at him and he winks. Then he smacks his lips and yells to her as she begins walking away. “Frieda, go ahead and put that on my
He’s buying you a drink.

He’s probably buying everyone drinks.

So don’t think about it too much.

Nanaba and Mike have plopped themselves between Aurou and Levi. Frieda’s spot is claimed on the other side of Erd, so looks like I’m stuck standing here awkwardly.

“Doth thou needst to rest thy royal behind?” Erd eloquently inquires.

“You can sit in my lap if you need to, Princess.” Levi offers with a pat to his leg.

“Here,” Nanaba scoots herself onto Mike’s lap and pats the space beside her on the very edge. Far enough from Levi for comfort and I’ll take it!

Frieda comes back with a drinks and everyone settles into idle chatter.

I chime in every now and again, but I can’t say I’m particularly invested in any of it. Can’t say Levi seems to be either, by the way he keeps staring at me. As if he’d like nothing more than to eat me alive.

Halfway through my second drink, I think I might let him.

Then somebody saves me from one kind of mistake for another, and sets up karaoke.

I lose all focus.

To my credit, however, I am sure to finish my drink and several songs before actually heading up there.

There’s a fairly decent stage. More of a glorified platform, but you can tell they have live music. And now that I’m actually up here, I’m not sure if I have enough alcohol for this.

I clear my throat while the current song finishes up. I look over to our corner, and I don’t think they even noticed my absence.

Not even Levi who is currently swept up in a conversation with Gunter over agents.

Oddly that makes this easier. To start without Levi’s eyes boring into me. If I’m being honest with myself, nobody’s looked at me the way he does. Like I’m so much more than what’s right in front of him. Not even-

I sigh and look down at my costume.

‘What’s a Charming prince without his trusty steed?’ I said one morning as I stirred cream into my coffee.

‘Hey, fuck you!’ Jean came up behind me and poked my sides, making me giggle and squirm.

‘Not my fault you’ve got the face of a horse.’ I shrugged.

‘Not mine you’ve got the eyes of a Disney Princess,’” He retorted as he wrapped his arms around my waist. ‘But at least that’s not insulting.’
I turned and folded my arms around his neck. ‘Maybe I was referring to the way I rode you like a stallion?’

He snorted. ‘You weren’t,’ He leaned in and kissed me softly. ‘But I’ll take it.’ He kissed me again, pulling me closer this time. When we stopped for a breath, I could feel him smile as he whispered lowly on my lips, “Charming.”

There are a few claps for the girl in front of me, thankfully jogging me out of unwanted memories, and I go up to make my selection.

The light takes on a bluer tone as the music starts.

Oh my God.

What am I doing?

Look at how many fucking people there are! I can’t do this! I can’t-I close my eyes and take a deep breath.

I thought that I’ve been hurt before
But no one’s ever left me quite this sore
Your words cut deeper than a knife
Jean’s paperthin apologizes echo in my ear.

Now I need someone to breathe me back to life
I open my eyes and look directly at Levi.

Got a feeling that I’m going under
But I know that I’ll make it out alive
He follows my voice and meets my gaze.

If I quit calling you my lover
Move on
My hand grips the mic tightly.

You watch me bleed until I can’t breathe
I’m shaking falling onto my knees
My foot starts tapping to the beat and I lean into it.

And now that I’m without your kisses
I’ll be needing stitches
Tripping over myself
I stretch out my hand, to no one in particular.
I'm aching begging you to come help
My other hand curls into my heart.

And now that I'm without your kisses
I'll be needing stitches

Just like a moth drawn to a flame

I relax again and look straight ahead.

Oh you lured me in; I couldn't sense the pain
Your bitter heart cold to the touch

Now I'm gonna reap what I sew
I'm left seeing red on my own

I rip at the lacing to loosen this velvet top.

Got a feeling that I'm going under
But I know that I'll make it out alive

If I quit calling you my lover
Move on

You watch me- my head whips to the side before I grab my mic- bleed until I can't breathe

I'm shaking falling onto my knees

I buckle my knees.

And now that I'm without your kisses
My hand lightly runs down my face.

I'll be needing stitches
I'm tripping over myself
I'm aching begging you to come help
And now that I'm without your kisses
I'll be needing stitches

I stand up straight and face forward and tilt my head. A faint sting of tears rim my eyes.

Needle and the thread
Gotta get you out of my head

Needle and the thread
Gonna wind up dead

Needle and the thread

Gotta get you out of my head

Needle and the thread

Gonna wind up dead

Needle and the thread

Gotta get you out of my head

Needle and the thread

Gonna wind up dead

Needle and the thread

Gotta get you out of my head get you out of my head

You watch me bleed until I can't breathe

I'm shaking falling onto my knees (falling on my knees)

I bend to my knees for a second then bounce back up.

And now that I'm without your kisses

I'll be needing stitches (and I'll be needing stitches)

I'm tripping over myself

I'm aching begging you to come help (begging baby please)

And now that I'm without your kisses

I'll be needing stitches

And now that I'm without your kisses

My back curls into the words and I close my eyes again.

I'll be needing stitches

And now that I'm without your kisses

I'll be needing stitches

And now that I'm without your kisses

I'll be needing stitches

The music fades and I straighten back up.

The room is quiet.

There’s still chatter, but I can actually make out the words in them. Everyone else just stares up at me. Because I didn’t feel awkward enough before getting up here.
Applause breaks out and I fan myself with a panel of the loosened velvet top before taking a bow.

As I hop onto the floor, I can’t help but notice how unreadable Levi is right now. He won’t take his eyes off me, but I’m not in the mood to play games so I head straight for the bar.

The bartender hands me a tall glass of water which I gratefully chug.

“You were amazing up there.” He, or should I call him tall dark and handsome in a pinstriped vest, begins by leaning on his forearms across the bar. “Can I buy you a drink, Charming?”

This time I physically wince at the pet name.

“It’s Eren actually.” I smile and extend a hand.

“Yeah, I like that better than Charming anyway.” He laughs as he takes my hand. “John.”

“Excuse me?” Fate can’t be that cruel.

“John.” He repeats a little louder.

“Yeah” Apparently it can. “that’s what I thought you said.” I smirk before taking a sip of perhaps my third whiskey sour.

He flashes those perfect teeth again and I take a large sip. “What’s wrong with that?”

“Nothing,” I shrug. Levi’s watching me closely across the room. Which is something I don’t know why I’m noticing. “It’s not your fault you’ve been saddled with such a name as John.”

“Well what would you like it to be?” He practically purrs.

I bit my lower lip. Yes I’m flirting with the guy. He’s hot, there’s a mutual interest, and he’s not Levi.

Which is good?

If the furious burning in Levi’s eyes as he finishes off his drink anything to go by, then very.

“How about…” I look back to the bartender and begin absentmindedly unlacing this damn over shirt. “David.” Like Captain David Stevens? Really, Jaeger? Why not make it simple and just call him-

“You look like you could be a David.”

“Do I?” He moves a bit closer. I bit my lip and nod. “Well,” He extends his hand to me again, I take it. “Eren, my name’s David, it’s nice to meet you.”

“See how well that rolls off the tongue?”

“It rolls nicely off yours.”

Oh, he’s smooth.

“Black Maple,” Levi shoves his glass between us and fixes David with a threatening glare. “Straight up.”

He looks back at me, cocking his jaw and raising his eyebrows. I smile apologetically before he turns to fix Levi’s drink.
Levi turns to face the opposite way and leans back on his elbows. “You look for any excuse to sing in front of a crowd, don’t you, kid?” He rolls his head to look at me. “I’m starting to think you chose the wrong career path.”

“What the fuck was that for?” I snap, changing the topic to the obvious issue at hand.

He narrows his eyes. “I finished my drink.”

“Bullshit, Levi.”

“Fine.” He turns on his elbow and leans closer to me, alcohol hovering in his breath. “I didn’t like the way he was looking at you.”

I match him by leaning in and speaking warningly. “You have no business worrying about the way other guys look at me.”

“You’re my business.” He hisses lowly.

“My sex life isn’t.”

For a second he looks as though he’s been physically slapped. “It could be.” He breathes. Then he regains his composure, clenches his jaw and narrows his eyes. “But you’re right,” He leans back and instantly loses all emotion on his face. Then shrugs and drawls, “It’s not.” before pushing off the bar and walking away.

I watch his back disappear in the crowd.

Now I feel like I’ve been sucker punched.

I finish my drink in two gulps, it burns like a bitch, but what the hell, right? YOLO or whatever the fuck they say.

“So do you know Levi Ackerman?” Not-really-David returns with Levi’s drink.

“Unfortunately.” I grumble.

“Is he always such an ass?” I look up and he smiles.

I chuckle and smirk. “Unfortunately.”

“Here.” He reaches below the bar and grabs two shot glasses. “What’s your poison?”

“Scotch.”

He half smiles, disappears and reappears with a bottle. He fills the tiny glasses and lifts his to a toast. “Bottoms up.”

I raise my glass to meet his in a CLINK and immediately throw my head back.

“Shit.” I suck air through my teeth. That was not at all like the cheap shit on the plane. Not. At. All. Infactomundo, me thinks I can already feel it.

“Yeah,” Not-really-David gruffs. “That’s the good stuff.”

I nod and grab at my glass to chase the burning in my esophagus with cool water. That’s when I
mine keen eyes catch the on-goings-on in the corner booth.

I.E- Levi pulling a cherry off it’s fucking stem-it’s MOTHERFUCKING STEM-as some blond beefcake holds it above his head.

Without muchuffa word to John -not-really-David, I scoop up Levi’s abandoned drink and march over with a clenched jaw.

“Hey, asshole.” Myself say on approach. “You forgot your drink.”

With another bright red cherry still between his teeth, he glares up at me.

Whoa, he looks mighty fine like dat, dough.

He ka-nows it, too, as he eyes harden to a challenge and he slowly bites down and sucks it into his mouth. Then, putting a hand on beefcake’s ka-nee, he lazily reaches for the glass my hand holds.

My nostrils flare, and I not-so-casually dump the entirety of liquid contents on his entirety of tiny person.

Once again, most of the room falls silent, and again I recollect the phrase ‘if looks could kill me with his eyes ’ or something along those lines.

“Oh, I say with a cocked head. Then I let the glass fall just to hear it shatter.

But, of course, it doesn’t shatter.

No, no, that would be too much enJOYment for drunk, Eren!

Instead, Mr. Perfect catches the bottom of it with one hand without breaking eye contact. Which, letzbhonest is purty fucking impressive.

Now the whole room is silently watching us, but care not, do I! There is something far more threatening than a hundred judging eyes, and it’s staring up at me.

I’m expecting him to yell. Or jump up ‘n beat the shit outta me.

But again , of course he doesn’t do as I had espected. Rather, he calmly sets the glass on the table, grabs a napkin, daps his shirt and pants, folds and replaces the napkin back onto the table, and then he stands.

And I know how much I done fucked the fuck up.

In one breath, he’s in front of me. In another I don’t even get to finish, he’s pulling me outside BY MY EAR!

“I need a car.” He commands to anyone listening without breaking pace.

“Levi, what the f.” I start to yell.

“Shut up.”

Sure enough, there’s a car waiting with an open door as soon as we step into the cool night’s air.

In combination with the pain, I’ve sobered up a little bit. Enough, at least, to realize that I crossed that whole ‘keep it professional’ line.
More like barreled through it.

He literally throws me into the backseat and scoots in beside me. The driver pulls away from the curb without a word, and we begin the long, tense ride trailer. Home sweet trailer.

After a good long while of nothing but the sporadic drumming of my fingers on my knees, I take a deep breath. “L-”

“Don’t.” He cuts me off sharply.

I gulp and stare intently out the window.

23 uncomfortable minutes later, we stop inside the back gates. Without warning, he wraps his hand tightly around my wrist and drags me behind him. All. The. Way. to the trailer.

There he unlocks the door and pulls me inside.

Still in his death grip, I kick off my shoes. Then he pulls me over and throws me on the couch.

He looks down at me with the same look he’s been undressing me with all night.

That he couldn’t wait to eat every last morsel of me. It is, however, also laced with a searing ‘I will strangle you.’ look, which is unsettling.

I gulp.

He starts by unbuckling the studded band around his wrist before he begins unbuttoning his shirt. “Fucking brat.” My heart is hammering in my ears as he tosses it away and begins on his pants. “Do you know how expensive these pants are?”

“Probably not expensive enough to care about folding them.” Find my voice after watching him toss them away with the shirt. I shamelessly roam my eyes over his sculpted body, settling them on the dark grey boxer briefs sporting a half hard bulge.

He grabs my chin with his gloved hand, and leans close enough for me to feel his whiskey breath on my lips. “Who said you could talk,” Oh, shit. I smirk and relax into his hold. He slowly climbs onto my lap, the leather proving too tight against my growing erection. “Charming?”

He moves and I open my mouth for him to claim. Just like he claimed that stupid fucking pet name. Forcefully erasing Jean’s name from it’s title and carving in his own with his tongue.

He brings both hands up to cup my face and I bring mine to hold his hips.

Our lips move against each other, pressing and pulling back for tiny breaths. He slots our mouths closer and harder together and his tongue curls in a way that has me positively moaning into it.

I feel the corners of his mouth twitch up when he pulls away for a breath, and I wipe it away by leaning up to recapture it. My hands slide from his hips to grip his firm ass through the soft, thin fabric currently in my way. He growls and pulls back sliding my bottom lip between his teeth. He rips off what remains of the string lacing the front of this damn velvet shirt, and pushes it off my shoulders. The loose V neck soon follows. His hands go to start on my pants, but I pull him by the collar still wrapped around his beautifully long neck, into a long kiss instead. I lightly push him to his feet in front of me, and run my fingers back to his hips. Our mouths part with a string of saliva connecting them. I break it with one finger and pull it into my mouth to suck on it. His breath catches as he watches me pull it out with a pop. My hand returns with the other to his hips, and I slide off the
edge of the couch to my knees.

And I can’t help but laugh at the way my head goes straight into his stomach.

“What’s so funny, Brat?” He grunts looking down at me. I lean forward and lick his wonderful abs salted with sweat and bourbon. Then I look up at him and half smile, waiting for him to get the joke. “Shut up.”

I chuckle into his skin as I resume lapping up what remains of the liquid I spilt on him.

Moving slowly down his happy trail til my tongue swipes under the waistband of the cloth doing nothing in hiding his raging boner. I smile into his hip before nipping at it gently and pulling back enough to look into those lust blown eyes sporting a silver gleam. My thumbs hook into the bottoms of each leg hole as my hands wrap around the back of his thighs to hold him in place. I lick my lips and mouth at his erection through the wet fabric.

Whoa there, okay, a part of me forgot just how salty and bitter precum is, but it’s okay! I shall trudge ahead!

And ahead, I do.

Levi weaves his half-gloved fingers in my hair as I lick at him again. His hips buckle slightly, and I decide to stop teasing him.

With my thumbs still hooked, I pull the boxer briefs to his ankles and immediately acquaint the tip of my tongue with his slit. He moans, his dick twitches, his fingers tighten, and I smile. This time, when I go back down, I run my tongue from the unusually soft hair at the base of his throbbing penis all the way to the very tip where I bring it into my mouth and suck it off with a little pop. I take more of him in the second time, not letting him all the way out. Slurping and sucking, I repeat this process until he’s in as far as I can take him. Which is not as far as I could take Jean, that’s for damn sure. My head bobs at a tempo he has no problem matching with his hips. When I draw back for a deep breath, he lets out a low growl. I watch his heaving chest; wait just long enough for it to calm. Only then—taking a deep breath and momentarily praying away my gag reflex—do I take him all the way to the hilt. His body trembles with a deep seeded moan, and I can feel the heat and throb of his dick against my tongue. All it takes are a couple well done bobs of my head and strokes of my tongue and he cums hard in my mouth.

I pull myself off him quickly to give a few little coughs. Because having that much cum hit the back of your throat that fast is no easy feat to swallow.

Literally.

Levi’s thrown himself on to the couch by my side.

“F-uck.” He grunts with one hand resting on his stomach and the gloved one hanging off the edge.

I lace my fingers with those hanging loosely, then pull myself up enough to hover over him and steal his heavy breaths with my kisses. Slowly, I climb on top of him, propping my weight on my forearm above his head. “Eren?”

“Hmm.” I hum into the lazy kisses I’m planting on his jaw. “Am I allowed to speak now?”

He flicks the top of my ear.

“As long as you don’t make me regret it.” I chuckle into the crook of his neck. “What about you?”
His other hand begins lightly tracing the contours of my back.

“What about me?” I ask against the pulse on his neck before placing a small peck to it.

“You’re still hard. I can feel it through these tight ass pants.” Then he rolls his hips into mine, as if I need a reminder as to how hard I still indeed am.

“I’ll take care of it later.” I growl. Because, let’s be real, as much as I want Levi hard again, and now, it may not happen. He’s drunk and I did a real number on him, if I do say so myself...Unless—

“Do you want to suck me off, too?”

I lean up on my forearm to look at him hopefully. He laughs. Like actually, for real, laughs. It takes my breath away.

“If you want.” He untangles our fingers and moves them to cup me through my pants. I shamelessly moan. “Or, I could fuck you.” I feel my cheeks get red hot as a corner of my mouth twitches up. Apparently he’s got more stamina than I thought. “Alright.” He smiles up at me; gloved hand on my outer thigh, the other on my opposite hip. Too quickly to react beyond hooking my legs together, he’s scooped me up. In no more than probably ten steps, I’m on my back on his bed looking up at him. “I’ll do that then, shall I, Sparky?”


“Yes, what, Eren?”

I sit up, lace my fingers in his hair and pull his mouth to mine. Then, using that hold as an anchor I pull my lips to his ear. “Please fuck me senseless.”

There’s that laugh again just before he moves my head and reclaims my lips.

Chapter End Notes

I TOLD YOU THERE’D BE SMUT!!
Sorry you all had to wait 18 chapters for it, but ¯\_(ツ)_/¯
And, yes, I know I have a serious problem with singer!Eren.
But...I mean....SINGER!EREN!!!
He’s a man of many talents.
MANY talents. Hehe.
We fall into a rhythm of coos and heavy breaths.

Because it's just so damn easy to get lost in his kisses.

Then, out of nowhere, he bites down on my lower lip. The smooth fabric over his hand runs up my chest, and in one hard shove, I'm on my back again.

With the same hand running down my stomach, his other works on my pants. It almost hurts how slowly he tugs on the zipper, but once the other hand meets the top of my pants, he wastes no time in yanking them off along with my boxers. I arch my back and kick my legs to assist as the sweat stricken leather sticks to my skin. Once the ends peel off my heels, he throws them to the side. Now that my throbbing cock is freed from the constraints of those damn pants, it begs to be touched.

Fucking aches to be.

Levi, however, catches my wrists as soon as I begin moving a hand to comply to its demands. He pins them over my head with the one hand, and moves onto the bed to straddle my thighs. Using his other hand he unbuckles the leather strap round his neck and throws it to the abyss behind him.

*I will miss you ridiculously sexy collar.*

"Eren." Levi recalls my attention as he husk inches from my face. He brings the gloved hand to his mouth. His gleaming white teeth pinches into the fabric at the base of his middle finger. Holding my eyes, he slowly pulls it off. Once it too has been tossed away, he runs his hot, wet tongue from the bottom of his wrist and around his palm. He then takes each finger individually into his mouth,
coating them with saliva. Just watching it makes my dick twitch.

Fuck, I need him to do something!

Just fucking touch it!

My hips buck under his weight and I groan in frustration.

Levi’s mouth twists sadistically before he brings his warm, wet hand to grip my cock.

That groan turns into a loud, raw moan.

"Ssshhhiit ... Levi!"

I thrust my hips into his hand and fight against his hold on my wrists, but it is fruitless in both regards. He waits for me to still before he starts pumping his hand around my throbbing dick.

I gasp as he rolls his thumb over my slit, adding my own glistening fluids to aid his efforts.

As he keeps moving above me I start to feel his own, newly restored erection lightly rubbing against my balls, making them tighten.

"Fuck!" I cry out, as the heat in my belly begins to coil from the added sensation. "I-I’m gonna- ah -gon-na-" He gets the gist of what I'm trying to get out and pushes himself off me completely. I groan as push myself up by my elbows and watch him move to the side of the bed. "I didn't say I didn't want to cum!"

He pulls out a small container of lube from one of the drawers built into the wall.

"I thought you said you wanted me to fuck you senseless." He retorts lowly. My cheeks get hot and I suppress a shiver at the musk in his voice. He smirks and begins climbing back onto the bed.

Using my elbows, I move further to the headboard so that I can better meet him halfway.

My head falls back onto a soft feather pillow and he follows it to steal away a kiss.

"You do want that," He begins to ask against my lips. "Don't you, Eren?"

I answer by leaning up to reconnect our mouths. I can feel him smiling into our kiss as I bring a hand up to cup his face.

It's sensual, sweet, intimate.

It lasts forever, yet is over too soon.

He pushes himself to his knees to stare down at me.

"Fuck, kid, you're gorgeous."

Well, I wasn't expecting that. "Your not so bad yourself, old man."

His eyes narrow as he pours some lube into his palm and begins coating his fingers.

"You really are a fucking little shit, you know that?" His warm wet fingers trail between my legs, and he regains his hold on my cock with the remaining lube on his other hand. He pumps his hand while he slides in the first finger. My breathing grows shallow and inconsistent as he continues
working me inside and out. A second finger joins the first; slowly stretching me until they curl. My fingers scramble in the sheets for a sturdy hold and a deep seeded moan escapes me.

Levi’s hand moves from my cock to hold down my hip. He begins alternating between scissoring his fingers and curling them into my prostate, ripping from me one shameless moan after another.

I arch my back and nestle the side of my face into the pillow.

"Fuck, Levi." I groan. "You're so fucking good at this!"

He suddenly leaves me empty and I whine in protest.

"You ain't seen nothing yet, Sparky." His fingers dig into my ass and he pulls me up so my hips are grinding against his waist. Then, with my legs wrapped loosely around him, he slowly guides the tip of his cock to my well stretched asshole. My breath shudders as slides in. He's couple hairs thicker than what he worked me for, but the small ache only adds to the sensation. "You okay, Eren?"

"Mmm." I nod. He's still while I adjust, but he doesn’t have to wait long as I begin rutting against him.

He pushes further and slowly pulls back. Almost completely before he pours another moan of pleasure out of me by slowly driving his hard shaft back in. Fingers dig into my ass as he begins to set a rhythm. My legs start quivering and I can no longer keep them wrapped around him.

Levi shifts his hold to the back of my thighs, and tilts my lower body up until my legs are riding even higher on his waist. The position pushes him further. With an almost animalistic growl that is more arousing than I would have thought, Levi surges on until he's buried deep, balls flush against my ass. His cock is long and thick and pressing against that place inside me that's shooting white-hot streaks of pleasure from my ass straight to my dick. He holds me down and continues fucking me into the mattress with quick, driving thrusts.

I move beneath him, thrusting up to match his tempo, helping Levi impale his hard cock deeper and deeper.

“More,” I rasp. Fuck, I am so desperate to take every inch of his cock inside me. Love feeling the hard slap of balls against my ass.

And fuck, does Levi gave me more.

Every sound from my mouth is broken, breathless, lustful, and kind of fucking loud.

Levi’s face is so close and his hot, wet mouth swoops down to drink those noises from my lips. This is pure ecstasy and we quiver from the force of it.

“Eren.” He breathes as his mouth finds my ear. He works the soft flesh between sharp teeth, nibbles a wet trail to my shoulder and bites down. The erotic pressure rocks my body as the man I'm supposed to undeniably hate fucks me. The quivering inside becomes an earthquake. Every shuddered breath I suck through my raw throat is flavored with Levi’s scent.

Mint, sandalwood, but rather than the light mix of cigarettes I am overwhelmed with the burning scent of whiskey.

We keep rutting together, here in this stupidly expensive trailer.

I look up and see Levi's bangs are damp with sweat, his skin is positively glistening with it. He stares
into my eyes as he rolls his hips with a grace I couldn't imagine anyone else having. He's breathtaking. Fucking sizzling.

Those silver storms cut me like stone.

My stomach fills with fire and I scramble for something more to hold onto. I find Levi's shoulders and dig in. Fingers overlapping the dark ink on his skin.

The need to cum pounds at me with a fury so violent I am surprised I haven't broken yet. My dripping cock begs to be touched. So I reach between our sweat stricken bodies and grasp it. Levi rises up to watch me touch myself. Then his hand surrounds my own, taking control, moving both our fingers over my flesh.

“Cum for me, Eren.” He commands as he continues fucking into me with near bruising force.

May the record show I have never been one to follow an order, but for this—for him—I have no problem.

Climax completely takes me under, swallows me whole in a wave of blinding pleasure that tears a scream from my sore throat. Levi’s thrusts lose their grace and he becomes a savage of sporadic stabs and low growls. He threatens to break the bed beneath us.

"F-uck-Shit-Ah-" He drops his head on my shoulder as he pulls out and cums on the sheet. "fucking hell!"

My sentiments exactly.

I want to hold him, which sounds fucking cheesy as hell, but right now I do.

Except every muscle I own has turned to jelly and all I can do is lie here and stare blankly at the ceiling while my chest rises and falls rapidly and my body rocks with aftershocks. “Still alive, shitty brat?” Damn bastard obviously has more stamina than I would have expected because he leans up on an elbow to look down at me, a small smile playing on his lips.

“Barely.” I breathe. Shit, I shouldn't have said that.

He really doesn't need his ego inflated and further. The breath of a soft chuckle brushes over my skin as he rolls off the bed.

Goddamn, he has the best ass I’ve ever seen.

He disappears behind the poor excuse of a wall that separates the living room from the bedroom. I hear him rustling around, a click of a lighter, and he saunters that perfect body back to lean on the frame between rooms. He’s staring at me, half up now on my elbows, and I watch the small ember hanging from his soft lips glow as he takes a drag.

“You’re smoking inside?” I ask sardonically.

He opens his mouth and huffs out a cloud that fogs his face. “Up.”

“Excuse me?”

“Up.” He gestures with the deathstick. As if I didn’t know what the fuck ‘up’ meant.

“Why?”
“Because I fucking said so.” He says with narrowed eyes and yet another drag. I roll my eyes, but reluctantly slide off. “Good Boy!”

Whoops, my finger flies up in his direction. Man, this thing has got a mind of its own. With the cigarette between his lips, he rolls his eyes and begins pulling off the sheets.

“You’re kidding, right?” I deadpan. Because he’s kidding, right?

“I’m not sleeping on this. We made a fucking mess.”

“So you’re drunk enough to be okay with smoking inside, but you’re not drunk enough still to sleep in between fucked in sheets.”

He pulls the cigarette out between two fingers and exhales the smoke between his teeth. “Pretty much.”

“You’re so fucking weird.”

“Yup.” Levi extinguishes his death stick on a little plate thing holding a candle. “Now make yourself useful and grab a pair of sheets from the cubby across from the table.”

While I shop in the linen closet for the softest sheets I can find, Levi passes me to throw the soiled ones in the wash on the other side of the trailer.

My hand smooths over a shiny blue set.

Of course he has silk sheets.

Once he turns around I throw them at his stupid, perfect face.

I think I’m still a little drunk.

“There you go, asshole.”

Without missing a beat, he walks up to me. Sheets trapped between my chest and one hand as the other begins groping my sore ass, he backs me against the wall. It’s cold on my back, but it balances out the hot skin flush with mine. He leans up to nibble at my lower lip and the moment my mouth opens, he’s inside it sucking on my tongue. He tastes like smoke and bourbon, smells like sex and sweat, and fuck me if it’s not hot as hell.

Levi backs off with a grimace. “At the very least brush your teeth, you damned brat.”

And he’s gone. Back to stretching his stupid silk sheets on his stupid amazing bed.

Whatever.

“You’re one to talk, you taste like shit.” I respond when I step into the bathroom and begin running my toothbrush under the water.

The corners are tucked, the comforter smoothed, and my mouth has been minted before he replies. “Of course I’m brushing my teeth, fuckhead, I’m not a neanderthal.”

We switch spots and the faucet springs to life as soon as we do.

There’s half a second of debate as to where I should sleep, but a slap to my ass spurs me to follow the owner of that hand to the welcoming bed.
Before I slide into it, I look down at Levi and his sweat slicked hair. “What, not going to shower?”

“Nah, that’s sober me’s responsibility.” He sighs as his head sinks into his pillow. One of his arms falls above his head, the other over his stomach.

*I could get used to seeing that.*

I shake my head and tuck into bed.

Yeah, still drunk.

*No you’re not.*

Ah, the feeling of lying naked between silk sheets.

Levi shifts to his side and drapes an arm across my waist.

There’s nothing quite like it.
Befuddlement

Chapter Summary

The boys are left a little confused over what happened last night. Each of them deal with it their own way, some better than others.
Levi’s POV

Chapter Notes

AAAAAHHHH!! A new chapter in less than a month!? Could it be? Yes. Yes it can.
Fair warning, this chapter is a bit of a roller coaster of action and reaction, but I feel like it all fits. Because my poor baby doesn't really know how to deal with all the feelings he's feeling and he's not so good at keeping those feelings in.
On the flip side, my other baby child is not so good at expressing his.

As my heavy eyelids reluctantly slide open, I can tell it's going to be a long day. I know this because I didn't just decide it was time to get up, oh no, I awoke with a pounding in my head and an elbow in my ribs. Said elbow, as it turns out, is very much attached the giant pain in my ass denting the other side of the bed.

If you can even define the way he's completely sprawled out as 'the other side'.

I'm honestly surprised I didn't wake up sooner from the earth quaking snore reverberating off the walls.

Good thing he's cute.

I roll off the edge of my bed with a groan and ruffle my hair in my hands.

Fuck, I need a shower.

Based off past experience, I sniff the air, and of course the whole room is laced with the smell of cigarette smoke.

I hate drunk me.

At least he had the decency, this time, to brush my teeth.

After taking the whole three steps to the tiny bathroom, I decide to look back over my shoulder.

Even with the way his mouth is awkwardly hinged open, I could easily muffle his noises with a kiss.

His chestnut hair is ruffled on the light blue pillowcase. It makes his olive skin that much more noticeable.

What did I do to get this beautiful boy in my bed?
No, seriously what did I do?

Because my memories of last night are a bit blurred. I get the gist of what happened, but am spared most of the details. As if my mind is only giving me a synopsis rather than the whole work.

I remember word for word the conversation at the bar. The mere fact some of those words came out of my mouth shows how close to gone I was.

Then I marched back to my seat, downed whatever alcohol was left on the table (even if it wasn't mine), and offered myself up to the first hot guy I saw.

I remember the brat pouring my drink on me; getting to the trailer; can picture his doe eyes barring into mine as he bobbed his head on my penis; I remember having the best sex I've had in a long time; and then the aching need to pass the fuck out.

Still, I can't remember the exact words that were spoken nor the noises he made.

Things that don't usually matter much to me.

Yet for some reason it's different this time.

This time I'm unexplainably disappointed.

It doesn't take long for steam to fill the tiny room, and even less so before hot droplets are running down my head as I turn my chin up and close my eyes.

Usually this is the part of the day I am able to zone out. Just get sucked into a mindless routine and let my thoughts run wild.

Today, the first thing my mind's eye wanders to is a honey sweet kiss on a bridge with blinding white snow swirling around us. His ears and cheeks are pink from the cold and our breaths blur the air between our lips as we part. He's wearing a playful yet shy smile while his swirling azurite eyes pierce me. I run my thumb over his cheekbone and lean up for another kiss.

But this is stupid. All of it. Because this would never happen.

I open my eyes to the blur of a grey tiled wall in front of me.

My heart is pounding so I take a deep breath and begin to focus on doing what is usually done in a trance like state.

I mean, how foolish could I be?

Of course nothing like that would ever happen. To start with, I don't even like the kid enough for that level of actual romance (as my record shows, I've never really been good at it anyway)and second to that, he hates me. Which in a weird and confusing way pisses me off.

Though it really shouldn't. At least not as much as it does.

There are more times that I want to bash his head into a wall than times I want to kiss him.

Okay...that's not entirely true, but he does drive me batshit.

As I reach for a towel once the water stops, an alarming thought hits me.

*What now?*
I mean he completely lost his mind after our makeout session in the bathroom; I can only imagine how he'll react after last night.

The door opens silently enough, but it seems as if the floor is covered with shards of glass while I tiptoe toward my closet.

My towel is wrapped loosely round my waist which only inspires me to hasten my quest for pants.

"Mmm." I pause all movement to flit my eyes to Eren who is beginning to stretch in the sheets.

*Please don't wake up, not until I figure out what to do.*

As soon as my hand finds a pair of dark cotton briefs, my towel hits the floor.

His eyes begin fluttering open just as I pull them to my thighs.

Having completely stopped moving or, you know, breathing, I gulp heavily instead.

He yawns as he stretches his arms over his head and kicks his legs in the sheets.

What do I do?

He's obviously still half asleep when he begins throwing the sheets off, then his dazed eyes register my presence.

"Shit." Eren widens his eyes and hastily pulls a corner of the blanket over his lap.

As if I hadn't already seen him.

*Not sober.*

True.

We stay like that for what feels like far too long; just tensely staring at each other. His expression changes from confusion to anger to guilt stricken and I know he's about to boil over.

So bring a hand to rub at my pounding temple and sigh. "Look, don't-

"Hi."

Huh?

My attention is recaptured by the boy looking up at me with an unsure lopsided smile.

"Uh-" I relax my face, place a strategic hand on my hip, and smirk. "Good morning, Eren."

His cheeks heat with shades of pink, but his face at least relaxes a little. Looking now past the opening to the living room, he takes a deep breath and clears his throat.

Goddamn this is awkward.

"So..." Eren starts. Rubbing the back of his neck, he looks back at me-takes his sweet time roaming his eyes over my mostly naked body-before he sighs. "The shower free?"

I raise an eyebrow.

*Really? What could possibly have given that away?*
Is it my wet hair? The open door behind me? Or maybe that the only other person in this fucking trailer is standing right in front of you!

"Right." Must have read my mind cause he doesn't ask anymore stupid questions. Instead he shuffles awkwardly to the edge of the bed then wraps the sheet as best as he can around his waist. I see the top of his ears get red when he trips within those three steps to the bathroom.

With an exasperated sigh I continue to dress.

*I wonder if I have eggs....I know I have tea and that sounds fucking amazing. With some fucking Advil.*

After halfway buttoning a crisp white shirt over dark wash jeans, I make for the kitchen.

There are clothes scattered throughout the trailer. Apparently drunk me draws the line at picking shit up.

By the time Eren finishes his shower and gets dressed, the trailer has been tidied, I'm half a cup of good 'ol Earl in and stirring eggs in a pan.

My eyes flick up to watch as he saunters into the living room. His movements are a little stiff and I can’t help but smile into my mug knowing I'm the cause of that. His hair hangs down to the rim of his glasses, shaggy and damp; his pants are lighter and has a hole in one of the knees. He needs some new clothes and new glasses since these are being held together by fucking scotch tape. The dark green button down that he's wearing s'not bad, though it seems a tinge too small for him-wait a minute... "Is that my shirt?"

"Wha-" he looks down at it then back at me with that stupid lopsided grin. "Well all mine are dirty."

"Shitty brat." I grumble while redirecting my attention to pouring him a mug of coffee. *Looks good on him*. Toast pops behind my back and I grab the pair of pieces after shuffling the eggs onto the two plates I set out on the counter.

I balance one plate in the bend of my left arm, hold the other in that hand and with my right I've got a strong hold in the loops of the mugs.

He starts toward me like I'm going to drop everything. "Calm your dick, kid, I've waited tables before."

"Oh," he stops and cocks his head. "When?"

The dishes meet the surface of the table with a small clatter. Fuck, when was that? Seven, Eight years? "Long time ago."

"Ah, so this was back when they were serving up mammoths?"

"Do you want food?" I hold a fork up warningly.

"Grouchy." He not so mumbles while sitting across from me. My head is still pounding and my back hurts like a bitch.

"You know," I start casually. "You scratched my back to hell."

Mid-bite, Eren chokes on his eggs and his face gets tomato red.

Maybe we weren't supposed to talk about *that* yet. I smirk into my steaming tea.
Oops.

"Well," he clears his throat. "You left bruises on my hips and thighs." Touche, kid. Shaking my head in amusement I take a bite out of my toast."Did you just laugh?"

Oh shit, did I? "No."

I think I did.

"You definitely did."

"I disagree and you have no proof."

"Just admit it."

"Why would I admit to something that didn’t happen?"

"It did happen."

"If anything it was more of a chuckle."

"That's still laughing."

"No it's not."

"What is so wrong with laughing?"

"Nothing’s wrong with it." My annoyance is beginning to leak through my voice. "I laugh all the time."

"Yeah, when you're in front of a camera." He says lowly as he picks at his eggs. "But I never hear it when we’re alone."

"Maybe it’s because you’re not very funny." I shrug and take another bite.

"I-I-I meant like when we’re alone," He clears his throat nervously. "with Isabel or Hanji or...really anyone."

I raise my eyebrows and take a drink. He’s very perceptive.

*Eh, it's not like it takes a genius to figure that out about me.*

True indeed.

We continue to work on our breakfasts in silence. I for one, don’t really know what to say. This is not at all going how I expected it to.

To be honest I was sure the boy would completely flip his lid.

I was prepared to fight.

But no, instead I’m stuck here trying to catch up with whatever the fuck this is.

Not that I’m complaining, I just don’t understand him.

"Are you just going to keep staring or what’s going on?" Eren asks without looking up from his plate.
Shit, am I staring?

I am aren’t I.

What is this kid doing to me?

I’m the one who’s supposed to make those kinds of comments.

Naturally, I choose to ignore him and begin cleaning up.

Halfway through my load, he comes up behind me and reaches around to put his plate in the sink. His breath heats the skin beneath my ear and his hand skims over my ass. "What's on the agenda today, captain?"

Fuck, my heart is deafening, my nerves are on edge, and he smells so fucking good.

"I was thinking maybe shopping."

"Shopping?" He hums.

"Mhmm." I lean my head back, my plan being to turn just enough to capture his lips, but it is, of course, thwarted as he moves to my side.

"Oi!" I slap his knee with the back of my hand. "Get your ass off the counter!"

Eren, the shit, scoots further back and cocks his head in a challenge. However, the manner in which he speaks has a very noticeable edge to it. "Make me."

Motherfucker.

Okay, if he wants to play...

Slowly, I pry apart his knees and settle myself between them. His ears are red again. The kid sure talks a big game, but I can tell how nervous I make him. My hands move up his thighs and when I get nearly all the way up I rub my thumbs in a circle. He gulps when my hands move from his hips to his waist and up his chest. I seize the front of his [my] shirt; he actually leans back, as if he’s trying to back away, he even looks a little angry. Regardless, I quickly move out of the way to pull him from the now contaminated surface straight onto the floor.

"Fuck." He grumbles before he sits up then he hold up his now horribly shatter glasses.

"What?" I deadpan unsympathetically. "You told me to make you."

"You have obliterated my glasses." Eren says quietly, dangerously. Maybe I’ll get that fight after all.

"Not like you couldn't use a new pair." I shrug.

And Eren’s on his feet positively fuming. "It's not like I can really afford it you bastard!"

Ah, there's the annoying brat I know and love.

Wait...obviously I didn't mean it like that.

"Calm down, kid, they were falling apart anyway."

"That's completely beside the point!" And here he goes again, coming up with any excuse to argue.
Any reason to be mad at me.

"I'll get you a new pair." I counter simply, trying to calm the storm.

"You don't need to take care of me." He huffs lowly. Damn, this kid has some serious pride issues.

"I'm not taking care of you." My voice is passive as I move a clorox cloth in circles on the counter.

"Look, just because last night-you know- happened doesn't mean I need your money."

"Jesus fuck, Eren!" I throw my hands up and turn to face him. "I broke them, I'll buy them."

He cocks his jaw and walks away. Holy shit, that certainly flipped the morning mood. The bathroom door slams.

Oh no he did NOT just do that!

"Oi!" I march across the living room only to jiggle the handle of a locked door. "What is your problem?"

“I don’t have a problem.”

“Obviously you do.”

After a few beats I hear a loud sigh.

"You." Eren admits quietly. Almost in defeat. I can hear him sliding to the floor on the other side. "You've always been the problem."

He says it so quietly that I don't think he meant for me to hear. I sigh while mimicking him on my side.

"I'm sorry." I breathe. I'm not even sure if it made its way through the door. I'm not even sure why I said it. For all intents and purposes I've done nothing wrong. Not that I can think of, but still whatever it is I am doing is hurting him. I lean my head back on the wood paneling. We each sit back to back with the thin door between us. A few minutes pass in silence before I get back to my feet and head for a jacket. "I'll leave. Feel free to do whatever you want. If you want to stay here I won't be back til tonight, if you don't, well, Erwin would kill me if you didn't come back tonight, so do. Come back tonight. If you go out." Stop talking. "Yeah."

I finish buttoning up my favorite black double paneled coat and step out into- well fuck-the snow. Lovely.

My shoulders instinctively shrug against the cold while I walk. I have little idea where I'm going, but I guess shopping since I mentioned it. Not like I have anywhere else to be. The only problem with that is I really don't need anything myself, and Eren would most certainly be pissed if I got anything for him.

All the more reason to.

Damn I may be just as stubborn as he is.

Besides, can't have him looking like a lazy college kid. Not that it's not charming in its own way, but for an up-and-comer his wardrobe needs to be taken up a notch.

And I've always believed the best kind of therapy is retail. Because you don't actually have to say a
damn thing!

My car is warm and my seat nice and toasty by the time I get in. Thank the fucking heavens for touch start!

Precisely 45 minutes later I’m stuck in an atmosphere of perfumes and the ever expected aroma of stale pizza. People buzz around me in my knitted stocking cap and thick rimmed faux glasses.

I fucking hate people.

And I swear to God if anyone recognizes me, I will punch them in the throat.

First thing’s first, I check my phone. Not that he’d text me or I’d have a missed call, but because maybe someone else did. Nothing.

Doesn’t matter, continue with the game plan.

~

Shirts are easy. Just find something that fits me and replace it with a size bigger and with longer sleeves. Pants, however, prove to be more difficult. I think I’ve got his height down, but his for his waist size I’m at a loss. I hold them to my waist to guestimate, but I can’t trust it. He seems like maybe he’d be two sizes bigger; at the same time he could only be one size. I hold up one pair of quality dark washed jeans, and hold them to the point of my body that his hips fit to.

That’s it!

Muscle memory. How much of my hand could I get around his hips? How long did my arms extend to cup his ass? How thick were his thighs? How much crotch room does he need?

I pull a few pairs with confidence based on these answers.

Besides, it’s not as though he can’t exchange them. It would just be better if he didn’t because he might just throw a fit over something or another.

Goddamn, I can’t wait to see his fine ass in these.

My stomach calls for a break a couple hours later. Between Diesel, Armani, and Ralph Lauren; Eren now has three pairs of jeans, two pairs of slacks, two blank tee-shirts, four button downs, a sweatshirt, a jacket, and a couple graphic tees that made me think of him.

All that’s left are a couple pairs of shoes and, of course, glasses. If I had his prescription I could have them by tomorrow, but I may have to see if Petra can pull some strings.

I hang my jacket on the back of a chair. Having traded it for a baseball cap, the knitted blue hat is sticking out of the pocket. Adjusting my fake glasses, I pull out my phone (still no missed anything) and scroll straight to the number of my favorite strawberry blonde.

Seriously, if I wasn’t gay...and Erwin wasn’t already there, I would marry this woman.

*You’ve reached Petra Ra-

Damn, voicemail.

I scroll back up and tap on another number.
"Garrison towers, how may I direct your call?"

"Yes, is Miss Ral in?"

'Hmm...Looks like she is just finishing up a meeting. May I ask who's calling?"

"Nick."

'Just a second, I'll let her know.'

...

'What do you want?'

"Is that how you answer the phone for everyone?"

'Only you.'

"Gee, you really know how to make a girl feel special."

'Seriously, Levi, what do you want?'

"Can't call just to talk to a friend?"

'I know you and you've never been one to chat on the phone.'

"Okay, I need you to do something for me."

'I surmised as much.'

So much sass.

"Can you find the prescription for an Eren Thorn's glasses and have it faxed to the best eyeglasses place thing in Vancouver?"

'An Eren? You mean the Eren?' What does she mean the Eren!? Is there something I don't know? What have she and Glasses been talking about? 'Why does he need new glasses? What did you do?'

"Why do you assume I did anything?"

'You broke them, didn't you?'

I sigh and rub my temple. "Yeah, I broke them."

'Geez, Levi, how are you supposed to get the kid to like you if you break his things?'

"Wha-get the brat to like me? Why would I - where did you even get that idea?"

'Hanji told me you practically drool over the boy.' Of course they did. 'And apparently he's become quite the looker. Not that he wasn't already."

“Whatever they’ve told you is complete bullshit. I mean honestly, every time they’ve seen us together we’re at each other’s throats.”

‘Still?’

“Well could you just see what you can do for those glasses?”
‘You know, Levi,’ She starts in a voice that’s playfully sarcastic. ‘you may consider being a touch nicer when you’re asking someone for a favor.’

I roll my eyes to the table. “Petra, you are the greatest, smartest, most beautiful girl” She clears her throat on the other side of the phone. “Sorry, woman I know.”

‘Aw, my dear, don’t you know groveling will get you absolutely everything! I’ll see what I can do.’

“You truly are an angel.”

‘Yeah, yeah, I know. How is it up there anyway?’

“You know, pretty much not at all the same without you.”

She sighs. ‘I do wish I was up with you guys. I miss you, but rules are rules.’

“Why did you have to go and fall for Eyebrows?”

‘Will you stop calling him that?’

“Sure, when he decides to trim them down.”

She snickers. ‘They are a tad ridiculous.’

“Don’t worry, I won’t tell him you said that.”

‘Oh, I don’t care, he knows how I feel.’

“Good. Glad you have an honest relationship.”

‘Me too. So you get back the day after tomorrow.’

“That wasn’t a question, was it?”

‘Nope.’

Of course she still knows my schedule.

“You know, it’s not your job to keep tabs on me anymore.”

‘Conceded much?’ Me? Conceded? ‘The tabs I’m keeping are on Eren. I’m his PR. Well me and Armin, but since he’s still technically an intern…’

“Right, I gotcha.”

‘Anyway, since you’re free Wednesday night-’

“Who says I’m free Wednesday night?”

‘I do. You have no interviews, no filming, no previous obligations, so I went ahead and penciled in dinner on you at 7.’

“Oh, so I’m just conceded? You’re totally not keeping tabs on me?”

‘You most definitely are, but you’re right. Old habits die hard, but you’d know all about that.’

“I ever tell you you know too much about me?”
‘All the time.’

“As long as we’re clear that I might have to kill you one of these days.”

A lighthearted laugh echoes in my ear. ‘You could try.’ That earns a small smile on my end. ‘You know, Levi, you really should apologize to Eren.’

I gulp. “A-about the glasses?”

‘Is there something else you need to apologize for?’

“Of course not, and I already did.”

‘Is that why you’re calling me all alone?’

“I’m not alone.” Technically I’m surrounded by people.

‘Mall folk don’t count.’

“How do you do that?”

‘I keep telling you, I know you. How much have you spent anyway?’

“What are you talking about? I can go to a mall and not get any-”

‘How much?’

“You don’t want to know.”

‘Is it for you or him?’

“Why would it be for him?”

A low whistle rings through. ‘Hanji is right, you must really like this kid.’

“You’ll get back to me about that prescription, then?”

‘Nice segway.’ She drawls. ‘And I’ll get that as long as you promise not to stand me up Wednesday.’

“I would never stand you up, Petra.”

‘Liar.’ She says it sweetly, but there’s a hollowness to her voice.

The line goes dead and I sit for half a moment to shake off the inevitable guilt she’s left me with. Years ago, when she was first hired on as my PA, Petra had quite the crush on me, and she made absolutely no show to hide it. Personally I didn’t know if I could yet trust her with the truth, so I brushed it off. I wasn’t trying to be cold, but I was. See, the media doesn’t know that I’m gay. Not that I really care if they do, but as I mentioned before, I like to keep those createns’ noses far far away from my personal life which includes who I may or may not be attracted to.

So one day, she asks me to dinner, and me, being the idiot I am, automatically think it’s business related so I agree to go. I show up to the restaurant and see her completely dolled up. Hair up, makeup on, beautiful red dress, and as I look at her from across the room I realize what I’ve done.

Walking up to her, sitting down, properly explaining myself-well that would have been the right thing to do. She deserved at least that much. But I did the complete opposite.
I turned tail and left her sitting there without a single word. When I saw her the next day, she wouldn’t look at me. It took a few days of looking at running mascara before I took her to my house for coffee and apologized by letting her in on the truth.

Not too long after that, Erwin started showing up more and more to ‘check in’ on filming. The rest, as they say, is history.

After looking at my watch (I.E seeing a group of teenagers pointing at me in the corner of my eye as I did so) I decide it’s time to leave.

Yet, once I get seated in my car, I find that I don’t think I’m ready to go back. I don’t want to fight with the kid, but I also don’t think I should have to defend myself in Eren’s own internal whatever the fuck’s going on there. Which I guess I do get it. I mean, from his point of view I abandoned the person he holds dearest to his heart. And, fuck, I did, but he doesn’t know the full story to judge me fairly. Mikasa figured it out a while ago. Infact one of the first things she did was confront me about it, but obviously she hasn’t passed it on to Eren. Which I guess is good since it’s something that needed to be worked out between us, and it’s not really her story to tell. Still, if she had, maybe he wouldn’t be this neurotic about whatever’s happening.

And, fuck, I do really like this fucking moron.

At least enough to want to see where this goes.

Hopefully far enough to have sex again. Sober this time so I don’t miss a Goddamn thing.

Wait, how am I almost to the trailer? I thought I didn’t want to confront him yet.

*Well, too late for that now.*

Once I park, every step I take fills me with more anxiety. I’m not good at this. I’m not good at defusing bombs, I’m good at setting them off and continuing on with my day.

Cautiously, I step through the door. Eren is sitting on the side of the L that’s facing me. His legs are crossed, he’s holding a pillow to his chest, and he watches me with puppy dog eyes.

I set down the bags and finish slipping into my nice, warm slippers. Then, with slow, watchful steps I sit on the other side of the couch to look at him.

The silence between us is palpable to say the least.

I try multiple times to break it, but I can’t think of a damn thing to say.

“*I think,*” Eren starts slowly with his eyes on the coffee table. “*We should talk.*”

“*Yeah?*” My voice is more strained than I expected. After clearing my throat, I continue. “*What do you want to talk about?*”

“*Everything.*”

“*Everything?*”

“*Yes.*” That’s it. He doesn’t elaborate at all, just sits there, expected me to say something.

I have a feeling I’m gonna need a drink for this. I leave for a minute and come back with two glasses of ice and a bottle of brandy.
“Okay, kid.” I lean back and cross one leg over the other. “Shoot.”

“Why did you leave Mikasa?”

“Fucking hell!” I lean over the coffee table, pour myself a large glass, and immediately take a swig. “You don’t waste any time, do you?”

“So?”

I take another drink, and a deep breath before I begin. “To put it simply, I left because she didn’t deserve the childhood she had and certainly didn’t deserve to be apart of the life I lead.”

“What do you mean ‘the life you lead?’”

Fuck. “No, no. You asked a question, now I get to ask one.”

“I never said that was the way it worked.” He barks.

“Well I am.” I sit back again. “It’s only fair.”

“Fine.” Eren pouts into his pillow. “What do you want to know?”

“What landed you in Juvie?” His eyes roll back and he hits the back of the couch with a groan. “Not so fun is it?”

“I guess I deserve that.” He rolls himself back up to face me with a serious expression. “Assault.”

“Assault?”

“Yeah. In the first. Talked down from attempted murder on grounds of self defense. Enough to keep me from being tried as an adult and being sent to prison, but not enough to keep me out of Juvie for 9 months.”

“Whoa, back up.” I reposition myself to lean toward him a little. “What the fuck happened?”

“My turn, remember?” He holds up a finger, I roll my eyes and take another small drink. “So, Isabel said something about people planning to kill Mikasa…”

“Was there I question in there?” I bite. Fuck Isabel, of course she would say something stupid.

“Why?”

“Fuck.” I down the rest of my glass, it burns like a fucking bitch. “I’m not going into this. Ask something else.”

“No.”

I slam my glass on the table. I grit my teeth as I speak to keep from yelling because I am NOT talking about this right now. “Ask. Something. Else.”

“Fine.” His features harden. “Why are you such an asshole?”

I sneer. “I’m the asshole.”

“Is there anyone else here?”
“You know what?” I jump to my feet to peer down at him. “I may be an asshole, but at least I’m an asshole who knows what he wants!”

“What’s that supposed to mean!”

“Oh c’mon, kid.” I drawl. “One minute you’re on me like a horny dog, the next you’re picking a Goddamn fight!”

“Maybe,” He’s on his feet now too. “That’s because I don’t have a single fucking clue about who you are!”

“You’ve been living with me for over 3 months, and you say you know nothing about me?”

“I didn’t say that,” Eren drops his arms to his side and shrugs. “I mean I know how you are. I know that you are completely crazy when it comes to cleaning-like really fucking insane-and that you have to sleep with your socks on, and that you never miss a morning run!” He cheeks are beginning to get pink and he continues calmly. “I know that your favorite color is blue, and your favorite kind of day is a rainy one. You ask for black coffee, but you put two sugars and a cream in it when you think nobody’s looking. However, overall you prefer Earl Gray and Peppermint tea.” I am frozen. He’s stepping toward me and I can’t fucking move. “You are insanely stubborn, but incredibly patient. I know that you add a splash of vanilla to pretty much everything you cook.” He stops right in front of me. His eyes, glimmering with emotion, pierce mine. “What I don’t know, Levi, is how the man made up of all these little things, matches up to the man who left his sister behind. To the man who gets so Goddamned defensive when asked about anything in his past. So, no, when it comes down to it, all I know are things about you, but I have no tangible grasp on who you are.”

“When you put it like that.” My hand skims over his before falling back to my side. “I guess I don’t really know you either.”

“I think I’m a little easier to read than you are.”

“Eren,” I fall back into the welcoming cushions. “I don’t talk about my past for a reason.”

“What reason?” He sits next to me.

“Nice try, kid.” My glass is just out of reach, I need to lean up to grab it.

“Why can’t you just-”

“Because it fucking hurts.” I drink. “It’s like ripping open stitches that aren’t quite healed. Maybe someday I’ll tell you. Hell, few people know about it now. Iz, Farlan, Erwin, Hanji, Mika, Petra-”

“Mikasa knows!?” And he’s on his feet again. “Mikasa knows? When? Why the fuck didn’t she tell me?”

“A)She doesn’t have to tell you shit since it’s not something that has anything to do with you directly-don’t fucking fight me on that.” I cut him down before he has a chance to interrupt. “And B) I mean, Mika and I...we’re trying to mend our relationship, so we’ve been filling each other in on the parts of our lives we missed.”

“Why didn’t either of you tell me you were talking so much?”

“Once again, it’s none of your business. I figured Mika would tell you if she wanted to tell you.”

“Um, first of all, it IS my business! She’s my sister!”
“Yeah? And you’re saying you tell her everything going on in your life?”

The rest is left unsaid, but we both know what it is. *Have you told her about the fucked up situation going on between us?*

Eren falls back by my side. We sit in silence again. Before long, he reaches across my lap to grab the nearly empty glass. I let him take it from me, watch him as he brings it to his lips and finishes it off.

Now that I have half a second to breathe, I can tell things are getting little fuzzy orb around them.

Eren’s hair looks soft, I run my fingers through it. His lips look warm, I move to meet them. His head is turned at an awkward angle, I change my position and straddle his lap. His hands find their place on my waist.

“Levi-” He begins to protest on my lips.

“Eren,” I pull back enough to look in his eyes. “Just enjoy this. We fly back Tuesday and everything will go back to the way it was. You can go back to hating me, I’ll go back to being a hardass. Just right now, let go of all that other crap.”

“I-I don’t know”

"I promise, it'll be like none of this happened."

"Okay." I can feel the smile on his face as he recaptures my lips. It’s cute, I wish I could see it.

We sit like that. Just kissing. Nothing else, just taking in the feeling of it. Of each other.

After a several minutes, or several hours, we pull apart. Lips too swollen, breath too short to continue.

For another minute I just look at him. Look at that messy hair, that defined jawline, that small smile he’s trying to hide, and of course those impossible eyes. My thumb runs over his cheekbone. “You really are something else, kid.”

With that I leave him. I scoop up the drinks and begin cleaning up a bit.

“Hey, Levi?” Eren calls to me a few minutes later.

“Hm?”

“What are these?” I look over past the counter to see him rummaging through the shopping bags.

“Clothes.” I shrug.

“For who?”

“Um-” He may get mad again, and we are on such nice terms again. “For me, obviously.”

“Levi.” He calls my attention back to him holding a pair of his jeans up to his body. “Little long for you.”

“Hey! I can fit in those!” No I can’t. I would drown.

He sighs and folds them over his arm. “Why?”
“Why what?”

“Levi.”

I give up, my shoulders slump in defeat. “Because you were mad at me and I needed something to do and you need some new clothes so…”

“You bought me clothes because I was mad at you?”

“I bought you clothes because you need them.”

“Sure you did.” He bites his lip and winks.

“You’re not mad at me for spending money on you?”

“Yeah, kinda, but you do have good taste. And you were kind of an asshole earlier.”

“How the fuck was I the asshole? You’re the one that freaked out.”

“Because you shattered my last pair of glasses.”

“Because you sat on my counter, and you know that drives me crazy.”

“I do know, that’s why I did it.”

“You don’t make any sense to me, kid.”

“I don’t know, I guess I was looking for a reason to get mad at you.”

“I noticed.”

“I’m sorry. Right now, til Tuesday, I’m sorry.”

“Just til Tuesday?”

“Yup, the moment we step off that airplane, These last few days never happened, right?”

Ouch.

“Y-eah.” I gulp, already regretting those words. “Right.”

Well, at least I get these days.

Guess I better soak in every minute til then.
Snowday-Dreaming

Chapter Summary

A snowday brings about a day full of realizations.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes


"Leevvvvil!" I whine while burying my face further into my pillow, desperately trying to fall back into the deep pit of unconsciousness. I feel the warmth on my side shift.

BangBangBang! BangBangBangBang!

Levi groans and rolls off the bed, leaving a chill where his arm was draped over my back.

Wait no, come back.

His voice is hushed as he speaks with the alarm clock. I turn over onto my back and blink my weighted eyelids til the cold ceiling blurs into focus. The door across the trailer clicks closed and I begin propping myself up on my elbows. Levi doesn't stop until he's crawling from the bottom of the bed.

"What was that about?" I ask just before he follows his momentum to pin me back down on the mattress with his arm across my chest and his head tucked into the crook of my neck.

"Doesn't matter, go back to sleep." He groans.

I have no protest to that. So I close my heavy lids once more and let the feeling of his hot breath on my skin pull me back under.

An eternity later, my eyes flutter open. We're pretty much in the same position we fell asleep in, but Levi's leg is tangled with mine.

This is nice, but futile.

None of whatever our relationship has come to can follow us home, so why am I letting all of this happen?

You're only gonna hurt him.

I know. Believe me, I know.

And yourself.

I shift my focus to his silky hair underneath my chin. It smells just like vanilla with a light mixture of mint. It's intoxicating, just like the rest of him. I begin tracing the ink on his back and shoulder. Sometime between pinning him to the wall and wrestling in the sheets, I realized that it's a phoenix.
The head and body are on his shoulder blade, its wings splayed behind it. The red of the bird begins to fade with the feathers of the wings, turning into smoke. The wisps of which twist with the reds then fade into greys up and over his shoulder. There he has a shield where the right corner breaks and falls into the smoke behind the sharp of one of the two crossing blades. And beneath all of it, written across his ribs: Flügel der Freiheit.

No idea what it could mean, can't even tell what language. I would ask him, but based on his reaction the last time I asked about his past I'm guessing it would not go too well. Besides, I have no right to pry. Secrets like that are meant for-I drop my hand to the mattress and turn my head away-lovers.

Which I am not.

I sigh and flick my eyes to the clock.

12:47

FUCK!

I fly out of bed straight to my neat pile of clothes. Levi groans and begins propping himself up on his elbows.

"What are you doing?" He asks in a groggy voice.

"Look at the time!" I start while jumping into a leg of my jeans. "We're late!"

"Let me guess," he drawls with a yawn. "For a very important date?"

"Ha.ha. Seriously, asshole. get moving!"

"Eren." He deadpans yet at the same time is fixing me with a somewhat amused glint in his eyes. "There is no work today."

"Huh?"

"Yeah," He rubs at his eyes. "Too much snow."

"What?" I stop mid-belt buckle.

He gets out of bed to stretch and saunters past me. "Thought you knew."

I quickly pull a sweater over my head before following him toward the kitchen. "How was I supposed to know that?"

Levi's shoulders move up and down while he works on coffee and filling the kettle. I sigh and let it go because if I used my tiny brain I'd have realized sooner that probably was what our wake up call was all about. Then a beautiful realization hits me.

"So what you're saying is that we have a snow day?" I feel the line of my mouth move to a crooked smile.

Levi turns around to regard me before he graces me with a breath of laughter. "Look who's an excited little pup."

"Woof!" I play along because apparently I've transformed into a 5-year-old. "Does that mean we can do something?"
"Knock yourself out, kid."

"But what about you?" I begin quivering my bottom lip and whining.

"It's fucking freezing outside." I whimper some more with my hands bent like a dog. Pathetic? Maybe, but I've never had a snow day before! Haven't really been able to play around in it. We've had to film with it the last couple days, but now we have a day off. And, fuck, our flight has already been postponed by two days and if I'm stuck here anyway, I'll be damned if I let this snow day go to waste! "No. You go out and run around if you really want to, but I'm staying in my pajamas curled up with my hot tea and a book."

I step closer to him with my puppy eyes and my bent paws and my quivering lip and my whimpers, but he doesn't budge. So I'm forced into phase two of Operation Snow. I wait until I'm right in front of him and I drop to my knees with the same puppy persona I've adopted. "You better stand up if you don't intend to follow through with the implication you're giving me."


He sighs, running a hand through his hair. "Fine."

"Yes!" I pull his waist into a tight hug and start twisting it like stuffed animal. "Thank you, thank you, thank you!"

"Yeah, yeah. I need to get dressed, so you need to finish making the coffee and tea, two bags."

"Oh, I know how you like your T-bags." I drawl while getting on my feet. He flicks my ear and walks away. A soft laugh leaves my lips but is cut off by the tightness of my throat.

Stop this, Eren. You're not fooling anyone when you say things will go back to the way they were.

They will. They have to.

With a heavy sigh, I set back to finishing the task appointed to me.

A half an hour later I'm bundled in the coat, gloves and boots Levi bought me. As of late, I've pretty much been refusing to wear the new wardrobe, but I have absolutely no winter clothes so I contested for today. It's not that they're not nice, but they're too nice, ya know? I get it, though, I need to start looking nicer to fool everyone into thinking I'm a functioning adult.

"Ready, Sparky?" Levi stands with the door open to an Audi SUV provided by the studio.

"What a gentleman." I sarcastically drone. "How much to tip the chauffeur?"

"Shut up and get in the fucking car."

"Sheesh," I put my hand up in defeat before sliding into the nice toasty seat. Once he's joined me on the other side I turn to him in my heated seat. "Somebody's grumpy."

"You would he too if a bright-eyed brat dragged you out of bed and into the freezing fucking cold."

I roll my eyes and grumble to the window. "It's not like you're not getting anything out of it."

"Bitch, I better be."

The glass in front of my face fogs with my silent laugh.
The icy roads twisted and turned out of the city and it wasn't long before I was seeing trees pop up on either side of us. "Where are we going?"

"I don't really know." He answers casually.

"Oh." I sigh, then whip around in my seat to look at him. "Wait, what?"

He shrugs. "I figured we'd drive up the mountain til we find a trailhead."

"We're heading to the mountains!?"

"Are you this excited about everything?"

"Considering I've never left Cali before, yeah everything is pretty fucking exciting."

"You never been out of California before?"

"Yeah," I turn back, look at my lap, and shrug. "Well, it's not like I've had anywhere else to go."

"Might I ask why the hell you have a passport if you never had anywhere to go?"

"We were going to go to Mexico or the Bahamas or something when Armin and Mikasa graduated,"

At the mentioned her name it's like the air has been sucked from the car.

"So what derailed those plans?"

"Huh?" I have to shake myself out of the snowballing guilt and catch up to the conversation.

"The trip, why didn't you go?"

"Um," I rub at the back of my neck. "A lot of things, I guess. Armin got the internship, I dropped out of college and fell right into a Shitty full-time job, and Mikasa-" I gulp. "Well she was accepted into Stanford, and Harvard, and Yale, but she stuck with Stanford so she didn't have 'leave me'."

"Yeah, that's only, what 5-6 hours away?"

"Ha, only?" I loosen up and smile. "It was actually during that drive that I totalled my car!"

"And how does the time to get there have anything to do with totalling your car?"

"Well...ha-it's really a funny story-" I trail off, hoping he won't ask to hear more.

"I'm sure it is." He doesn't disappoint and doesn't press the topic. Some of the times he can actually be that way.

The SUV swerves unexpectedly into a small parking lot a few miles up the mountainside. We stop right outside of a small wooden barricade saying that the trail is closed.

"Do you think it's because of the snow?" I ask as we get out of the car and walk towards it.

"Kid, this is Canada." Levi starts, securing his dark scarf before he walks to the little barricade. "If there's any reason to close I doubt it's for snow. It isn't even bad out."

"I thought you didn't want to be here."

"It's still cold, but the snow's not bad." He swipes a handful of snow from the top of the rounded wood and crumples it in his hand. "Good for packing." What? "C'mon."
He's quick to jump over the barricade and looks at me expectantly from the other side.

"Um-" But before I can say anymore, his dark silhouette is disappearing behind the light snow that has begun to fall. Sighing, I follow his lead and hop the barricade.

As soon as my feet sink into the padded snow, my childlike instincts kick in and I end up leaving Levi in the metaphorically dust. I meant to just catch up with the bastard, but now I'm halfway up a small hill. Even with the cold burning in the back of my throat, I can't wipe the smile off my face. At the top of the hill, without even a chance to catch my breath, I throw my arms into the air and let gravity pull me to the white cushioned earth.

My limbs move of their own accord while I close my eyes and feel the tiny kisses of snowflakes as they melt on my cheeks.

I can't feel the tips of my ears, but it's oh so worth it! When I open my eyes I see Levi staring curiously down at me. I greet him with a big toothy smile. He bends down at my head and draws something in the snow above it. Then he's back on his feet and I stand to join him.

"Very nice." I comment on his addition of little devil horns on top of my angel. "But doesn't it send a mixed message?"

"Sure does." He grumbles under his breath.

I'm going to pretend I didn't hear that.

We begin carving our own path twisted through the trees. The air is so crisp and pure it's as though I've checked all my troubles at the pathetic wooden gate. Despite everything, I feel comfortable up here with Levi. So, naturally, I can't stop talking! We talk about work, about school, about the snow. Rather, I talk about the snow and Levi loudly complains about it.

The sun is already starting to hang low as we get to a clearing overlooking the city.

"Whoa." I stop in my tracks, and I thought to sit on a rooftop gave you clarity.

"Yeah." Levi echoes my awe. I find I perch on a cold rock just before the ledge and Levi doesn't waste time in taking a seat by my side.

I tell him about Hannes and growing up (from junior high up). I don't mention juvie or anything before that and he doesn't ask. He tells me a little bit about high school. That he was the typical "bad guy" type for two and a half years and he dropped out just before he would have graduated.

"It was stupid. I should have stuck it out, but I didn't." A shadow creeps over his features. "I couldn't really."

He stops there and I don't push. So I begin talking about my high school experiences. Starting with the story of the most embarrassing first day in the history of ever. "First off, why the hell do they even have those on the first day!?"

"So that they can place you in the right class, I would assume."

"No no," I start seriously. "I think the teacher was just trying to fuck with me."

"What happened?"

"Well, there was a leg of the course that was a climbing wall. We had to strap ourselves into a
harness and everything so we could repel down. And, unbeknownst to me, my harness had a broken clasp."

"Oh." He says with a complete understanding.

"Yeah, oh." I continue. "So all my teammates are already over the wall and waiting for me before they can ring the bell that we won. And I go to repel..."

"And you ended up falling onto your ass?"

"Worse, I flip over to fall, but Jean thought it'd be hilarious to grab the rope to hold me in place. He said he was just trying to help, but he really just wanted to watch me dangle upside down."

"Jean?" Levi drawls thoughtfully and turns to look at me. "Kirstein?" I avert my eyes to the blinding white surface concaving with each step I take. "As in 'Horseface'?"

"God, I hope so." I scoff. "The world doesn't need more than one of that asshat."

"So you went to school together," He grumbles almost to himself.

"That a problem?" My mouth quirks slyly sideways as I look over at him.

"Just didn't know you've known each other for so long." He shrugs. "Were you two...I mean is that when..."

"We didn't start dating until the end of that year."

"Ah, and then-"

"Then I found him fucking someone in our bed barely over a year ago." That came out with a little more bite than I meant it to, but Levi doesn't say anything.

Instead, his hand wraps around the one resting by my side and brings them both into his coat pocket. It's a surprisingly intimate gesture that has me blushing from head to toe, and we keep sitting in warm silence.

"Can we build a snowman?" I ask a few minutes later. My head turns down to him at my side and my mouth hangs with a sideways smile.

He rolls his head on his shoulder to fix me with an 'are-you-fucking-serious' expression.

I close my eyes and widen my smile. I can tell I've won when he sighs loudly. My hand is pulled from his pocket as he gets up and when I open my eyes with a chuckle there's a cloud of breath hanging in front of where his face was moments ago. Now he's bent over- a welcoming sight indeed- and has begun doing something...that's making his hips make tiny movements: up and down, side to side, and I'm picturing all the things he can do with those hips and all the ways I can grab that-

"Hasn't anyone ever told you that staring is rude?" He asks while still bent over.

"Hm?" I respond absently.

He straightens back up, turns around, and begins wiping the snow from his gloves. "Alright, Sparky, your turn."

"How did you get over there?" I ask as I realize the small distance he's put between us.
"Do you even know how to make a snowman?"

"Yeah." I shrug. "You-um-you make three different sized snowballs and, ya know, stack them and use coal for buttons, branches for arms, a hat of some kind, and a carrot for a nose, and- what?" Levi rudely begins snickering behind his hand.

"It's nothing, kid." He scoops up a pile of snow and starts packing it into a ball on his way over to me. "So, you start with this."

"Pfft, no!" I snort in disbelief. "That's way too small."

"I gets bigger, dumbass."

"That's what he said."

"Walked right into that one, didn't I?"

"Yeah, you must have missed the 'low hanging' sign." Ow! Okay, I deserved that, but now my arm is going to be nice and bruised later.

"Anyway," He throws the little ball back onto the ground and squats. "You take this little thing and-" He begins moving it. "You roll it til it gets to the size you want it."

"Okay...sounds fake, but okay."

It turns out not to be as fake as it seemed. Soon enough we've stacked three giant snowballs on top of each other in descending order. Once I have found the perfect arms, I meet Levi at the top of the hill where he's placing a pinecone as a substitute for the carrot nose. The arms are placed as though one is waiting for a high five and I trace a smile under said nose before stepping back to appreciate our work of art.

"It's missing something." Levi scrutinizes.

"Like what?"

Then he takes off the dark scarf from around his neck and wraps it around Gerald.

"I've named the snowman Gerald." I declare.

"That's a good name."

"No, wait." I'm hit with sudden inspiration to transform Gerald into someone else entirely. I wipe away his smile for a stern thin line, then I add angled eyebrows and push the nose further in so that it's smaller. "Now he's Levi."

Ow! He could've at least picked different spot to punch me in.

"Whatever." He grumbles he unwraps his scarf and shudders. "Now let's head back for something hot."

"But LEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!!" I whine.

"None of that, I've held up my end of the bargain. Besides, it's already almost dark"

I huff as he starts walking away. It is fucking freezing, my gloves are pretty much soaked through, my face is numb and my throat is raw, but I don't want to leave just yet. There's still one thing I've
always wanted to do. It's a bad idea, I know, but I say fuck the consequences!

The small white frozen ball hits Levi square in the back of the head.

Bullseye.

My victory is short lived as he slowly turns around, the snow already evaporated into a cloud of steam from his boiling rage.

I fucked up, didn't I?

Run, you idiot!

Great idea! I peel down the slippery hill and straight forward into the small expanse of trees. I don't even have to look back to know Levi's on my heels.

Well, guess all these months of racing the sunrise has come in handy after all!

A cold blast to my temple nearly stops my feet, but one thought of the man who threw that snowball keeps me going. I don't know how to lose him. There's nothing but open space that would be easy for him to cut me off. Then I see the tiny drop off of a creek in the distance, but as I get close enough I see that it is still too vast for me to jump over. So I cut right to follow it upstream. There's a bridge up ahead underneath beautiful trees hanging lowly around it. Perfect, a chance to escape if I play it right. When I reach it I immediately cut left to cross it, but it seems I'm not quick enough. Levi has tackled me in the middle of the bridge. My face and body sink into the snow under his weight. After a moment, I'm flipped onto my back only to be pinned by Levi hovering over me. His breath meets mine as we both try to catch up to it. Before my heart rate has a chance to slow, he cups my face in his hands and my breath is being sucked away by the sweet, warm mouth which has fallen to mine. Electricity such that I've never felt shoots through my body from his breath. “Eren.” He says with a husky voice inches from my lips. My eyes are still closed and I smile. Loving the sound of my name as it rolls off his tongue.

*Why does this seem so familiar?*

Blinding white snow swirls around us, his ears and cheeks are pink from the cold and our breaths blur the air between our lips as we part. I can feel my face relaxing back into something playful.

“Eren.” I look at him, stormy eyes filled with warmth and admiration? He runs his thumb over my wind-chapped cheekbone and drops his face to steal away another sweet kiss.

*It's like a memory from a dream...*

Levi props himself back up and looks at me. Like he's trying to study every feature of my face. My numbing cheeks begin burning and I can't help but do the same. Raven hair falls on his face but is almost immediately blown away by the cold breeze. Cheeks and ears are still pink as I watch his lips, his jaw, his eyes. Fuck, I can't stop staring at them now that they've caught me. There's so much emotion swimming in them. His pupils are dilated, his lids are wider than usual, but it's his irises that still my heart. The cold blues and warm greys suck me into a tremulous sea filled with desire and trepidation; passion and anger. I can feel myself reflecting his emotions. And as I'm getting lost in the weight of his body and the heat of his breath and the depth of his eyes, there is a silent exchange of declaration.

*I am completely falling for you.*

My face falls as soon as my breath leaves my lips. I'm overwhelmed by those eyes, by that breath, by
his touch. I go rigid and his eyes darken in pain? But maybe I imagined that because in an instant any emotion on his face melts away.

He gets to his feet and clears his throat. I jump to mine and begin sweeping the snow from my sopping clothes.

"We should get going." He rasps.

"Yeah." My voice is scratched. I fold my hands in my pockets and step past him toward whence we came. Levi silently follows.

It is after a tense car ride later that we're fumbling out of our wet coats and boots. He goes straight to the shower, and I grab a dry pair of sweatpants. He comes out 37 minutes later wrapped in a towel, and I slip into the bathroom as he crosses to his dresser. The lingering steam is heavy with his scent, it's choking me.

Why him? Why the fuck does it have to be him?

Why, what? Why are you falling for him?

Yes!

Fuck, I mean no because I'm not falling for him!

Are too.

Shut up.

I splash some cold water on my face in the vain hope that it will shock me out of my current train of thought.

Surprise, surprise, it doesn't.

Levi’s curled on his bed with a book when I step out.

There’s a bowl of soup waiting for me on the table underneath a clock that reads 6:52.

Fuck, it’s way too early just to adopt the most innocent form of avoidance (I.E sleep). So as soon as I finish cleaning up my dinner, I pull out a script and begin studying it like my life depends on it. I cave an hour and a half later and tuck into my comfy couch bed.

…

“That’s a wrap!” Mike calls the end of our day. “Everyone enjoy their holiday, I’ll send the schedules out in a week or so.”

The SUV is already loaded and ready to go, all I have to do is say my goodbyes to everyone.

Frieda will hardly let me leave without telling her what’s wrong. “You just have seemed really down today, Eren. Is it something to do with work? Is it something to do with Levi?”

“No, nothing like that!” I assure her. “I’m just kinda sad about leaving, you know? It’s been awesome and I’m ready to go home, but I’ll still miss you guys and, of course, the food.”

“Hahaha! Well, it’s not like we won’t always be here, and besides, who’s to say you won’t be back soon?”
God, I hope not. I mean filming, okay, in LA. Not isolated with him. I smile and give her a short hug.

A few hours later, we make it through security as fast as we could with our heads down and start boarding the plane. Learning from my mistake last time, I take the aisle seat, but as soon as I do my heart hammering. Fuck, why isn’t teleportation a thing? Before long the pilot has made her introductions, the seatbelt sign has been turned on, and we are stuck waiting for this giant metal deathtrap to jolt to life.

I'm okay, it's okay. Everything will be fine.

Except for the fact that the plane has jolted, and starts speeding down the wet- probably slippery- runway. My eyes have clenched themselves shut, my leg is bouncing up and down uncontrollably, and my hands are wrapped over the armrests so tightly that I'm sure my knuckles are white. The wheels leave the ground for a moment then hit the pavement again and I jump as far as my seatbelt will allow me. I can feel the oxygen straining to get to my head, my stomach has flipped completely, fuck I can feel my heart trying to jump from my chest.

It is in this moment of utter terror that Levi's hand-his soft, warm, sturdy hand-folds over mine. His fingers pry themselves between my palm and the armrest to intertwine with my own. The plane shutters as it begins its ascent and I squeeze him as hard as I can. He squeezes back, assuring me that he is right here. That he's not going anywhere. With that thought I start to relax, my breathing returns to normal, but my eyes remain closed. I'm tired, sure, but mainly I don't want to give myself a reason to let go. And I don't and neither does he. Even though we don't talk, even though we don't look at each other, our fingers stay interlocked the entire flight.

Chapter End Notes

I know the end of this chapter just kind of crumbles off, but I thought it helped show how distant and distracted Eren has become. In a way he hasn't been before.
Finale Party pt.1

Chapter Summary

In which it's been a few weeks that they've been back, and Eren has placed himself in the middle of an incredibly uncomfortable situation.

Chapter Notes

There's SO much going on in this chapter that I had to break it up, which is why it may seem to end at a weird part. Fear not, though, there is a method to my madness I swear! So enjoy, and as always thank you so much for reading this fic!

Guilt is a funny thing because you can usually trace it to one choice or action that led everything to snowball. Making it harder and harder to run from while it only gets bigger and bigger as time goes on. And the fact of the matter is, you knew. Whatever the choice, you knew nothing good would come of it. Yet, while you were trying to convince yourself that this tiny frozen ball would melt away, you were the one at the top of the metaphorical hill letting it go. Of course, the thing about running from this snowball is that somehow, sometime, it comes crashing into you. In this case it knocked me down in the middle of a picture perfect bridge on a picture perfect day with a picture perfect man, and I've been trying to pick myself up from it ever since.

If we had only left when we were supposed to! I mean two days, three nights, and a handful of hours? Wouldn’t have been a problem. Easy breezy beautiful. But two extra days... two extra days...totalling four days and five and a half nights, I think that's what did it.

Like I said, would have been easier if it had only been those two days and a handful of hours. But the way it's turned out, pretending nearly a week never happened is a hell of a lot easier said than done.

“-tonight, isn’t it?”

“Huh?” I blink a few times to gather my bearings. Right, I’m hanging behind enemy lines. Isabel and I have taken up posts on the couch downstairs. Something’s on the massive TV on the wall, though I don’t care enough to look what, and she’s looking at me expectantly.

“Are you okay, Eren?” She tilts her head with the question as if it will help her read me.

“I’m sorry, what did you say?” I ask apologetically.

She sighs. “The finale of your introduction arch!”

“Right.” Is that really tonight?

“So what do you want to do?”

“Um, actually I think I’m going to go home to watch it.” That’s not really a plan we’ve made, but it
beats staying here waiting for Levi to come home. Don't get me wrong, it's not as though I've been able to completely avoid him, I mean he is my mentor in this God forsaken program, but our interactions have been minimal and uncomfortable to say the least.

“Oh.” She looks disappointed, and a little hurt. Then she straightens up and smiles brightly. “Why don’t you invite everyone over here?”

“Oh.”

“We’ve got tons of room! And food, and games!” Her hands fly with enthusiasm with each thing she lists. “There’s a bar! Everyone can come, too! Mikasa, Armin, Farlan—” Farlan. “Hanji and Moblit! Oh, and Krista and Sasha and Connie! And what about the rest of the crew!? Petra and Erwin, Gunter, Aurou-maybe not Aurou, Nanaba, Mike, Frieda and Erd...who else am I missing?”

“No, Isabel, really-” I start seriously.

“Maybe Thomas, he’s cute, and Levi of course-”

“Isabel, just,” I start calmly. “It’s not that big of a deal, okay?”

“Of course it is!”

“That’s not-I mean yeah it is, but I really don’t want to make it a huge thing. I’d rather just hang out with a few friends and play games, have a few beers, and just relax, ya know?”

“You can do all that here.” She urges again. I see what’s going on, she doesn't want to be excluded.

“Or you could come with me.” I compromise.

Her smile turns bashful and she starts rubbing her neck. “Really?”

“Yeah, really.” I’m sure she’s still unsure of where she stands with Mikasa. But as far as I’m concerned, if she does have a problem, she can get the hell over it! I mean she getting through things with Levi, she should try giving Isabel a chance, right? “Do you want to?”

“What about Big Bro?”

Shit. “Um, doesn’t he have plans or something tonight?”

“I don’t think so.”

“I-I’m pretty sure he was going out with Petra to make up for that one Wednesday.”

“What one Wednesday?” She looks at me suspiciously. Shit, I’ve already revealed that I know more about what he’s doing than she does. Which is bad.

“Well when we were in Vancouver he mentioned that he was supposed to go to dinner with her and we didn’t end up getting back til Thursday so…” I trail off, hoping that that rushed explanation is enough to quell her curiosity. I mean it's true, and she definitely does not need to know that got that information while we laid sweat stricken between his sheets, and it isn't important that he said he’d have to make it up to Petra sometime after she got back from New York since she was leaving the following Saturday and she just got back yesterday and I’m desperately hoping he’ll be making that dinner up to her tonight and, yes, I know I’m desperately grasping at the straws of not fucking likely, but regardless I don’t plan on being here when he gets back and it would just a hell of a lot easier if he was, in fact, preoccupied.
“Goddamn, Jaeger, that was long winded.”

“Uh-huh…” She eyes me skeptically. I gulp heavily and decide that it’s a damn good time for a snack.

I hop up and stretch. “Man, I’m fucking starving, aren’t you?”

“Not really.” Her tone is still wary. Shrugging before she has a chance to ask me what may be on her mind, I turn and begin jogging to, then up the stairs.

*Close call, Jaeger.*

You can say that again.

*Don’t worry, I’m sure she doesn’t suspect a thing. You are a very good liar.*

Okay, conscious, don’t patronize me.

I pull out my phone as I skip the last few steps because I figure I should at least let Armin know we’re coming over.

“*NEVER GONNA KEEP ME DOWN!*” A little voice yells on the other side of the line.

“Do you really still have that as my ringtone? Literally nobody else in your contacts has a ringtone.” I wince at the thought. “Tubthumping” is the theme song bestowed on me by my so called friends, which I personally take as an insult. I don’t *always* get knocked down.

“Is ‘Blue’ still mine?”

“Touche, Azul, touche.” I guess all’s fair in lifelong friendships and timeless 90s pop anthems. I tuck the phone between my cheek and my shoulder while I rummage through the pantry for something edible, because fuck this healthy shit. YES! I found Isabel’s stash of barbeque chips! “So, what are you doing tonight?”

“Actually,” He begins excitedly. “I was going to call you about that.”

The bag is popped open and I immediately begin shoveling crunchy deliciousness in my mouth.

“Yea?” *crunch* “’bout what?”

“Are you eating?”

*crunch* “Maybe?”

“Wow.”

“’Tever,” *crunch* “wa’you’wanna tell me ‘bout?” *crunch*

“Oh yeah, so Riener is having a finale party at his and Bert’s.”

“Shweet!” This time I actually finish chewing my food before I continue. “Do you think Mikasa will mind if Isabel tags along?”

“She might.”

“Eh, she’ll have to get over it.”
“Would you be able to just ‘get over it’ if she did the same thing with Levi?”

“It’s not the same, Armin, you know that.”

“Fine.” he sighs. “Connie, Sasha, and Krista will be there so she won’t be left out even if Mikasa does give her the cold shoulder.”

“Damn, this is going to be a party.”

“Well I don't know about that.” Armin has adopted a skeptical tone. “Probably more like a large gathering.”

“What makes you say that?”

“Reiner takes his shows VERY seriously.”

I smile into the speaker, “That he does.”

_Just wait til the end!

They don’t even know I’m in it, the only thing they know is that I was featured in that _one_ episode. God, I can't wait to see their reactions, especially Reiner's. Though Armin, Mikasa, and Krista know about me going to Vancouver to film and they probably have their suspicions.

“What do you want a ride?”

“Nah, I've got it taken care of.”

“Oh?”

“Yup! What time, Blue-shroom?”

As always I feel like I can hear his eyes rolling. “We'll meet you at their place at 7.”

“Rodger that, agent. Green out.” As I casually put back Isabel's bag of chips, I see her flaming red head peaking out from the stairs. “Hey, Isabel, change of plans.”

~

We pull up to the curb outside a fairly classy apartment building. Bert’s a trust fund baby so they can actually afford to live in a place like this in the better part of L.A. Unfortunately that fund came from in the aftermath if his parents' deaths, which is among the things we have in common except all I was able to keep from my mother was the key to our old house and her red scarf now safely secure around Mikasa’s neck. And for my father, hell the only thing I kept is the fucker’s name, and that not even legal anymore.

"Hey Jaegerbomb!” Ymir hollers as she steps out of her car on the other side of the street.

"Hey...Krista?” The little blond steps behind her. I totally called that one.

"Hi Eren." She replies shyly, tucking her hair behind her ear as she catches up to us. "Hi Isabel.”

Isabel catches her and pulls her into a hug, after which Ymir grabs Krista’s waist and continues walking.

"Me-ow." Isabel says to me under her breath, and I have to stifle a snicker.
A little orange two door Camry screeches to a halt kitty corner from us across the intersection. Sasha and her bouncing ponytail ducks out and slams the drivers door before she storms toward the crosswalk. Connie starts behind her. She's not paying attention to the road and *shit!*

“SASHA!” We collectively scream and start running. Once the blurring blue car passes, we see her crumpled on top of Connie.

“What the HELL, SASHA!?” He starts while helping her to her feet. "WHAT WERE YOU THINKING!?”

“Oh my God, Connie, calm down.”

"C-calm-watdj." He frantically waving his hands around him. "h-how can I be calm when you almost got hit by a CAR!?”

"Well, just think about how I wasn't hit by a car."

"Because I pulled you back!"

"And I thank you for that," She sasses as she rolls her eyes and reluctantly plants kiss his cheek. "There. Can we cross the street now?"

Meanwhile we all watch, mouths gaping as they bicker, simply reveling in the fact that we did *not* witness our friend being ruthlessly rolled over the hood of a car. Damn, Connie, just damn. What's Sasha's deal anyway? Why was she storming out of the car?

"I can't believe that just happened." Isabel mumbles at my side.

"Yeah." I breath in awe. She passes by all of us cheerily, but when she catches sight of Connie following in her peripheral vision she scowls. He rolls his eyes. "What's going on between you two?"

"She's just pissed because I got us lost a few times before she took over driving."

"Really? That's it?"

"Well," he rubs the at his arm. "I also, kinda wouldn't let her stop at Wendy's on our way here."

I follow him in the building with a low whistle. "So she's not only hangry-"

"She's Hurious." He finishes with a nod.

"Welcome, friends," Reiner is literally waiting for us in the hallway when the elevator door opens. "To Casa de Titan!"

"Reiner," Bertolt's voice echoes out. "Stop calling it that, it's weird."

"Beside," Annie leans in the doorway when we get there. "Aren't they, like, the bad guys?" Her cold blue eyes flick over me and she acknowledges me with a nod, “Eren.”

I smile and start, “Hey A-”

“Annie-annie-bananie! What's shakin?” Ymir asks with her arm around hanging around Krista’s shoulder. “Haven't seen you in a few weeks.” Annie blinks her hooded eyes and shrugs. "If you don't come back soon, I might be in the market for another roommate.”
"Yeah, we should talk about that later."

Ymir nods and pulls Krista with her inside.

Mikasa and Armin are already on the giant sectional couch waiting for us. When they see us Armin waves and Mikasa jumps up to pull me into a bone crushing hug.

"Mi-ka-sa." I get out between strained breaths.

"I haven't seen you in-"

"9 days," I start prying myself out of her hold. "It's only been 9 days."

"9 days without a peep."

"That's not true, I've peeped." I reply defensively.

"No," she crosses her arms and pops a hip."You've barely cooed."

"...that's a strange way to put it."

"Well it's true." And by the sudden coil in her body, it seems she's taken notice of my guest. "Isabel, I wasn't expecting to see you here."

Her tone isn't spiteful, but it's also not particularly welcoming.

"She's here because I want her to be." I come to her defense with a casual tone and shrug. "She's really become a good ally."

"You mean friend?" Armin butts in from the couch.

"No," She starts. "I really think he means ally. Since, for some reason he and big br-" With a cautious glance to Mikasa, she cuts herself off with a clear of her throat. ".-Levi seem to be at war."

"You're not still mad at him, are you?" Mikasa asks.

"Yes I'm still mad at him," I answer in a childlike tone. "But more than that, I just don't like him."

"Liar."

"Why not?" She asks seriously. "He hasn't done anything-"

"No," I try to keep my voice steady. "We just rub each other the wrong way."

"Or exactly the right way."

"Really?" She looks at me skeptically, or maybe it's guiltily, or both? Whatever it is, though, I'm looking for an out of this conversation. "I would think you'd get along."

My eyes began wondering for anything, really. There's the kitchen, but it looks like Sasha’s beaten me to rummaging through their fridge. Wait, she thinks what? "Yeah, well, you're wrong."

"I agree, Mikasa," Isabel joins her side to scrutinize me. "They seems like they'd get along very well."

There's a lamp in the corner, which I really can't do anything with. Hey, wait just one second! "Okay, does nobody remember the giant black eye he gave me!?"
"Of course I do." Mikasa's fists clench and unclench. "But it's not as though you didn't throw the first punch."

"Hey! He fucking asked for it!" There's the marathon on the tv and Levi's giant face is not going to bail me out, but I am DONE talking about this!

"You should have just walked away and told me about it."

"Hindsight is 20 fucking 20, and if I say I don't like him-" you do. "-then I don't fucking like him, okay!?"

Liar.

"Sheesh." Reiner says while he purposely moves between us. "All this over tastes in fashion." Isabel, Mikasa, and Armin all give me indiscernible looks. "Oh, I meant to complement you in your outfit-" one Levi bought me. "your fashion sense has seemed to grow, which begs the question: why are you still mad at the guy if you've started dressing like an actual human?"

"Wow, I don't even know how to respond to that."

"I just don't see how a little thing like like that could make you hate him so much for so long. Especially with Levi Ackerman who is just one, like, the greatest actors ever!"

"It's a little more complicated than that. Starting with the fact that he's an ass!"

"You're never even met the guy!"

"Aren't you his sister?" He turns to Isabel who's watching us with great amusement, Mikasa almost winces. "Why aren't you defending him?"

"He is kind of an ass." She shrugs. "It's part of his charm."

"Really? That's so cool!"

"Has the definition of cool changed recently?" I ask seriously.

"Could you, like please please get him to sign my season 1 box set?"

"I'll see what I can do!" She answers with a sweet smile. Whatever.

Out of the corner of my eye I see a pretty little wii with a pretty little controllers, and oh do I know a perfect way to get out of whatever is happening. Without any warning I switch the tv to AV and rush to get the controllers. My mission, distract everyone and get semi control over the situation.

"What the hell, Jaeger!" Reiner yells at my back as I begins setting up the game. "Change it back!"

"Oh, we'll switch it back," I assure him before looking at Ymir who's in the kitchen regarding me with amusement. "But we have unfinished business."

"What, Jaeger." She crosses her arms and smiles. "Still sore from that ass kicking I gave you last time?"
"Whatever, I was sick."

"Sick with shame."

I toss her a controller. "We're settling this once and for all."

Everyone around us watches; some in confusion some in exasperation, but overall either invested in this or dissolving into other conversations.

"Bring it, Jaeger."

Mission Accomplished.

ROUND 1:

"Everything's brown!"

"Cheap move, you fucking ass!"

"Language."

"Ah, suck a cock!"

"Maybe I will!"

"Gross, Eren." Armin grumbles.

"Yeah," Ymir keeps egging me on. "I bet you've sucked quite a fewwoOH FUCK YOU, DBAG!"

"Maybe you should pay more attention."

"Maybe you should.."

"Huh? What should I do?"

"Shut up and press the damn button."

ROUND 2:

"HAHAHAHA SUCK IT!"

"Fuck you, Jaeger! It's not over yet!"

"That's what you think, but it's not over yet."

...

"You're a cold hearted bitch, you know that!?"

"Oh sweetie, if you're going to insult me you need to be a little more original."

ROUND 3:

"THAT BLOCK CAME OUT OF FUCKING NOWHERE!"

"Maybe you should pay more attention, Eren."
"Are you fucking serious, Ymir!?"

"What are you gonna do about it, you gonna cry?"

"There's one more level."

"Yeah but it's my jam."

"We'll see about that."

FINAL ROUND:

"How does this taste, bitch!?"

"I WILL FUCKING END YOU JAEGER!"

"How are you going to do that when you're the size of a pea?"

KNOCK.KNOCK.KNOCK

Literally nobody moves a muscle to get to the door. When it's clear that nobody is going to move, I hear Mikasa sigh and get to her feet. "Fine, I'll get it."

The next thing we hear is her loudly slamming the door in the mystery guest’s face.

"What the hell, Mikasa?” Ymir yells over the back of the couch. "You made me fall!"

“Ha! Who’s better at Rainbow road now, Be-O-ch?” I drop my controller in my lap like mic on a stage.

"Shove it Jaeger, it's your sister's fault!"

"Hey," I hop up and shrug. "You didn't see me freak out and fly off the road."

Her eyes shift into darts and she waves her controller, "That only means we're tied."

"Nope!" Reiner butts between us. "You've had your fun, but the show is going to start soon so you both will have to wait til after the finale to settle it."

I smile down at her smugly, but my curiosity has caught me so I trot to Mikasa's side. As I move to reopen the door, she grabs my wrist before my hand can turn the doorknob.

“Trust me Eren, you don’t want to open it.” Oh no, Levi? No...maybe? Despite my rebellious instincts, I actually listen to Mikasa and drop my hand. She whips her head to pin Reiner with a deadly stare. “What were you thinking inviting him?”

_Huh?_

“Wha-who?” He starts defensively before his eyes widen. “Oh.” Shit, I should have known from Mikasa’s response. KNOCK.KNOCK.KNOCK. “Look, I didn’t think about it. He’s one of my best friends.”

“Gee thanks, Reiner.” I roll my eyes. It’s Jean. Of course it’s Jean.

“I shouldn't be that surprised because there are a lot of things you don’t think about,” She bites.

“C’mon, Mikasa, he’s gotta be over it by now.” Ymir interjects as she's settling her legs around
Krista sitting on the floor. “Aren’t you Jaegerbomb?”

I-I don’t know. All I know is that I’m not in a blind rage, and that’s gotta mean something, right?

“Whatever, I’m getting rid of him.” Mikasa snaps.

This time I grab her forearm before she can turn the doorknob. “No, Mikasa, it’s fine.”

You’ve gotta face him sooner or later.

“But Eren-”

“Really, just-” I just need a second. “I have to pee.”

Smooth.

Thankfully, the way their apartment is set up places the bathroom at the very end of the hall, which is perfect for catching up to whatever can of worms I may have opened.

“Okay,” I begin pacing once I’m behind the closed door. “Okay, you can do this, Jaeger.” I’m pulling at the roots of my hair as if I can pluck out my anxiety. “Fuck, why did I do that?”

Maybe you’re ready to face him.

Well, that...I stop and look at myself in the mirror. “I mean that’s a theory.”

With a heavy gulp, I brace myself, open the door, and walk down the hallway which seems to have dramatically shortened.

As soon as I step into the living room, his amber eyes stare at me from where he stands on the other side beside Marco. He looks apprehensive, defensive really, but as I look at him I can’t find it in myself to conjure a boil in my stomach.

Huh, in fact I don't really feel anything.

I mean his general presence has always pissed me off, even when we were together, but I no longer have a burning desire to strangle him. I'm just generally numb when I look at him, and it's neither good nor bad. If anything I'm almost relieved, which really doesn't make any sense. Maybe I am just finally over him.

The room is tense to say the least and all eyes are on us, carefully measuring our reactions to one another.

“Hi.” I break the silence and try, I repeat try, to greet him with a small-tiny-microscopic (and extremely strained) smile.

The corner of his mouth twitches up. “Hey.”

The air seems to deflate a bit, but Mikasa still has an almost visible aura that’s dark and dangerous, which actually helps me relax little. At least I know she’s got my back no matter what. Meanwhile, Sasha, Isabel, and Connie are huddled in the corner looking uncomfortable, incredibly confused, and maybe even a little bit traumatized by Ymir and I's battle.

With my hand holding the back of my neck I stretch and let out a heavy sigh. “Okay...” I look toward the tv where Levi's face has replaced the colorful winner's stand where Luigi waved enthusiastically at his victory. Why is my heart speeding up?
“So,” Connie cuts through the tense air by asking the really important question. “Where's the pizza?”

“Should be here any minute.” Reiner says with a triumphant smile and his hands on his hips. He must feel real smug about having Jean and I in one room. As if he had anything to do with it. I mean, other than inviting him. Suddenly his eyes widen at the TV across the room. “Shhhh!”

‘And now, the thrilling winter finale of SR’s Goliath.’

“Oh my God guys, shut up, it’s on!” He completely fanboys and sandwiches himself on the long side of the couch between Bert and Annie curled together in one corner and Ymir and Krista sprawled in the corner of the sectional to be front and center. The rest of us settle in. Jean sits on the floor on the other side of the room next to Marco (Ouch, that still stings a bit); Sasha, Connie, and Isabel on the shorter side of the couch; Mikasa’s curled up in the chair (which is more like a lovesest) with Armin and I am leaning on the wall behind them. I wish I could say I was comfortable, but I feel like I’m standing on glass, what with all the sideways glances I’m getting behind Marco’s head.

Just ignore it. Ignore him.

It's not like I'm not trying!

The episode opens with the captain nursing a drink in a deserted bar and he looks like shit.

Sexy shit, though.

"I would totally turn gay for him." Reiner mumbles. There are a few collective nods from the group - girls and guys alike- Jean, however, glares at him, and both Mikasa and Isabel grimace to each other. Meanwhile my cheeks are burning red and I turn my face into the wall.

His hair hangs in front of his face and his usually crisp white shirt is slightly unbuttoned under a loosened tie. The screen shifts its focus to the black night behind the large bar window and

....wait for it....

"Shit!" Reiner half jumps at the masked figure close to perfectly blended in the dark. Isabel gives me a sly sideways glance. I try to hide my smile.

Captain David Stevens swaggers home in the rain and every other flash of lightning reveals the rugged Titan behind him while each one in between shows it’s disappeared. He finally gets to his apartment and leans on the door after closing it. While on the other side, the Titan stands with its hand on the door. There's a clash of Thunder, a jiggle of the door handle, the Captain looks through the peephole and the mouthless Titan looks up. The tv fades to black and old English text traces itself in white before the screen flashes and that text burns black with the words now translated to GOLIATH.
"Knock. Knock. Knock."

"Must be pizza." Armin comments off hand.

"Sshh!" Reiner snaps.

Since I'm closest, turn off the wall to head to the foyer.

"Okay," I begin as I open the door with my wallet out. "How much-" I look up to find Farlan standing where my pizza man should be. Without hesitation I make like Mikasa and slam the door in his face. Luckily, the tv is too loud for the others to notice. Except Armin, because he doesn't ever miss anything, who peeks his head around to corner and finds me leaning on the door with my arms sprawled to each side of the frame. He casually gets to his feet, nobody pays him any mind.

"Let me guess," he starts as he reaches me. "It's not the pizza guy."

There's another small knock on the door.

"Sparky?" A too familiar voice carries through the small barrier. I close my eyes. Really? "Be a good boy and open the door."

"No."

"It's just us."

"Exactly."

"C'mon, I don't bite," I can hear him smirk before he rasps. "Unless you want me to." Heat rises to my face and I look cautiously to Armin who has found something very interesting on the ceiling. There's an audible sigh before drops his voice even lower. "Eren."

And it's that purr that makes me melt.

I can feel it against my lips with frost nipping my ears and fingers.

The handle turns in my hand as I gulp my face into the toughest scowl I can conjure, and I let the door swing open. There's a moment when he's looking at me that I know he was living the same memory, but sure enough he recovers and pinches my cheek as he steps in. "There's a good boy."

"Ass." I grumble. Farlan shuffles in after him and looks at me with raised eyebrows. Shut the fuck up, Blondie. "Why are you here?"

"Jeez, Sparky, you sure know how to make a girl feel wanted."

"You're not." I gulp because there's that look again. And I can feel my eyes reflect the contradiction in his. One of desire and resentment. But whatever glimmer of emotion in his eyes suddenly harden to utter contempt as something catches his eye across the room. Or rather, someone. Great, just when I thought that maybe, just maybe I would be able to at least stand Jean's presence, Levi had to show up.

"Eren?" Someone calls from the other room.

"Yeah- I'm fine- wait, what did you ask me?"

"Um...the pizza is it- oh." Krista moves just so that she's in sight of Levi, then she's at a loss for words.
"Sshh!" Reiner commands without breaking eye contact with the television. Sasha and Connie are the next to notice him.

"Holy shit." The collectively mumble.

Isabel smiles widely and waves. Jean follows her focus and his face falls slack in response to the raven-haired man pinning him with an award winning glare. Mikasa's moves to lean on the wall where I was and smiles at the intruders. **Farlan** smiles widely back and she grabs her scarf to hide her blush. Okay, buddy, how dare you.

*As if you have room to talk. You're the one who's fucking his best friend and her brother.*

Was, conscious, was, and fuck off. I'm her brother.

*Which is even weirder.*

Stop thinking things, me!

"I'm glad you guys made it." Mikasa says to the intruders.

"You invited them?" I ask in disbelief before turning to Armin. "Is this what you were talking about on the phone earlier?"

"Shut-" Reiner jumps to his feet "The Fuck-" and starts stomping over. "U-aoh...." he gets real quiet once he sees Levi.

I actually think he might pass out, he's pale enough.

"Reiner?" Armin asks from his side. His eyebrow is twitching and I swear he hasn't blinked once.

"You're friend okay?" Levi asks me.

"Ummm...I don't know I've never seen his like this."

Mikasa comes over and waves her hand in front of his face. Then we five-Mikasa, Levi, Armin, **Farlan**, and I-shrug to each other. Everyone in the entry shuffle around him to settle back around the tv. Armin and Isabel go back beside Sasha and Connie; Mikasa and **Farlan** go to sit in the chair, but I when decide to try and awkwardly settle between them, Mikasa glares at me so I search for another spot. Levi is the last in the line and, of course, I'm right in front of him. Jean is watching us intensely and his eyes narrow just as I feel a sly hand work its way from grazing my ass to gripping my hip. I freeze completely, partially because I can't breath, before he uses that grip to lightly pull me with him into the now open corner of the couch and the arm. Once I hit his lap, however, I go completely limp and end up slithering to the floor. Luckily, Jean and Marco are still in front of the furthest point of the couch.

Above me Levi heaves a heavy sigh that I can hardly hear over my pounding heart. I chance a glance at Jean who scoffs and scoots closer to Marco.

*Don't play into it, Jaeger, he's just egging you on.*

I take a deep breath. You're right, conscious, it doesn't matter anyway.

Once I relax a little I notice that the room is uncomfortably tense. Mainly because most of the people in here don’t know how to act around an international superstar that's not Jean. They've even condensed themselves dramatically. Sure, Isabel and I have talked about Levi loads of times, but it's
a much different story when they’re actually in his company. Personally, I have never felt any of that with Levi as a person. As an actor in the professional world, however, he commands attention without ever seeking it, he inspiring in his own way, he is untouchable and dangerous at the same time. Though, that the latter is probably just because I know that he is.

From behind us I can here Reiner mumbling to himself, "Levi Ackerman's in my living room. Levi fucking Ackerman in MY-"

"You gonna keep muttering to yourself back there," Levi so eloquently begins talking over his shoulder. "Or are you gonna move your ass and unpause the screen?"

All I hear is scrambling before Reiner has bolted back to his spot. He begins fumbling with the remote while making nervous glances to Levi who is, well, being himself and not the shiny movie star Hollywood knows and adores. In other words, he's being an expressionless, intimidating, and completely apathetic asshole.

The three agents in his squad are all gathered around a computer screen. On it are open cases involving TITAN.

"Look," Matthews (Gunter) begins as he rubs his eyes. "We've been staring at this crap nonstop for over three days. I think we all need to take a step back for a while and come back to it with fresh eyes."

"Agreed." Kat says through a yawn.

"I don't know," Barnes (Aurou) begins. "I'd feel a little guilty since the captain's losing so much sleep over this."

"It's because he's losing sleep that we should do our best to stay sharp."

"Speaking of the captain," Matthews asks as the computer screen goes black. "When was the last time either of you guys saw him?"

"Last night." Barnes answers suspiciously.

"Same." Kat adapts the same tone. "Why?"

"I don't know," Matthews stalls putting his jacket on. "I just think it's strange that none of us have seen him all day and we're even here later than usual."

"Maybe he's finally catching up on that sleep like we should." She is presses the button for the elevator.

"Besides," Barnes is the first to step into the open doors. "Nothing could've happened. This is the captain we're talking about. He can handle himself."

"Yeah, you're right, it's probably nothing." Matthews steps in beside the other two and the doors slide closed with a ding that echoes throughout the empty office.

The dark office fades with a swinging light that transitions the scene to a dreary warehouse. With the next few passes of light, the captain comes into focus as he’s coming to. There is a low whistling recognizable as some classical melody, though David neither knows nor cares what it may be. He is tied to a chair and he doesn’t even try to test his bonds.
“How original.” He huffs. His voice is raspy from dehydration, his hair is wet and brow is damp with sweat, his shirt is unbuttoned even further, and there’s a small cut on his cheek with dried blood over the yellowing bruise.

It is not fair that he looks so fucking good (save the yellowing bruise) on that big ass screen and that he’s sitting right behind me in real life. What’s worse is that I can’t do anything about it. Can’t do anything to express how good he looks when he’s glistening in sweat, but that it’s even better when it’s real and I’m the cause of it. Or how I wish I could go into the screen and lick it off him because I know exactly what it tastes like. Calm it down there pal, this is neither the time nor place to get yourself all...heated up. Fuck, you’re right, conscious, my entire body is burning red. I bet I look like Bob fucking Tomato right now.

“Why David,” The Titan speaks from where he leans on the wall behind him. His voice, despite being muffled by the mask, is low and fluid. “Glad you’re finally awake.”

“Can’t say I am.”

“Hm, no.” It swaggers of the wall until he’s in front of the captain. It’s brown hair is shaggy and hangs over the mask’s pointed ears. David knew that each Titan wore a different mask, but this one, oh this one he's been searching for for a long time. The Titan that started it all. The mask itself is carved without lips to hide the back to front layered teeth. It has a straight nose, high brow, and the pair of eyes beneath the holes for them are full of fury. The Titan squats so that he's eye level and inches away.

“That's not going to do, David. I need you,” It grabs his hair to hold his head still. The captain grits his teeth. “To be engaged in this encounter. I need you to FOCUS” the Titan yells and pulls harder at his hair. “On what's going to happen.”

“Yeah?” The captain snarls. “And what exactly is going to happen?”

The Titan loosens its grip on his hair and runs its fingers through it before pulling his head forward so they’re leaning on each other’s foreheads. Its voice is soft like the hiss of a coiled snake. “All in good time, captain, all in good time.”

...


“Got it!” I hop up faster than a bunny on Easter morning, happy for a reason to put a little bit of distance between us. It's got to be the Pizza guy this time. AND IT IS! Yes! Score one for Jaeger!

“Okay,” He starts as he begins piling boxes on my outstretched arms. “We’ve got a large sausage and pepperoni, a large cheese, a large chicken barbeque, a large supreme, and four orders of breadsticks. That sound right?”

“I think so.”

“Great! Your total is $107.43.”

Holy shit.
“Okay, cool, um” I forgot to collect everyone's share. “Just let me put these down real quick and I'll—”

“Here,” Levi creeps up by my side. “You can go ahead and keep the change.”

The Pizza Man is—surprise, surprise—starstruck. He just stares gaped mouth with the money clenched in one hand. I huff my annoyance and kick closed the door with my foot. I'm about to berate Levi for his general existence when it dawns on me why he was able to completely sneak up on me. I couldn't see him, of course, because it seems as though these boxes in my arms are actually taller than he is! I snort to hold back my laughter which is rather loud, but I know I can't contain myself for long. And I can't! As soon as I set the boxes on the counter I just burst out in a fit laughter.

“What's so funny, Sparky?” Levi asks. We start spreading out the various boxes of goodies which takes up most of the counter space. It takes me a little bit to reign in this humor, but I do then I make my face blank. Seem like these lessons are really paying off.

“Nothing.” I answer nonchalantly. Oh lord, he's found the sink.

“Nothing?” He begins scrubbing at his hands with fervor.

“Nothing that concerns you.”

Once he turns off the faucet, he turns to me and flicks little droplets of water on my face.

Being ever mature as I am, I respond the only way one would, by sticking my tongue out at him.

"Put that thing back where it came from, or so help me..." He grumbles. Nope, fuck you. "You're hopeless, kid."

He reaches up and flicks me on my nose.

And I thought he was supposed to be the mature one here!

With eyes narrowed like a snake, my tongue slides back in my mouth and I return the favor to his forehead. Levi's face goes into war mode.

He pushes my chest, I push his shoulder. He pushes my chest with both hands this time, I push his shoulders with both of mine. His hands grab my wrists as I try pulling them back to me, he challenges me with a raised eyebrow.

Ass.

It takes a couple times of looking from his hands to his face before I am able to create a genius plan. He'll let me go and I'll win this battle because, gee, I wonder what Mr. Deathgrip would do if I were to, say, lick his hand. I smirk as I look from his hands to his face again.

"Don't you dare, Jaeger."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Ackerman," Reiner begins uncharacteristically polite. Now that I think about it, though, any sort of polite is uncharacteristic for him. "But could you guys please keep it down, the show's still on."

Levi's head is turned towards Reiner as he speaks so I take my opportunity.

Next thing I know my head's in a lock between his arms, and, I mean, Levi's not exactly a tall guy. As a result my cheek is completely smooshed into his chest so hard that my eye is being forced
closed.

"Am I interrupting something?" Jean drawls from the edge of the kitchen.

"I don't think that's really any of your business." Levi bites back. He frees me and practically pushes me behind him. They stand, sizing each other up, until the others start shuffling in.

That was uncomfortable.

All this over lil'ol'me?

I'm kidding, it's actually pissing me off.

I'm neither of their toy to tug a war with.

I roll my eyes and turn my back on it all, and I load up on pizza and breadsticks. Then, I shove past them to claim a spot on the cozy carpet in the stairwell. I need to breath before I start throwing punches, and I know nobody's taking my sorry ass home right now.
Therapy Session with Armin

Chapter Summary

An short interlude of some serious couch (hallway) time with our favorite blond superhero.

Armin's POV

Chapter Notes

Ah, yess, there be a changin in the comin' winds. 'R ya feelin it?

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

There are a few things that I know about Eren with absolute certainty.

1. His favorite color is ever changing shades of blue and green.
2. He loves Mikasa more than the world, the sun, and the moon.
3. He would do anything for me, and I really don’t mean to sound conceited, it’s just true.
4. Pizza is where his true heart lies.
5. He’s terrified that he’ll never be enough, even if he doesn’t show it.

The list could go on, but most recently I have added another thing to it.

953. Eren is borderline falling in love with Levi Ackerman.

How do I know this? Because I know him. I can read him like a Little Golden Book.

As for Levi, I think I'm starting to understand him. In fact, I'm fairly certain he has had feelings for Eren a lot longer than he’s had for Levi. For him, I believe it all started when he bolted out of the conference to chase Eren all the way up to the roof. It was the way he talked to him with a subtle softness of his voice; the way he moved around him as if the last thing he wanted was to lose sight of him; the way he seized up when he realized he was acting a little too concerned.

As for Eren, well, he never did tell me everything that happened in his second call back, so maybe whatever he left out was what first put the idea in his head.

However, it was the day of his hearing when I really saw it beginning. He kept glancing at Levi over my shoulder while we were talking about the sacrifices he would have to make. When they spoke, his eyes held venom, sure, but there was an underlying fire of something more, even if he didn’t know it yet-no, even if he hadn’t accepted it yet. He was clumsier than usual, more aggressive than usual, over all more flustered than usual. Much more flustered than before the hearing. It was in the way he turned tomato red when my shirt popped open even though he’s usually very confident with his body. The guy could walk around shirtless in front of pretty much anyone, in fact, he has on multiple occasions; but not with Levi.
They balance each other out, and they are subsequently drawn to one another.

Eren wears his heart on his sleeve.

Levi has buried his away.

Eren is hotheaded and (generally) harmless.

Levi is reserved and (absolutely) deadly.

Eren is blinding as the sun.

Levi is mysterious as the moon.

Eren is cracked and maybe a little chipped, but not quite broken.

Levi is broken but is haphazardly gluing himself back together.

Though, large or small, there will always be pieces missing from them both.

Not to mention something happened between them while they were in Vancouver. Don't get me wrong, I know Eren wouldn't take it that far. Not behind Mikasa's back, anyway. Still, something's changed between them.

Both would deny any such accusation, of course, but anyone paying attention could see it.

You know, for being such phenomenal actors, they are horrible liars.

It's all in the eyes, and lately there's been so much emotion in both of theirs.

However, there's no denying that there are some that seem to be buying their act. Namely, Mikasa because she doesn't want to see it, which I completely understand; and Reiner, probably because he's too oblivious anyway.

So, when Eren and Levi step up to get the pizzas, I know something's about to happen.

"Dammit! I really have to go to the bathroom!" Sasha reluctantly declares. "I swear to GOD, if any of you even try to get a slice before me, you're going to wish you were never born!"

Well, that should give them a little bit of time to themselves.

It's not long before an indiscernible conversation starts coming from the kitchen.

"Do you have anything that doesn't taste like piss with hops?" Mikasa grimaces into her bottle. She's curled up in the corner of the chair away from Farlan. He looks at her almost hopefully.

"Hey," Reiner starts after taking a big swig. "If you don't like it, you can get your own."

"I saw a liquor store across the street if you want to grab something?" Farlan asks. She shrugs and they casually get up to go. Isabel and I exchange suspicious expressions. Well now, I knew they worked in the same building, but I didn't know how close they must have become there. The door is almost inaudible as it closes behind them. I wonder if Eren even noticed them leave.

The agents get into the captain's apartment, looking for something, anything that would indicate
It should be noted that the apartment on screen is far too shabby when compared to Levi's immaculately clean home. Suddenly, when other noises reach us from the kitchen, Isabel looks at me with raised eyebrows.

Whiny, grunting noises. Wow.

“Nothin',” Matthews sounds exasperated. "Not a damn thing’s out of place."

"Isn't that a good thing?"

Reiner’s eyebrow is physically twitching from the ruckus emitting from the kitchen. Though, I'm instantly relieved when I hear Levi’s voice carry through warningly, “Don't you dare, Jaeger.”

Okay, it's just some kind of feud.

Reiner’s at the end of his straw. Without shifting his focus from the television, he calls back. "I'm sorry, Mr. Ackerman," Oh goodness, is he actually trying to be civilized? “But could you guys please keep it down, the show's still on."

More disgruntled noises and Jean pops up.

"Jean, don't-" Marco starts quietly. Hmmm, reminds me of the tone I adopt when I'm trying to keep Eren from doing something stupid. I watch quietly as he marches past. I sympathize completely, Marco.

Sadly, he and Eren are cut from the same hotheaded cloth which, I think, is why it didn't work out between them. They just didn't quite belong together, you know? Not that they weren't passionate (they were aggressively so), but they were always butting heads and putting each other down-sometimes intentionally, sometimes not. No, they each need someone to balance them out.

For Jean it's Marco- a storm to a rainbow.

For Eren I think it's Levi-daylight to night.

You can't have one without the other, but a raging storm (Jean) and blinding sun (Eren) don't quite mash up. I mean they obviously happen, sometimes, but they generally don't last.

Down the hallway the sound of the faucet hums beneath the scene on the dialogue on screen.

The door opens and Sasha's in the kitchen before the last drop falls. Reiner reluctantly pauses the show when the small crowd begins blocking his view. I am just approaching the end of the line outside the kitchen when, next thing I know, Eren pushes his way through and storms out of the apartment.

"What was that all about?” Connie asks.

Levi is glaring at Jean who is glaring at Levi who is now moving past him after Eren.
"Don't." I bark before I even think about it. He looks at me completely surprised, but he stops, nevertheless. I sigh as he opens the door for me. "Thanks."

Levi gives me a nod and closes the door at my back.

I find my best friend crust deep in what's got to be (hopefully) his first slice of pizza. Typical.
Eren turns his head up to look at me standing above him.

"Oah, haey." He says through stuffed cheeks.

"Didn't your mother ever tell you not to speak with your mouthful?" I ask on my way to sit beside him.

"blAAaaa" He opens his mouth to show me his half chewed food.

"Disgusting." He smiles with stuffed cheeks. "So, what happened in there, Eren?"
He turns away to focus on the horrible tan and gold patterned carpet. Once he finishes chewing, he talks. "Nothing, Armin. It's stupid."

"Yeah, it probably is, but you should tell me about it anyway." Eren nods solemnly while at the same time sliding a breadstick into his mouth. This stress eating thing, though a very Eren thing to do, is going to come back and bite him. Even though pizza is is love, he's been stuck on such a healthy diet lately that all this grease can only end in harm.

"Okay," he mumbles as he finishes chewing. "I'm about to tell you something, agent-to-agent."
Translation: What I'm about to say stays between us under penalty of an Indian burn. What? We were kids, it seemed like an appropriate punishment at the time.

"Understood, agent Green." I reply seriously.
He takes another large bite of pizza and nods. So now I have to wait for him to finish chewing, again. Once he's done he takes a deep, DEEP breath in. "I, kinda, sorta..." He physically winces as he rushes out, " Slept with Levi. "

" What!? " I hiss. " Are-you-crazy?"
He shakes his head with yet another breadstick hanging out of his mouth. I pinch the bridge of my nose. Yeah they'd be good for each other, but honestly, I didn't think things between them would have reached that point yet. Not behind Mikasa's back. Really everyone's back! By everyone I mean we, the siblings. Wow, that sounded messed up. What I meant by we, the siblings, is we the close enough to be considered family/ are either legally or biologically related.

"Like," Eren begins through a mouthful. "A lot." I give him an indiscernible look as he finishes his bite. "Like, a lot a lot."

"Wait, are you saying this happened more than once?"

"Like, alotalot a lot." He says it in a trance like state.

"Eren." I say like a disappointed parent.

" I know." He droops, hand falling to his paper plate to grope at what's left. Sighing, I resolve to save him at least in one way by taking away his patter. "Hey!"
"You'll make yourself sick, Eren." I scold.

"So?"

"Eren." He pouts, but gives up his argument. "Back to this Levi thing ..." His face falls heavy with shame and he goes back to looking at the floor. I place a reassuring hand on his back so he'll at least look at me. When he does, I continue. "Aside from...um...you know..."

"Fucking him."

"I would say it like that, but yes. How do you actually feel about him?"

"I-I don't know, Armin." My friend's eyes are swimming with emotions, and I can tell that he really doesn't know. Not exactly. "I mean, I don't hate him. There are still things I'm mad about, but I don't hate him." His expression changes to annoyance. "He's infuriating as shit, he gets on me for the stupidest things, he always seems to know what I'm thinking when he's almost impossible to to read, and he can be a real fucking prick!" His features soften and the very corner of his mouth turns up. "But he also can be really fucking sweet. And he looks at me like he gives a damn. Like he really sees me. All of me. He'll listen if I need to talk, he encourages me and has helped me get so far already. He's patient, sometimes, but, fuck, I can be obnoxious-"

"Yeah. You can." I mumble.

"-so kudos to him for even that...hey!"

"What?" I shrug. "I'm just agreeing with you."

"You're supposed to be listening, not inserting negative comments."

"I am listening, Eren."

"I know." He sighs. "Thank you." I rub my hand on his back in a circle urging him to continue. "It's just, I mean, how fucked up is this whole situation anyway!?"

"Pretty fucked up." I agree.

"Right!? I mean I might really like my adopted sister's biological brother!" And she might really like Levi's brother-like friend. My head bobs in agreement that... yeah.

"So what it's not conventional?" So begins my role as therapist. "If you like him, you should pursue it. After you talk to Mikasa about it, of course."

He groans loudly. "But, Arrrmiiin!"

"Well, is it something you want to pursue?" I stop to look at him seriously.

"No." He says before his resolution falters. "I can't." He curls his knees to his chest. "I don't know if it's worth hurting Mikasa."

"First, you don't know if it will hurt her-"

"But what if it does?"

"Second," I continue without acknowledging his interruption. "You're going to have to talk to her anyway."
Eren looks like I just told him to kick a puppy. "Armin-"

"It's the right thing to do, and it's better she hear it from you than someone else."

"Why does she need know at all?"

"Eren."

"I mean it, Armin!" He shuffles so that he's directly in front of me. "Nothing's even going to happen, and you're the only one who knows that anything did happen, and you wouldn't say anything, right, Agent!?"

"Of course not, but-"

"Then, so, why not just let the whole thing go!? Sometimes the right thing to do is protect the ones you love from what could hurt them."

"Eren," I start sympathetically. "It's not about maybe hurting her. It's about having enough respect for Mikasa to tell her the truth and let her decide how she feels about it."

He deflates, head and shoulders drooping over his lap. After a minute or so he says quietly, "I hate it when you’re right."

"I know you do."

"Does that mean I have to tell her tonight?"

"No," Oh, God, no. Please no, not while we’re all confined together. "Maybe just take her to lunch tomorrow or something.” He nods and looks up at me. "For the record, I really like Levi.” His eyes widen and I can tell he’s holding his breath. “And I think you’d be good for eachother.”

Eren smiles a little and looks me dead in the eyes. “Yeah?”

“Yeah. I really think you would.”

“Even though everything’s always so tense?”

“Actually,” I get to my feet with his plate in my hand. “You seem really comfortable with him.”

“Huh.” He take my other one extended toward him and I help pull him to his feet.

“Just,” I pause as we start walking toward the apartment door. “Don’t completely write off your feeling for him.”

From the corner of my eyes I can see the corner of Eren's mouth twitch up under his pink tinged cheek.

Man, he’s got it bad.

He stops suddenly and looks at me suspiciously.

"What?"

"Did I hear you say fuck?"
I roll my eyes, and keep walking. Just to lighten his mood I admit over my shoulder, "Maybe..."

"I knew it!" He exclaims at my back as he catches up.

Chapter End Notes

ARE YOU FEELING IT NOW, MR. KRABS!?
Finale Party pt.2

Chapter Summary

Finishing an evening of suspense, humor, angst, more humor, flashbacks, and maybe even a little bit of romance.

Chapter Notes

A few things: 1. The scene shifts a lot because, well, a lot happens in it. 2. Okay, so I royally fucked the timeline between Jean and Eren. For some reason, I had been imagining this whole time that they'd been together for four years before the breakup, but as I was writing I realized that, no, that made absolutely no sense given that I already wrote that they started dating the summer after graduation. So...point being, I went back and edited that so it fit with what I was actually going for. Sorry I suck at lifing. 3. The first link may seem out of place to the scene, but think of it in the perspective of the player in that everything is falling into place. Also, I've timed the links to my pace of reading through the scenes which, I think, is pretty moderate. That being said, I know it will vary, but I do hope it still aligns well enough :)
Thanks for reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I have only heard Armin say 'fuck' maybe 5 times since I've known him. So, aside from the fact that he only said it to solidify the fuckedupness of everything happening, it was one of my proudest moments! They grow up so fast.

Clearly, though, I don't. If I did, then maybe I would be able to handle everything better. *Don't write off your feelings for him.*

Honestly, him being okay with the possibility of Levi and I only makes it so much worse. How can I break those kinds of ties with him if I have the echo of my best friend's approval in the back of my mind?

You can't.

Exactly.

I mean, of course I still have to.

But, then again, do you?

Yes.

Most likely.

Fuck, I have to talk to Mikasa. And I really really don't want to talk to-
Thinking of the devil, she steps out of the elevator at the end of the hall carrying a six pack and wearing a smile that quickly disappears when she sees me. I have that effect on people, and she can see through me like a window. Armin quickly closes the door again so that we're all still alone in the hallway. Wait a second, wasn't she inside? And WHY the fuck is Farlan behind her?

Mikasa fixes me in place with one single twitch of an eyebrow: 'What happened? What were you two doing?'

We three have spent years mastering the art of nonverbal communication, which I can tell is a good thing given the present intruder.

My eyes get unintentionally accusatory: 'I could ask you the same thing.'

She ignores me to look pointedly at Armin for an answer. He returns her gaze with a smile and a shrug: 'Don't worry, I got it.'

After thinning her lips, she looks back at me: 'Eren?'

Okay, enough, I'm done being pestered over. I roll my eyes and cross behind Armin to go back inside. Behind me I hear him sigh heavily. The glow of the television reveals the concern everyone had about my abrupt exit and I don't know if I should be relieved or offended.

The Titan tilts his mask half off, revealing his face to the back of David's head before leaning in close enough that his nose was in his hair. A piano begins playing in the background.

"Because," When he speaks it's merely a whisper. Lips grazing the shell with every harsh syllable. "We've been playing cat and mouse for too long, and I'm growing bored." His finger lace themselves into the captain's raven hair in order to pull his head back roughly. The knife follows the angle to the pulse point directly beneath his jawline. His lips graze his temple. "It's time we up the ante and start the real game."

His fingers fall away to pull his mask back over the rest of his face.

Damn, we were gone for longer than I thought we were. Levi is perched on the edge of the couch and stands up as soon as he sees me. Well, at least someone cares. It looks like he is about to come over, but he stops when the door opens behind me. Oh, right, Mikasa.

I wonder if there's any pizza left…

A dark laugh echoes in the shadows. "Agents, it has been fun, but I'm afraid -

"Eren, Armin," Reiner calls from the living room. “Get your lily-asses back in here! It's getting really intense."

Levi’s settled back in his seat and I honestly don’t know where or how to move. Like, do I go sit
back down? Next to him? No, definitely not. I’m still annoyed with him.

*Still annoyed with him, or how he makes you feel about him?*

Doesn’t really matter, does it? In the end I’m still not sitting by him right now. But I also want to follow Mikasa and *Farlan* into the kitchen to grab a beer (and keep an eye on that slimy bastard). Though-I look at Levi’s profile a second before his eyes flick over to mine and I gulp-being around *that* with alcohol in me has proven to be problematic. Yeah...best stick to water.

And where is water? Oh, right, in the kitchen; guess I *have* to go in there with them.

“*Scuse me.*” I say as I shove myself between them to get to the cupboard.

“Eren.” Mikasa growls.

“I’m thirsty.” I shrug innocently while filling my glass to the rim.

After rolling her eyes, she pushes me out.

“*SSShhhhh!*” Reiner hisses over his shoulder just as I slop water all down my front. Thanks Mikasa.

Both Levi and Jean have the exact same reaction which I take personal offense to. A roll of their eyes and an almost playful look that screams ‘*Typical Jaeger.*’

Yeah, well, fuck them.

*The titan’s fingers tighten their grasp on the captain’s hair. He takes off his mask completely; the angle of the camera shows nothing but the monster’s lips moving next to David’s temple.***

I purposefully walk past Levi (Reiner bats me out his line of vision) and I stick myself right between Ymir and Isabel in the very corner of the sectional. This way, at least, I’m equally separated from each of them. Ymir punches my arms, but Isabel has no problem curling up to the other shoulder.

“*Til next time, oh captain,*” He places a soft kiss to the skin. "*My captain.*"

*The last thing Captain David Stevens sees before his world turns black are burning emerald eyes above a dark twisted smile.*

Jean’s quiet hum draws my attention and I can him see scrunching up his face to study the screen.

“*-Captain?*” A distance voice calls from a blurring light. *When the camera focuses, Kat’s bruised face is smiling down. The perspective shifts as the captain sits himself up in the hospital bed. There are bandages wrapped around his head and throat. His right arm is in a sling which does just enough to temporarily distract from how beaten he looks. He winces as he feels his broken ribs protest and falls back to his bed. “We didn’t know when you’d wake up.”*
“H-” David begins in an almost inaudible voice. “How long?”

“Three days.” The captain closes his eyes as those words sink in. Three days, huh? What the fuck happened? The last thing I remember. “We were ambushed, and the Director-”

“His eyes-” David begins like he’s trying to keep a firm grasp on a handful of sand. The screen flashes to burning eyes fading into black. “I’ve seen them before.”

Jean looks directly at me, it seems, so he can look at my face. He gasps, eyes widening like he’s just realized something important. That motherfucker figured it out.

“Okay,” Kat dismisses. “But there’s something more important, David.” He raises his eyebrows; she never calls him by his first name, not unless it’s really bad news. “We...lost some of our agents.”

“Wh-”

“Even more of us were seriously injured.” She’s no longer looking at him. “And...” The scene shifts to a grand piano in an empty room where the melody that has been in the background is revealed to be being played by fingers dancing across the keys- it flashes back to the hospital room. “The director...well, she-she-” Her voice cracks and she takes a deep breath before continuing. “She wants your badge.” Back to the piano, where a smirk plays in the shadows- back to the room. The captain’s eyes widen and he attempts once more to get out of his bed. “Captain, please don’t. You need to rest.”

David grunts in pain, but still manages to swing his feet over the side of his bed. “She can’t-”

He attempts to stand, but crumbles to the floor and passes out. The screen goes black once more before cutting back to the piano in the empty room.

This time there’s a silhouette of the musician. Their hair hangs in their face as they concentrate on the movement of their fingers. Not once does the camera pan in a way that’s indicative of the musician’s identity other than revealing that it's most likely male. The scene shifts back to the captain, partially recovered, who now stands before his director. His gun and badge is shown lying on her desk.

“I’m sorry to do this, David.” She begins. “But I can’t overlook what happened.”

He scoffs at her. “Don’t patronize me, Cheryl, you’ve been looking for an excuse to get rid of me from day one.”

“You can believe whatever you want.” She sits with her hands folded on the desk. “It doesn’t change a thing.” She begins working through papers and addresses him next without looking up. “You may leave.”

He glowers at her another few seconds before straightening his back and walking out. His squad- or what used to be his squad- swarm him, all pledging to quit and help him with whatever he was planning- the mystery man’s head tilts up as he effortlessly moves his fingers up and down the piano keys. David looks at them all seriously. “You’re needed here. This isn’t the end, I’ll be back.”

They deflate, doubt etched on each of their faces- a breeze ruffles the curtains and illuminates the dark room; the musician’s profile is shown as well as the same dark shirt the titan that held David
wore.

“You know,” Reiner begins curiously. “Something about that guy seems really familiar.”

“Who says it’s a guy?” Annie mumbles as she lightly kicks at his side. Isabel shifts on my side. From my peripheral I see both Levi and Jean look at me, but I focus my gaze on Armin smiling widely from where he’s sitting on the floor. He knows and I’m okay with that. “Could just be a masculine girl.”

The melody continues as David is seen mulling over box after box of files. Pictures and cases are strewn every which way. He keeps getting up to pin something to a board, and all that is shown are his movements. Then it’s back to the table for more clues.

This continues until he gets up, runs his fingers through his hair, and pours himself a drink. As he stares from where he stands at the clustered table, something catches his eye.

He suddenly gasps, wide eyed he moves to a mug shot and places his hand on it.

He picks it up and pins it to the board right beside a drawing of the titan’s mask, as the camera zooms out, the board is shown to be filled with pictures and papers, all interconnected by red strings but the mug shot is never clearly seen.

Back in the piano room, a dim light illuminates the empty space. The camera moves from the back of the titan’s figure-

“Wait a second.” Sasha says as everyone shift’s their bodies closer to the screen

-to his profile with his wild, chestnut hair-

“No fucking way.” Ymir drawls slowly at the edge of her seat. I cannot help the wide smile on my face that nearly matches..

-to his twisted smile-

Levi’s gracing me with a sideways glance when I look over to him and me thinkst I see a glimmer of pride in there.

-and finally, to the front of his face. He’s still looking at his keys, but as soon as he strikes the last note, his eyes flash to look straight into the camera. The screen goes black and the titan whispers
"David".

The credits start rolling.

Everyone is silent. Everyone is still. Everyone’s mouth is gaping. I don’t think any of them believe what they just saw. Not one of them so much as twitches.

That is until, right below Levi’s name, scrawled in calligraphy print, rolls: Special guest Eren Jaeger. Reiner is turning purple and the vein in his forehead is pulsing out, but it's Marco who breaks the silence.

"Wow, Eren, that was great! Congratulations!"

“Thanks for telling me, jerk!” Mikasa’s voice follows the pillow hurling at my face.

I wave my hands and put on an innocent smile. “Surprise!”

In response, I get bombarded with more pillows from every angle. Why do they have so many of them? What use are they to them? Have they been coveting them for this moment?

Probably.

Through the cracks of cushions, I watch the corner of Levi’s lips twitch as he watches the attack. They ceasefire when Reiner stands. As he is glowering down at me, his arms fold themselves into his chest. “This wasn’t something you could have mentioned?”

He sounds genuinely hurt. “Reiner, I-”

“No, Eren,” He cuts me off. I get the distinct impression that I’m engaged in a couple’s feud. “It’s fine.”

“Okay...”

“I mean it’s not like you knew this was only my favorite show ever!”

I look around for support, but all I find are amused faces. Assholes would rather be entertained than help a friend out. Does that really surprise you? No, not really, but still.

“And even if you did, you wouldn’t spoil anything.”

“I thought it’d be better if it were a surprise!”

“Well, it was! It was an awesome one!”

“Then why are you mad?”

His face falls into confusion and he tilts his head. “Who said I was mad?”

Wow, my friend is an oaf. I love him to death, but My God.

"Really, Jaeger," Jean adds lightly as if he's trying to egg everyone on. "Way to clue your friends in!"

"I wouldn't exactly call us friends , Horseface." I hiss.
"I just meant the principal of the thing, Eren." He bites back. "Pretty fucked up not to tell any of the people you do call friends. Hell, you didn't even tell Mikasa!"

"Jean-" Marco attempts to console him, but he jumps to his feet.

"Maybe," I match him by getting on my feet. "Because I wanted it to be a something special!"

"Well maybe, it was a stupid idea!"

"Jean-" "Eren-", Marco and, surprisingly, Levi start.

"How 'bout you go fuck yourself, Jean!"

"How 'bout I leave that to Marco!"

"Jean!" Marco jumps up now and grabs his arm. "I'm sorry, everyone, Eren, but I think we've overstayed our welcome."

But they don't move. In fact, Marco almost looks scared. And, to be honest, I don't blame him, seeing how my fists are clenched at my sides. Fucking assholes. I'm gonna claw their motherfucking eyes out.

Mikasa's with me, on her feet now, too, totally at the ready to help me tear Jean apart. Everyone else stays where they are. Most of them have learned from experience to let us get it out, but others (Sasha, Connie, Isabel, and Krista), I think, are far too shocked to do anything.

But I'm really gonna do it this time! They'll be sleeping with the fishes come morning!


I huff angrily- well actually, I snarl, but I feel a strong hand seize my upper arm and begin pulling me away. Marco scurries past us while directing Jean out. But as we make to follow them, not much to my surprise, Mikasa blocks Levi from the door.

"Levi," She starts lowly. "It's not as though I don't appreciate what you're trying to do-" But she don't appreciate it, man. "-but I really don't see the point in you manhandling my brother."

Ouch. The four of us who actually know what's going on, collectively wince. Also, not the best word choice since he's definitely manhandled me before.

"I'm only doing what I've promised to do." Promised who? "And keeping him out of trouble is part of that."

Did Zackly say that? Though, by the expressions they're exchanging, I'm not so sure if that's promise he means.

"What is he talking about, Mikasa?"

Her eyes are narrowed at Levi's who are hooded and somewhat challenging. I twist my arm out from his hold to look at her seriously.

"Don't worry about it, Eren."

"How do you expect me not to-"

"I said don't worry about it." She snaps.
Fine. Let the them have their secrets. I have plenty of my own. She doesn't exactly step out of the way of the door, but I do manage to shove myself past anyway. Not that I'm going anywhere. No car, remember?

Lucky for me, though, after stepping outside Jean is there to keep me company. He's standing on the curb, presumably, waiting for Marco to bring the car around, or maybe God really just hates me and Marco's abandoned him here.

He's got a hat hanging low over his eyes and is now sporting a baggy sweatshirt which very much reminds me to beware of roaches in the streets.

Whatever, I'll try to ignore him.

"He's a little old for you." Apparently, he's not gonna let that happen.

"Excuse me?" Oh there's that rage I couldn't find earlier.

"I mean he's attractive, but it'll never work out."

"What are you on about, Horseface?"

"Levi."

"Look, you have no idea what you're talking about."

"Oh c'mon!" He rolls his eyes and crosses his arms. "You two are practically drooling over each other."

"Fine," I cross my arms. "Say there was something going on, which there's not, it's-"

"None of my business, I know. " He drops his arms to ruffle his hair. "It's just..." He trails off.

"Just what, Jean?"

Marco's car pulls to the curb and Jean shakes himself. "Nothing, nevermind."

Then he's gone, taillights fading in the distance. Well, that was strange and uncomfortable, and I'm not even sure I want to know what "It just" is. In fact, I'm 93% sure I don't.

"Hey, Eren!" Isabel calls to me while running out the double doors. "Need a lift?"

"Um..." I eye her suspiciously. Why does it feel like I'm a damsel and she's my white knight? "Sure..."

"Cool!" And she's bounding to her car across the street.

Whatever, I'm not going to question it I'm over this evening. Actually, though, not including my leave of absence or the outbursts at the end, all things considered, it wasn't actually a catastrophic event. I follow her, looking both ways lest I go the way Sasha almost did, and slide in the passenger seat.

So...

Now what? We've been driving now with idle conversations separated by long sullen silences; the only noises are the drumming of Isabel's fingers to the low static of the radio and the off pitch humming accompanying it. We take off at a green light as a stupid, annoying, why don't I change the
station melody pops on. What suspiciously good timing considering what happened not twenty minutes ago. This song was actually at the top of the charts the entire two weeks before I walked in on him and that whoeverthefuck he was. Go figure.

White knuckles

And sweaty palms from hanging on too tight

“Oho!” She cranks up the stereo. Fuck, I waited too long. “This is one of my favorite songs!”

I've got another headache again tonight

Eyes on fire, eyes on fire

And they burn from all the tears

I've been crying, I've been crying

I've been dying over you

I don’t think she’s fully made the connection that this shitty singer is the same dildo she’s been around all night. Even if she did, there's no need to crash her party. It's one song, 4 minutes 23 seconds of my life, I think I can manage. Actually now it's 3 minutes 18 seconds.

- ough

I think I maybe think too much

I think this might be it for us

Blow me one last kiss

You think I'm just too serious

I think you're full of shit

Be real and reverse that.

-spinning, so

Blow me one last kiss

Just when it can't get worse

I've had a shit day

What’s new?

You've had a shit day

Of course.

We've had a shit-

Month or so by that point.

-life’s too short for this
Want back my ignorance and bliss

Fuck you, you're the one who stole all mine!

Blow me one last kiss

I instantly picture his almost nervous demeanor before Marco pulled up.

I won't miss all of the fighting

That we always did

Ditto, pal. So what were you playing at with the whole "It's just.." thing?

-I mean what I say when I say "there is nothing left"

No more sick this is it

No more battles from me

And, I mean, why would I listen to him anyway? "It's just.." doesn't fucking matter, right?

I'll dress nice I'll look good

I'll go dancing alone

I will laugh, I'll get drunk

I'll take somebody home

Well, at least there was one thing he was actually able to follow through with.

-maybe think too much

OR not at all.

- be it for us

Isabel is totally jamming out in the driver’s seat. Her hands are shifting from the steering wheel and moving around her. She’s loudly singing along and she points at me and smiles. Then she points at me again with raised eyebrows. Shit, she’s queuing me in. Not gonna happen, hun.

“c’mon , Eren.” She says while bouncing her head to the beat. “I know you can sing!”

I've had a shit day

You've had a shit day

“Not to this, Isabel.”

“Oh, fuck him, Eren!” So she does know. Then why- “That’s what this whole song’s about! Saying ‘fuck it, I’m taking my life back from this destructive relationship’!”

“Yeah, do you know how much that fucking hurts, though? To know that that was exactly what he felt like when he came out with this song?”

Blow me one last kiss
I give up, without saying anything I lean forward and switch the station. It seems like 4 minutes and 23 seconds is just too much time to waste in my life. She’s a little taken aback, but doesn’t protest, instead she just sighs and shakes her head.

“May I be frank?” She starts as we pull into the garage.

No. “I guess.”

“You may not realize it, but the way you were acting around him tonight made it seem like you were over him.”

Wow, let’s just jump straight into this conversation, shall we? “Look,” I start as we each open our doors. “I know you’re just trying to help, but have you considered that you may be wrong?”

“Why do you think that?”

I sigh and lean my arms over the hood of her car. “Because everything still hurts when I think about it.”

“Of course it does. He hurt you, but that doesn’t mean you can’t move on. He’s like a scar. The cut itself hurts like hell, and it’s tender as it heals, then one day it stops hurting completely. Still, even after it’s become nothing more than a tiny white line on your skin, there are times when you look at it and you can remember the all that pain.”

“Ah, yes. Such wisdom,” I mull over her words sarcastically. “From the mouth of a babe.”

“Shut up,” She throws her small backpack at me. “You know I’m right.”

She bounds up the stairs into the house, but I feel like I’m glued to my spot. Her words soak in, and it dawns on me that I ______ know.

And she’s absolutely, positively, incomprehensibly correct. The only question that remains is: What am I supposed to do with that?

I don't know, maybe live your life.

I guess that's as good a plan as any.

When I finish following the fucking ridiculous sock ritual, I join Isabel at the bar in the kitchen. Half her body's buried in the fridge and before long she emerges with a two thirds full pitcher of iced tea. Without a word, she fills two glasses and slides one over to me while taking a big swig, “Thanks”.

“No prob, Rob.” Isabel tips her glass and winks. “You wanna talk about what else is bothering you?”

“Like what?” I reply a bit too defensively.

“Nevermind, then.” She breathes. “So, about Thanksgiving...”

“What about it?” I honestly forgot about it being, what, 4 days away?

“Well,” She shrugs. “Are you going to home or staying here? Because everyone is always welcome over... if - if you want.”

I smile. “Thanks Isabel, and you know, I haven't really talked to Hannes yet so I don't know if he's got specific plans.”
He probably does and they're probably the same as every year. We'll set up the deep fryer on the patio, have a few roasted potatoes and veggies on the grill. The tv will be on in the living room with the screen facing enough to see from the window so Hannes doesn't miss a single thing. Mikasa will be in the kitchen with Armin finishing the cooking and I will be floating from room to room to check on everyone's progress. Hey, I clean up! And I make one hell of an apple pie, but that can't even go in until the recovery zone between dinner and dessert so it's not like I don't pull my weight.

“Well, it's usually just Levi, Farlan, and I. Sometimes Hanji and Moblit come over, even Petra and Erwin made it last year, but,” the tone of her voice definitely shifts, and she looks down with heavy eyes. “I mean, they've all got their own families to go with. And it's not like I don't know that I have my own, I do! Levi and Far mean the world to me! Still...” I can see tears brimming her eyes from across the counter. “I just wonder what They're doing.” Her words are spiteful. It helps clue me into who they are. I watch a tear fall from her cheek to splash on the rim of her glass. “Do they even think about me?” Her voice is barely a whisper. “I mean, why even have a child if you're just gonna abandon her!?” I immediately hop up and wrap my arms around her. It's clear it's high time she got whatever this is out. “That's what they did, Eren.” She says quietly into my shoulder. “We went on this big trip to the city, had this wonderful day-best day of my life - then..poof..I woke up and they were gone. The room was paid for, their number was disconnected, and all I had was a backpack full of dirty clothes, a notebook, and a fucking photo album.”

What the shit? What the fuck kind of people could do that? I pull her tighter just so she knows that I would never leave her that way. “I'm so sorry, Isabel.”

She pushes herself from my arms and begins wiping her eyes. “Whatever. Doesn't matter now, I don't need Them.”

“No you don't. You are an incredible person who is witty, beautiful, brave, dangerous, and who has the biggest heart of anyone I've ever met!”

“Thanks, Eren.” She sniffs.

“For what? Those are all true!”

“No, not for that.” Isabel smiles. “For listening to me. For letting me just get it out!”

“Of course!”

“I mean, I don't really even know where the that came from. I guess thinking about the Thanksgiving just brought up all these pent up emotions and is not like I can really talk to Levi about these things. I mean I can, but it would just make me feel like I'm saying he's not enough and he is! He's more than enough! So why even think about Them?”

I cut her off by hugging her tightly again. “Some cuts take longer to heal, Iz.” Her body hiccups for breath and her tears begin soaking through my shirt. “Tell you what,” I start as soon as her breaths even back out. ”Why don't you guys come over to Hannes’s with us?” She only responds by nodding into my chest. “That settles it! One condition,” She lifts her face up to me with furrowed brows. “You have to bring something with you.”

She snorts and pushes of me again. “There's always a catch.”

“You know me.” I say with a lopsided smile. I can spot a desperate change of topic when I see it. “Ever the trickster.”

She huffs another hollow laugh while deciding to clean both our glasses. After about a minute of
silence, Isabel turns off the faucet and yawns. “Man, I'm exhausted.”

Yeah, crying will do that to you. “Then go to sleep.”

“I will.” She sasses.

“Good.”

“Glad you agree.”

“I'm glad you're glad.”

She smiles and flicks whatever water was clinging to her right in my face. Well, clearly not all traits are descended by blood. But considering she was just crying, I won't retaliate, no, I'll just stand still and smile. She steps right past me. “Isabel,” I snap to serious. “If you ever need to talk or anything, I'm here.”

She bites her lip and nods.

“You know,” she stops herself right before reaching the first step. "I'm always here for you too. So if you ever need to talk about...anything, anything at all, I'm here."

"Okay...Thanks Isabel."

"Because, well..." She sighs. Where's this going? "It's none of my business,” Oh no, that's the station she's pulling into. “But whatever happened in Vancouver seems to be really messing with Levi.”

Great. Back at it again with the white hot guilt. “He seems gloomier than usual, more up tight, a lot...lonelier I guess, and he's been like that since you got back. And if I'm being honest, Eren, so have you.”

Then she's trotting down the stairs leaving me to wallow in my own gloominess.

Damn it's really that noticeable, huh?

On that train of thought, he's not home yet. Wonder what's holding him up.

Do ya now?

Yeah, actually, I do.

Gonna wait up for him?

Don't go that far, conscious, I was just wondering where he was. Still...the night is middle aged; I see no need to hurry to bed.

Me: Hey still up

Agent Blue: um...yes?

Me: sweet! Army of Zombies?

Agent Blue: I'll metaphorically see you in 5

Good to know that somebody’s not yet sick of me tonight, and what better way to forget about this evening than with a cleanse of zombie blood? I rush up to my room to let my ps4 and game start up while I throw on some more comfortable clothes. I mean, it's not as though I don't appreciate Isabel's
offer to listen, but it's not something I can really talk about. Besides, it seems like she's got her own things to sort through, there's no need to top it off with my own shit.

"Eren?" I hear the muffled Armin yelling through my headset as I wrestle into a faded Gryffindor tee-shirt. Because, fuck yeah. "Are you even there? This was your idea in the first place!"

"Calm you tits, Armin, I'm right here."

"Good, then let the game commence!"

"You are such a dork."

"You're one to talk, Mr. Rebel X-Wing fighter Headset."

"Um...I don’t see your point. It’s awesome, and I swear my kills have gone up 235%."

"On your right...nice!"

"So... what happened when I left?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, Mikasa and Levi were totally sizing each other up back there. So what happened?"

"Nothing really. Levi left with Farlan pretty much right after Isabel ran to get you, and Mikasa stayed with Annie."

"Farlan.

"Not a fan?"

"I don’t like th-BEHIN-oh, you got it!"

"I can multitask, Eren. So back to why you hate Farlan."

"Yeah, Farlan, I don’t like the way he looks at Mikasa."

"s not like she didn't return it." Armin attempts to mumble.

"Excuse me?" Didst I hear a slur there?

"C’mon, you must have noticed too. Besides, they’ve literally worked at the same firm since she started, so it's not like they haven't been around each other before. Especially not since she found out he's Levi's lawyer. I mean, he’s the one who told her where Levi liv-"

"No, finish what you were saying."

"Nothing. Forget I said anything."

"Armin..."

"Eren! PICK UP YOUR GUN!"

"What do you mean, Armin?"

"You are killing us BOTH!"
“TELL ME WHAT YOU MEAN!”

“No! I shouldn’t have said anything in the first place!”

“Too late for that! Cat’s out of the bag, so what aren’t you telling me!? When did he tell her where Levi lived!? Why did she need to know!? And how the HELL did she get that information from him!?"

“Whoa, Eren, Mikasa can be charming when she needs to be, so there is absolutely no reason to suggest anything else- WOULD PLEASE JUST SHOOT SOMETHING!? ” Blood blotches as a zombie begins tearing at my avatar’s flesh. “Darn it, Eren! You’re the one who wanted to play this game in the first place!”

“Armin!”

“Nope, I’m not an owl, talk to her yourself? And, really, Eren, it’s not like you have any room to get talk.”

Fuck, he’s got a point. I groan and throw myself back on the beanbag. “How am I supposed to tell her, Armin?”

“Just be straightforward and honest. Talk to her, make it a conversation.”


“That’s not exactly what I mean.”

“I don’t know how to even say it, Armin, how am I supposed to make it into a conversation?”

His sigh hisses in my headset. “Then just sit her down and tell her. Cut through any other small talk and st get it out.”

“Okay, but can it wait until after Thanksgiving?”

“Oh sh’, I forgot about that.”

“Me too, until Isabel brought it up..which reminds me that I kind of invited them.”

“Oh, really? All of them?”

I groan again because I forgot that Farlan was probably included in that invitation. “Unfortunately, I think so.”

“You think so?”

“Well it was an on the spot decision I didn’t really stop to clarify.”

“What happened?”

I sigh- not my story to tell. “Nothing really, Isabel and I were just talking and I invited them over.”

“Well, that’s going to be an awkward dinner.”

“No kidding.”
“Hannes sn’t even met Levi, has he?”

“Nope.”

“I bet he’ll be thrilled about that.”

“It’s Hannes, get a few beers in him and he’s anybody’s best friend. It’ll be fine.”

“Just imagine his response if he found out about you and Levi...or Mikasa and Farlan-”

“There is no...either of those!”

“I’m ’st saying. Remember how he was with Jean?”

Oh, yes, vividly and it still brings a smile to my face. There we were, the day before Junior prom, when I brought Jean over to help me pick my outfit, and to, I guess, meet Hannes. It was an overdue meeting, I admit, seeing how we had already been dating since the whole beach incident. Anyway, Jean made an offhand comment about how it’d be better if I didn’t wear anything at all. Well, little did Jean know (or I for that matter) that Hannes happened to be standing right outside the cracked door. Did he bust in the door and demand Jean leave? No, no, like a true veteran, he waited for just the right moment to attack, and that moment came just after Jean took his first bite of store bought pecan pie (we’re a pie family). I kid you not, he- you know what, no. This memory’s too good not to relive:

We were all sitting around the small round table- Jean and I on one side, Mikasa and Hannes on the other, both of whom spent the entire meal glaring at him. He was nervous and apparently moving his hand higher up my thigh helped transfer some of those nerves to me. The meal itself felt more like an interrogation.

‘What do you plan to do after high school?’

‘Intern at Regime’s Music Production branch. I-I'm actually starting this summer and hopefully-’

‘And what are you going to do with that? Do you want to be a music producer?’

‘Actually, I hope to be a singer.’

*Insert judgmental grunt here* Jean gulped and moved his hand right below my crotch. I choked on my Dr. Pepper, and he was graced with more soul scorning glares.

‘So that’s it then? No college?’

‘I-I didn’t say that, sir.’ Jean stammered. I hadn’t seen him so flustered before. ‘I plan on taking online classes that fall.’

*insert another judgmental grunt* The table fell silent again. At least, I was trying to keep my silence as Jean kept pawing at my incredibly uncomfortable growing erection. He kept a good poker face, too, his only tell being the smirk at the edge of his mouth. I just had to keep aggressively bite at my food to keep from moaning. He was as sadistic then as he is now. Finally, however, I did get enough control of myself to pointedly, and violently step on his foot. Boy did that work.

‘You boys okay over there?’
‘N-ever better.” Jean said through a voice a pitch or two higher than normal. Then he subtly glared at me and I not-so-subtly glared back.

‘You sure ‘bout that?’ Hannes raised his eyebrow and looked straight at me. ‘Eren?’

‘Yeah, Hannes, I’m just done.’ I smiled as I readjusted my boner in the waistband of my jeans. Then I got up because I needed an excuse to throw some cold water on my face. ‘I just need to use the bathroom.’

*insert skeptical grunt here*

‘Would it be okay if I started cleaning up?’ I heard Jean ask as I made my way to the bathroom at the end of the hall. He always was a suck up, too bad Hannes has never been one for bullshit. Once confined in the hastily cleaned bathroom, I was able to splash cold water on my face and take a few deep breaths which seemed to do the trick. Jean was waiting for me in the hall when I opened the door.

‘Hey Charming, thinking of me?’

‘What were you thinking, Jean?’

‘I was thinking you seemed to like it.’ He looked me up and down. ‘And I really liked seeing you like it.’

‘In front of my family? Really? Not the best fucking timing!’

‘Jesus fuck, calm down.’

‘You can’t just do stuff like that.’

‘Okay,’ He ran his hand down my arm and started rubbing circles on my wrist. ‘You’re right. I won’t do anything like that again.’ - awe I was so cute and naive to believe him- ‘Besides, it’s not like we don’t have tomorrow.’

Ah, yes, prom night. Infamous night for loss of virginity. Not mine, as it turned out, Jean hit the spiked punch a little too hard and I spent the evening rubbing his back as he curled over the toilet. But that’s another story for another day.

He leaned in to steal a kiss when- *insert a clear of throat for warning followed by a grunt of annoyance*

His face fell and I rolled my eyes while I walked back to the kitchen. Mikasa was there holding a knife when we entered. Jean froze in the doorway as she held his eyes and cut a piece of the pie.

‘Knock it off, Mikasa.’ I grunted.

‘What? Can’t he take a joke?’

‘Yeah, if you were joking.’ I started balancing the four plates on my hands. ‘He’s known you for, what 3-4 years, I think he can tell when you’re joking.’

‘I doubt it.’ She mumbled darkly. We had been together for nearly a year and she still didn’t like the idea of us. Don’t get me wrong, she was nice enough, occasionally she even laughed. And by the end of the following summer, she actually warmed up to our relationship, but on that night she was particularly hostile. I think it was the fact that prom night had the reputation it did and she wasn’t
keen on the possibility of it happening to me, even though we had kind of already planned on fucking. I was going to be more eloquent, but why? We all know what was being talked about. But back to the story at hand.

Jean had cautiously scurried around the edge of the kitchen back into the dining room where Hannes was sitting and menacingly drinking a beer which I didn’t know was even feasible. Jean audibly gulped as he sat at my side. The intimidation level had definitely been amped up, and he was feeling the heat.

’Soh, Eren,’ Hannes started after I set his dessert in front of him. ‘Did you settle on a tux?’

‘Um,’ I set Jean’s in front of him as I took a seat. ‘Yeah, I think so.’

‘Good, good.’ He took another sip and watched as Jean brought a big bite of pie (with a sizable pecan in it) to his mouth. He had found his moment. ‘Though, maybe some would prefer if you didn’t wear anything because “it’s not like it’s not coming off anyway, Charming”.’ Jean choked, literally choked on his bite. I got up to pat him on the back until he was able to hack up that pecan that was clogging his airway. It tore up his throat so badly he had to speak in a whisper for the rest of the night. After revealing that he had heard everything we had said, he calmly kept eating his pie before adding, ‘I guess it’s a good point, you shouldn’t even worry about what you’re going to wear because you won’t be going.’

That was that. No room for argument, not that I would've been able to at that moment because I was already not only embarrassed as hell but fucking pissed. Mikasa was fuming at Jean, but I was fuming hotter. I helped him up with daggers in my eyes, my face was on fucking fire, and when I walked him to the door I kissed him long and hard, knowing full well that Mikasa could clearly see us. I had to sneak out my window the next night because like hell I wasn’t going to go to prom.

Man, aren’t flashbacks fun?

“Earth to Sgt. Green. Can you hear me, Sgt. Green? Shoot something if you can hear me.”

“Yeah,” How about I shoot four things? “Keep your knickers on, Blue, I was just zoning out on some good memories.”

“Well, anyway, you should call him in the morning.”

“Who?”

“Hannes.” He replies in exasperation. “You should call him in the morning so he at least has a heads up.”

“That’s probably a good idea.”

“Mhm, and s’long as Levi’s not giving you a handjob under the table, ‘m sure e’rything will be fine.”

“On your left, asshole.”

“How’s your homework?”

“Um...great!”

He sighs. “You haven’t even looked at the packet I got for you.”
“Because it’s a full fucking binder of shit I missed!”

“Krista and I can help you. You ’st need to sit down and do it.”

Double shot to the head! “It’s not like I’m not always fucking working or running errands or prepping interviews or running a four hour inventory shift or-”

“That was part of the deal, Eren.”

Armin doesn’t even need to lift his gun because I’m aggressively plowing the undead platoons down. “I know, but, fuck, it’s a lot and it’s nearly impossible. Nobody has that much time to give 100% to everything!”

“You’re doing fine, Eren.” His avatar is jogging ahead of me to clear our path. “Zackly didn’t make it easy for a reason. ’s like Erwin said ‘either way he wins’ so ’st keep doing your best. You’ve got the cavalry behind you! You’re ’ready a part of a major network show, you’re the ’sistant to Hollywood’s favorite eye candy, and e’ryone of them adores you. Behind you!” I hope he doesn’t think I didn’t notice that Levi was lumped into that ‘e’ryone’. “So, really, ’s keeping up with school. Honestly, with Krista and I helping, it sh’dn’t be that bad. Your mentorship’s already being used as credit in most of your workshops, but you still have to do your week in each of the other branches at Regime. And- CLEAR- even if you somehow don’t get it all done, then-”

“I’m sorry, backup.” I say as I mow down another row of zombies. “What was this about a week in the other branches?”

“I really should not have had that Reds, I keep sayin things I sh’dn’t be.”

Called it. “Armin…”

“Nothing, it's 'st something you’ll be doing between breaks. Hanji will talk to you about it...sometime.”

“Or you could talk to me about it now?”

“Oh, look! Mission 'complished! Well, it's been fun, Eren, but I am beat!”

“Armin, don’t you dare-” The headset turns to static. Fucking PS4 doesn’t even tell me that’s he’s logged off.

Whatever, I can keep playing by myself.

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I don’t know what time is nor do I know my own name. No, all I know is that there is a swarm of the undead after me, and, by my calculations, I’m fucked. I have a gun, but I’m out of ammo, I have a machete, but that would require me getting close enough to use it which would mean diving head first into the swarm. I’m stupid not suicidal. Though, someone at the edge of my memory would beg to differ. The swarm is getting closer and the light is getting brighter.

“Eren, we need to talk-” A voice rings in the distance.

Eren, Eren, That’s it, isn’t it? My name. And that’s Levi’s voice.

Levi. I should find him, maybe he has something better than an empty gun. I turn tail and run through the ruined city with the ember littered ash. Run until I see him in front of me. Then things go
black. Next thing I know he’s above me, pulling something off my head.

“Levi?” I murmur. He’s turned to the swarm that is nearly upon us, but the man must be magic because all he does is wave his hand and they disappear and the world gets darker save the warm light off in the corner.

*I must be wounded or otherwise impaired because I swear he lifts me into his arms.* “Fuck, you’re heavier than I thought.”

“You’re hotter than I thought, so we’re even.” *Wait, did I just say that? That didn’t even make sense.*

“Go back to sleep, Eren.” *Sleep? How can I sleep? It may be dark now, but that swarm is going to pop up any second and just because I’m injured doesn’t mean I can afford to sleep! But, shit, whatever he just lowered me onto is soft and warm and maybe a nap doesn’t sound too bad. I feel his fingers brush my cheek and I turn my face into them. Then hot breath hovers just inches above my face. There’s a sense of trepidation followed by a heave sigh. “We’ll talk later.”*

*Later? Yes, later. But why not right now? Where could he possibly be going? Why is he leaving me behind? Why isn’t he warming the other side of my bed?*

My bed.

The thought snaps me to semi-consciousness and my heavy eyes pry themselves open in time to see Levi’s silhouette fade into darkness as he shuts my bedroom door.

Chapter End Notes

Shout out to [Otaku_lynxie](https://www.anime123.com傑) for the suggestion of the piano for the final scenes of the show! It was an awesome idea and it really made the finale for me so thank you! You are absolutely fantastic!
Swimming and Turkey and Porch Swings, Oh My!

Chapter Summary

After an awkward morning, Levi and Eren must endure their families spending Thanksgiving together, what could go wrong? And what could go right?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Would you hurry the fuck up, shitty brat?” Levi hollers to me from where he stands downstairs.

“Well, we would already be gone if you didn’t make me change!”

“They’re your relatives. Don’t you want to look nice?”

“Exactly,” I yell while blindly skimming my hand through a pile of (hopefully) clean clothes. “They’re my relatives and their ‘spectations of my appearance aren’t too high.”

“Mine are.”

“Clearly!” Ahha! Silkish blue button down, what could be wrong ‘ith that?

“No.” He snaps before I even get a chance to get stairs.

“What?”

“You’re still wearing sweatpants, that’s what.”

“So? I’ve a fan-cy shirt.”

“Take them off.”

"Whoa, Levi," I hook my thumbs in my waistband and begin wiggling them down to show off my hip bones. "No touchy, ‘member?"

His expression goes dark and he begins walking purposefully up the stairs. He stops right in front of me and hooks his finger in my waistband only to snap it back to my skin. "Get your ass in your room, Jaeger."

I gulp, I mean, we don't even have time, we're already late, right? Maybe a quickie?

No, Jeager get your head out of your dick!

Shit, you're right, I'm sure we have enough time for more than that.

That's not even what he's talking about. This isn't Vancouver, and you are literally on your way to Thanksgiving dinner. Plus, Levi has more control over his labito than you.

When I don't move, he simply moves past me to get to my room. More control, huh? Whatever conscious, and besides, I thought you were all shippy with us!
"Oi!" Levi calls me. I jog to my room, ready for, I don't know, something steamy; but instead I find Levi going through my dressing room very very hard to ignore the pile of clothes on the floor. Well, that's disappointing. There's gotta be a way to turn up the heat in this room. I smirk because I've just thought of the perfect thermostat: a strip tease...ish. I shrug out of my button down and toss it on my bed. Then I slowly pull my undershirt over my head and throw it over as well. Well, that's disappointing. There's gotta be a way to turn up the heat in this room. I move so I'm in his peripheral line of vision before wiggling out of my sweatpants, still all that gets me is a quick once over. Not good enough. So I swagger over, he purposely turns his back to me to look through the other side of the closet, and I move so that I'm right behind him. My arms wrap around his waist, my head moves to the side of his, and my lips scim against his ear. His body goes rigid. "Eren." He says in warning, but I just smile at the sound of my name and move to kiss at his jaw. Next thing I know, I'm being held against clothes against the wall by a hand on my throat. Levi looks fucking livid, then he moves his nose next to my mouth. "Fucking hell," He pulls back with a disgusted face. "How much have you drinken?"

Not enough to be drunk- no, that's a lie- not enough to be really drunk; just enough to get me to Hannes where I can drink more to get me through dinner. Boom. Fullproof plan. "Whadja mean?"

"I mean you reek."

"I do not." I lift my arms to smell my pits because I just showered, thank you very much! He curls his lip when he looks down at the half hard cock I'm sporting in my thin boxers. When he looks back at my face, I smirk and wiggle my eyebrows 'cuz, hey, I'm game if he is.

Okay, maybe I have had a touch too much to start my morning.

"Walk." He snarls with a strong hold on my bicep to act as his steering wheel. He directs me into the bathroom where he opens the shower door. "In."

Fuck that! As soon as he loosens his grip I bolt. "Nope!" I bark as I loop the staircase. Fuck, floating staircases are fucking hard to run down. 'Specially when slightly intoxi-whatever.

"EREN!" Levi calls at my back. He is practically on my heels, but I'm still faster and I have a lot of 'perience running from les popo in this conditions. I speed out the patio doors on the right side, but he grabs them before they get a chance to close. I jump the stairs because long legs, but he does too because stubborn ass. I get to the patio on one side of the pool, but the doors on this side are locked. Fuck! I turn, barely out of Levi’s catch, and head for the small bridge. I'm halfway over when I taste it: freedom.

Three quarters of the way when I feel it: defeat.

And 12/16ths succumbed to gravity when I grasp it: revenge.

The cool water snaps me to my senses, but not quick enough to save me from swallowing a few mouthfuls of saltwater chlorine. I shoot to the surface, sputtering coughs as soon as my lips meet the air. Not a moment later, a raven head, a fuming raven head, bobs up beside me.

And I realize I done fucked up.

Survival mode kicks in and I’m swimming as fast as I can to the end of the pool overlooking the cliff. But I’m a duckling who never spends time in the water, and I am swimming with a fucking shark. Needless to say, it takes .003 seconds before I am caught and being pulled to the nearest edge of the
pool. He’s hooked his right arm around my waist and throws me halfway onto the patio, but before I can even think of running again, he’s out and lifting me to my feet. He holds me there while he catches his breath.

Levi is dripping head to toe. He’s still fully clothed, too. Nicely, expensively clothed. Soaked in such a way that each centimeter of those nice expensive clothes are clinging to his body. His hair hangs in his face, water traces a path from his bangs and down his perfect nose where it drips to the ground. His eyes, well, actually I’m avoiding his eyes, but I can feel them burning into my very soul. And when I do finally decide to face their wrath, I find them honed into the task of running down my body. My mostly naked body.

Though, the “mostly naked” could really be used loosely in this situation since my boxers are clinging to my skin as tightly as his clothes are clinging to his. He lets me go like a hot wire and doesn’t meet my eyes when he speaks in a low-very low-incredibly dangerous-borderline scary-voice. “Go upstairs, take a shower, get dressed in nice clean clothes, then get in the car. I don’t want to hear one noise out of you until we get to your dad’s.” I take a deep breath. “Not ONE noise, Eren!”

I hold it until he’s turned his back and he Levi-stomps away. I say Levi-stomps because Levi doesn’t stomp, but when he moves like that it has the same effect.

I not-so-dry rub my face. SSHHIIITTTT. What the ever living fuck was I thinking?

I was trying to ask you the same thing before you went all sexual predator.

I know, fuck, that was not-in any way, shape, or form-acceptable.

Especially since we haven’t even talked at all about that since we’ve been back.

Fuck.

“It’s not like we have all Fucking day, Princess!” Levi snaps at me from the doorway of the upper patio. “Hop to!”

You know, after all this I thank whatever God there may be that Farlan picked Isabel up early to cook at his place. That would have made this so much more mortifying than it already is.

My shower is mostly cold as penance for my stupidity. My towel is soft and warm which doesn’t seem quite fair. I don’t deserve to have any sort of comfort right now. By the time I’m dressed in my best pair of jeans and that blue button down I cast aside earlier, I have 4 missed calls and 7 text messages asking where the fuck we are. Two from Armin telling me that I better not be doing anything (or anyone) that I shouldn’t be doing, or so help him, he would stop speaking to me for a minimum of 3 days. Dammit, I’m just screwing up on all fronts today.

At least we won’t show up empty handed. Levi’s made sweet potatoes and a layered oreo pudding which looks fucking amazing.

In the car I am sitting as still and silently as possible when Levi begins filling my arms with these dishes. “You mess either of these up, you’ll regret it.”

I really REALLY REALLY pissed him off.

I just nod stiffly. Nearly having a heart attack with every bump in the road, I cling to them as tightly as I possibly can.
As soon as we pull up to the curb, Levi turns to me. I think I can feel beads of sweat rolling down my forehead. “What?”

What? What? I’m fucking horrified. Horrified that anything I say can and will be used against me in the court of Levi. He sighs. Well, he did say “until we get to your dad’s”, and we’re sitting outside Hannes’s bright green house, so...

I take a deep, skeptical breath before rushing it all out. “I’m so so so incredibly sorry, Levi! I’m sorry. I’m sorry—”

He rolls his eyes and steps out of the car, but I can’t stop apologizing until he understands. “Levi,” I start again as soon as he opens my door to grab the dishes. “Please say something! I’m sorry for pulling you in the water, I’m sorry for running away, I’m sorry for pregaming and making us late in the first place, I’m sorry about your clothes, I’m sorry about making you take another shower, but most of all I’m sorry for making a complete ass of myself with the whole... you know... It was inappropriate. Especially considering—”

“Eren,” He snaps. “We’ll talk about this later. For now, put on your game face and just fucking forget about it.”

“I’m sorry.” I mumble again. For this, for that, for completely fucking with him both unintentionally and not.

“Stop apologizing.” He sighs and slides his hand over mine as he takes the sweet potatoes out of my lap.

“Where the hell have you two been?” Mikasa comes barreling out the front doors. She stands not far away from the car in her holiday casual attire. Her hair is pulled back into a bun with face framing pieces left out, she's wearing a button up black dress tied at the waist with her red scarf. She's always been beautiful, my sister, but brutality often over shadows that.

“Well, this brat spilled coffee on himself twice before we left and we had to go on an epic quest to find clean clothes.” Levi, the oscar nominee, turns into a bemused older brother type when he looks back down at me.

“Yeah, that’s not surprising.” She responds in a beat.

“Hey!” I hop out of the car because shouldn’t she be defending me? She was all for defending me from him the other night, what changed?

“Hey, Eren!” Hannes throws his hands in the air as he steps out onto the porch. He also is wearing nothing too out of the ordinary, just a slightly nicer red shirt over solid colored black on top of regular jeans. Nothing fancy. Hey, I tried to tell Levi that this was not a real classy affair for us. But here we both stand in nice shirts and fancy dark jeans. So, I guess when described like that it doesn't sound too fancy, but these jeans are the type of jeans I would never be able to afford so they automatically get bumped up a few levels in my book.

Hannes jogs down the three steps to catch Mikasa and me in a half hug with his arms spread across our shoulders as if we’re posing for an awkward family photo. I hope to God nobody actually has a camera on them. His cheeks are already pink when gives Levi a scrutinizing onceover. “I’m guess you’re Levi.” There is a tinge of protectiveness in his posture and in the stiffness of his hold on our shoulders. “The long lost brother.”

“Yeah,” Levi half smiles in a modest way that’s not really Levi at all. “I guess that’s me.”
He nods to the tray in Levi’s hand and the bowl of pudding in mine. We silently follow. When I look at Levi, I spy a flicker of genuine amusement mixed with genuine pain in his eyes. But he hides it well with the rest of their sparkle and his calm demeanor. Farlan is messing with the TV in the living room to the left of the wooden staircase that leads to the bedrooms upstairs, and from here I can see my favorite mushroom blondie in the small kitchen in the back right corner of the house. It’s not a long walk by any means, but you do have to walk through two empty doorways and past the bathroom to get there. There is a small breakfast bar right when you step into the kitchen and an old door to the basement across from it. Armin and Isabel take up the little counter space available without utilizing the stove top.

“Look who **finally** decided to show up.” Isabel sarcastically cheers.

Armin looks at me knowingly then to Levi. My eyes widen to say ‘**No, Armin, it wasn’t like that!**’ He welcomes us with a smile after that.

“I like this one. “ Hannes declares with a nod to Isabel. “Hmm.” He hums. “Guess the table will have to do for now. Eren, you go ahead and lead the way, I need to pop in the turkey.” And he walks straight back through the laundry hall/ back entryway to get out to the yard. I raise my eyebrows and smile. It’s certainly not the ritz, but it’s home and home was always hard to come by before it. I take an immediate right, past the sunroom and through the swinging door into the dining/ living room. Huh, I should have noticed before, but it seems like they didn’t rearrange the room to have the TV and couch closer to the glass paneled doors leading to the backyard. This year they’ve kept the two spaces on their proper sides.

The double doors are opened to the deck, letting the cool breeze flow through, and the trickling of the pond can still be heard under the broadcasters of whatever teams are playing today. God, I missed this place.

“Eren?” Levi recalls me from my tranquility and I realize I’m about to drop the pudding.

“Shit.” I recover and turn to place it on the table next to the other desserts. The small round table from my high school days has since been replaced with a long rectangular one that contrasts nicely with the hardwood floors. It is lined with dinnerware, and nearly filled to the brim in the middle with platters. And I know that’s not even all there is. I haven’t seen a feast like this since Mr. Arlet was still with us, and let me tell you, that man could pack it away. Good times. Great times, actually. Some of the best.

The corner of my mouth twitches caught up in bittersweet memories. I can feel Levi’s eyes on me. Studying me. But he is not privy to these personal moments. He has his and I have mine, and for the time being, neither of us want to share them. I trot through the door and hop off the deck onto the lush, green grass to escape those warm grey orbs that see too much and reveal too little.

Hannes is focusing on his cooking on the pavement patio beside the sunroom windows, and- oh that’s why he didn’t move the TV- a tablet is propped up on the shelf side of the grill. A football lies on the lawn as if it was grown there, the soft breeze rustles the leaves of our climbing tree, and it all brings me a sense of peace I haven’t felt in months. I walk over to it and trace my fingers over the three initials carved into its trunk. The tree was never big enough for a house, but we were able to build a little platform about 10 feet off the ground. The long limb that branches out to hold the big yellow swing became our strongest foundation. The catch- because remember there’s always a catch- is that there’s no ladder. Only way up is to climb. We spent too many nights to count up there, just
gazing at the stars, knowing that there were so much more we couldn’t see because of the city lights. We vowed that someday, someday we’d go to a spot so remote that we could see all the burning dots that could possibly be seen against the cold black sky. Mikasa suggested finding somewhere in the mountains, Armin wanted to be floating in the ocean, but I wanted to find a spot somewhere in the deepest part of the redwood forest. I wanted- still want to see how far those big ass trees can stretch toward those impossible lights. It is a vow that is, to this day, unfulfilled. But it’ll happen. Someday. Maybe.

"Ow!" That tranquil football has been acquainted with the side of my face. The body behind that force is, of course, Mikasa. Rude.

"Get your head out of the clouds."

"Is giving me a concussion is supposed to ground me?"

"Oh, you're fine, don't be a baby."

"I'm not being a baby, I'm just asking for a warning next time you're going to hurl an object at my head."

"Hey, Eren."

"Wh-" A bouncey ball pelts me between the eyes. I glare at her mercilessly.

She shrugs. "I warned you."

"You call that a fucking warning?"

"Hey!" Hannes interrupts. "You wanna warning: watch your damn mouth!"

Don't point out the hypocrisy of that sentence. "Sorry, Hannes." I try to even the score when she’s looking inside by throwing a beautiful spiral directly at her chest- because I’m not a complete ass- but she, being part cat, hardly has to move to catch it. Show off. I pause after catching her next pass to watch as Levi and Farlan settle themselves on the deck. They fall into conversation and we resume our little game of catch. "How's work?"

"Not too horrible." Mikasa replies as she catches the ball. "You?"

"Oh," I gulp. "You know, same 'ol same 'ol."

"Are you filming again?"

"Nah, we're still on break."

"That's right!" Hannes looks up from the tablet. "I heard you were in some big finale or something like that."

"Mhm."

"So that's what that big trip out of the country was."

"Er-" I hold the ball to my side to scratch my head with the other hand. "Yeah, Hannes, it was."

"Huh, guess that explains it."
It would seem the two on the deck find this conversation to be more interesting than their own.

“Explains what?” If I even want to know.

“Nothin really,” He shrugs. “Mikasa just said you'd been acting weird since you got back.”

Interesting, her eyes are closed and her face is scrunched up in a silent wince. “Hmm, she did?”

“Now don’t start that, Eren.” Hannes points the pair of grilling tongs at me. “She’s your sister and she was concerned.” I roll my eyes. She might have been concerned, but she didn't have to go running to Hannes about it. “Besides, it doesn’t really matter now. The mystery’s been solved!”

I catch Levi's eyes as the same thought crosses our minds: No it hasn't because she doesn't know the real reason why I've been acting so strange.

I sigh and lazily toss the ball back to her. But as she catches it I'm already crossing behind Hannes to get to the kitchen.

Okay, God or Universe or whatever, I get it! I have to tell her, and it's gotta be sooner rather than later.

“Hi, Eren!” Isabel smiles widely as Armin steps past me toward the dining room.

I return her smile before rummaging through the fridge for a beer(s). I need to make it through dinner, remember? And I think I’m safe from jumping Levi by the fact that I am literally surrounded by friends and family. After opening the door to the basement, because I want some time to myself to get ready for said meal, Mewtwo and Holly greet me at the top of the stairs. I knew they had to be locked away somewhere. Mewtwo is a big ‘ol tomcat who is mostly white with a little bit of black on his chest, toes, head, and one little splotch on his back. He is a big cuddler to anyone who even looks his way. Holly is a beautiful small calico. She's sweet as cream to me, but down right mean to anyone else. So, she’s kind of like the Mikasa of cats. Mewtwo almost kills me on the ways down the steps, though, because he keeps weaving between my fucking feet and meowing as if I’m going to start raining treats any moment. And I guess if he did kill me, it wouldn’t be the worst thing in the world. It’d be a pathetic way to go- death by attention seeking love bug- but at least I wouldn’t have to talk to Mikasa Or Levi.

I plop onto the couch with a groan. Holly immediately hops in my lap and I begin absentmindedly scratching behind her ears. “Fuck my life so much right now, Holly.” She places her paws on my chest to try and reach her little nose up to mine. Now how am I supposed to resist that? I lean my head down, she gives a couple sniffs to my forehead before booping it. “At least you love me unconditionally.”

She replies with a high pitched meow and curls in my lap. And it’s not like Mikasa doesn’t, but this could seriously fuck up our relationship and that is the last thing that I want.

‘It's about having enough respect for Mikasa to tell her the truth and let her decide how she feels about it.’

That little blonde bastard is right but it still fucking sucks.

Mikasa and I took all of our gaming consoles when we moved. They were one we saved for and bought with our own money, so now all that remain are what Hannes had got when we were younger. There’s a wii from a pawn shop with the options of Mario Kart, Smash Bros, Donkey Kong, Resident Evil, and of course the wii fitnesses. As for options on the playstation 1 Hannes got at a garage sale, we have Namco, Bass Pro, Sonic, Spyro, Some Motorcycle game, a Winter Sports
game, and a generic Racing game. Or, of course there’s plain old TV, but it is hard to escape your thoughts when you aren’t actually doing something. And I’m feeling a little nostalgic so I’m going to go with Namco. Holly hates me for a minute when I have to push her from my lap to set everything up, but she forgives me as soon as I sit back down. This time, however, she doesn’t climb back into my lap; she’s learned not to once I have a controller in my hands.

I’m thinking Galaga to start, then maybe some Pac-Man, after that I’ll see where the pixel winds takes me.

I don’t know if any of my previous gaming ventures have indicated, but if I had to describe the type of gamer I am it’d be aggressive. I have been cursing every time one of those damn ghost—usually fucking Blinkey—has killed me. He pops out of fucking nowhere, man!

“What some company?” Mikasa asks from the base of the stairs. I hold back my panic and gulp down my guilt before I smile and gesture her a cushion next to mine. “I figured you’d be down here. You kind of just disappeared.”

“Yeah,” I can hear in her tone that question of ‘Are you okay?’ “I just wanted to be alone, I guess.”

She hums thoughtfully without pressing the issue. Lately she hasn’t been just letting things go like she usually does. Not since I moved out. But I guess being here, being home, she’s a little more relaxed. She knows I’ll come to her when I’m ready to talk about it. It’s nice. It’s like the old days when we would spend hours in comfortable silence, neither of us feeling the need to pack in as much as we can in whatever time we had. And I think, for now, I can let go of my guilt to just spend time with my sister. I take a sip of my beer and reluctantly offer her my second one. Mikasa raises an eyebrow, but takes it nonetheless. When I’m done beating Pole Position, I hand her the controller and she switches the game out for the racing one. After unwinding the second controller she tosses mine back into my lap. She begins flipping through the different tracks and settles on—

“Not the dessert one.” I groan.

“I get the first pick. Winner gets the second.”

“Fine.” And so we begin designing our cars. I choose the purple one with the giant exhaust pipes on the side.

“Why am I not surprised.”

“Ditto.” I say to her little white 90s old lady car.

“It has great stats.”

“Well, mine looks cool.”

“Cool won’t win the race.”

“We’ll see.”

She snorts. I choose automatic, she chooses manual, and the we immediately get transferred to wait for the flag. “Prepare to have you ass kicked...again.”

And kick my ass she does. Again and again and one more time just for shits and giggles. “It’s because I haven’t been able to pick a track yet!”

“Sure it is, wimp.” She leans back and takes a drink. “But fine, if you think it’ll make a difference,
the power’s in your hands.”

Oh, it did make a difference, it did. Though, the fact that I changed my monster out for the red convertible might have helped too. “HA!”

She shrugs unfazed. “I still win by ratio.”

“Eren, Mikasa!” Hannes hollers from the top of the stairs. “Turkey’s on the table and everybody’s waitin on ya!”

I turn to Mikasa and point seriously. “This isn’t over.”

“Please,” She hops to her feet and offers me a hand. “After we eat, you’ll be in a food coma.”

I scoff and follow her up the stairs.

And whatdja know, she was right about that too, at least, I’m damn well working toward one. This plate, oh this plate filled with thirds is my everest. By filled I do mean to the brim in an almost mound. There is no distinction of what’s potato, what’s stuffing, what’s corn, turkey, or whatever else I’ve piled on. But, hey, it's all drowned to hell in gravy anyway.

People around the table cast looks of either amazement or disgust when I venture into another bite.

"I don’t know why you keep doing this to yourself, kid.” Levi comments as he and Mikasa are clearing everyone else's plates.

"Um... 'ts thanksgiving."

"Eren, close your damn mouth.” Hannes commands from the other head of the table.

The fuck? Is it gang up on Eren day? Everyday is gang up on Eren day.

So it would seem.

"Can he even finish that?” Farlan asks in amazement.

"Oh yeah." Armin replies in exasperation. "He shouldn't, but he will."

"Fuck yeah.” I take a big swig of my new beer. "Mama didn't raise no quitter."

"Eren!" Hannes barks.

"'Orry."

*insert groan of defeat* doesn't matter, I'm almost done, just a third left. Armin quickly loses interest in my endeavor and starts taking away the food.

"Ey!"

"You are not eating anything else!” He snaps. “You’re going to make yourself sick, Eren!”

"Dessert?"

"I'll make you a plate.” I whimper. Why must he do this to me? I mean I may be able to feel my stomach on the brink of explosion, but still...pumpkin pie and oreo pudding! Armin rolls his eyes. "If you finish your plate you can have one piece of pie."
Can do, mushroom man! Isabel and Farlan seem to be mesmerized and watch til the bitter end.

"I don't know if I should be disgusted or impressed." Isabel mumbles. Farlan nods in agreement.

Like I said, mama didn't raise no quitter! Really, she didn't. Even when I was beaten up from T-Ball she'd wipe the dirt off my knees and tell me to get back out there and give it my best to finish the game. *Finish what you start, Eren. Then you can decide if you want to do it again, but never, never give up.*

And yeah okay, it is kind of a stretch to apply that to gorging myself on a Thanksgiving dinner, but whatever makes me feel better, right?

I pick up my plate and hobble into the kitchen. Movement should get my digestive system going. Though moving, in it of itself, takes a tremendous effort.

Armin is taking up counter space to pack up the leftovers, Levi is scrubbing the hell out of the dishes, and Mikasa, it seems, has taken the long way back into the dining room. I can't help but hesitate when I see Levi with his back to me because I can see his hips moving ever so slightly and the muscles of his shoulders rolling with each movement of the sponge. And I think of this morning, how all I wanted was to wrap myself around him, and how much of an idiot I was when I did.

"Well," Armin clears his throat. "I should go see what, um," Levi looks over his shoulder with a raised eyebrow. "What...ah...What was that Hannes?" Smooth. He scurries past me leaving us alone.

"Eren." Levi starts once he turns his eyes to me. "Did you seriously unbutton your pants?"

"It had to happen." I shrug innocently. I move to hand him my dish and he takes snatches it away before I get too close. Okay then. I clear my throat awkwardly. "So..."

He sighs and braces himself on the edge of the sink. "We really don't have to do this."

"Do what?"

His head turns to search my eyes. "Make small talk."

"Every talk with you is small talk." I drawl through a cocky smirk. He stares unfazed, maybe a little annoyed as I start chuckling. "Get it?" I chuckle some more because I can't help that I have an amazing sense of humor. "Because you're-*snort-laugh*-you're short."

"Yeah I got it."

"Oh c'mon," I say through the giant smile I can't help. "It's funny."

"Hilarious." He deadpans.

"Oh shit," I lean back on the counter as a wave of nausea crashes into me. "I think I'm gonna be sick."

"Karma's a bitch, ain't it?" I groan in pain and sink to the floor. He bends to look me straight in the eyes. "Do you need a puke bag, sweetheart?"

I flip him a firm bird with one hand while I bring the other to cradle my forehead. Asshole.

Fuck, I never thought I'd hear myself think this, but that may have been a teeny *tiny* bit too much food. “Maybe,” Believe me I know how stupid this is going to sound, but I'm desperate. “Maybe if I
had some more to drink-”

“Oh no, Sparky,” Levi brings a cool washcloth to rest on the back of my neck. “You had plenty to drink earlier.”

“Yeah,” I look at him with a crooked smile. “But you had to go and sober me up.”

“To stop you from making even more an ass of yourself.”

Fuck, fuck, no Eren! Don’t you dare say what you’re about to- “And here I thought you liked my ass.” Great, now you’ve done it. My playful smile melts as I realize what I said, as I realize how it changed the look on his face. His lips have parted with his cocked jaw, his eyes have gone dark and won’t meet me, and he huffs as he pushes off his legs to get to his feet. “Levi,” When he looks back down at me his expression is harsh, but I know no matter how small my voice is he’s hanging on to every syllable. “I- I’m sor-”

“Whoa, what happened to you?” Farlan so kindly interjects while waltzing straight to the fridge. I answer him with my glare. Mikasa appears from behind his shoulder and asks me the same question with her eyes.

“Little Miss Muffet, here, has a tummy ache.” Levi drones unsympathetically after he aggressively returns to the dishes.

Shit. Why do I keep doing this? Strapping him unwillingly on this fucked up rollercoaster that is my psyche. I throw my head back on the cabinets and groan, not out of indigestion but at my stupidity. I tried to stop you. I know, conscious, I know. Maybe I should listen to you more often.

“Do you need me to get you anything?” Mikasa asks sweetly.

“Nah,” I roll myself to my feet without straightening all the way up. “I’ll suffer through it.”

“You sure? I’m sure there’s pepto-” I physically gag. “Right, sorry. Tums?”

“Just let me veg on the couch.” I grumble. Somehow I am able to make it past the bathroom in the little hall between the doorways, and beyond the staircase across from the door to throw myself over the back of the couch.

“Well,” An upside down Hannes starts above me. “We all tried to stop you.”

I throw my arm over my eyes before for admitting, “I know.”

*insert grunt of amusement* as he ruffles my hair. Maybe five minutes pass before I cringe from a sudden weight hitting my stomach. The weight begins pawing its way to my chest and I lift my arm from my eyes to see Holly curl up over my heart. All it takes is a few pets down her back before she’s purring off beat to it. The warmth of her little body brings a smile to my face and the sweet humming on my chest easily lulls me to sleep.

When I come to who knows how long later, it’s dark, save the soft glow coming from somewhere behind me. Muffled laughter reaches my ears and I prompt myself on an elbow to look over the arm of the couch and straight out to the patio. They closed the doors so all I’m able to make out between the window panes are the tops of head under those bright lights. Holly’s since hopped off so I don’t feel bad as I swing my feet off the side of the couch. I rub my eyes and get to my feet.

“Why, if it isn’t sleeping beauty herself!” Isabel welcomes me when I step onto the deck.
“Ha.Ha.” I sit cross legged between Armin and Mikasa who is, surprisingly, sitting next to Isabel who is sitting next to Levi who is next to Farlan next to Armin and I seem to complete the circle. “How long was I out?”

“Couple of hours at least.” Armin answers. Damn, son!

“What are you guys even doing?”

“Playing cards.”

“What kind of cards.”

“Bullshit.” Levi stares blankly when he answers.

I can’t help but snort at that statement. “You’re playing Bullshit?”

“What’s wrong with that?”

No, Eren, think before you speak. “Aren’t you a little old for this game?” Dammit, why am I even here? Even the pond seems to go silent.

“Well, if I’m so old,” He smirks and the shadows playing on his face make it that much more intimidating. And sexy, but I’ll just have to bury that thought deep deep down in the pit of denial.

“Then you should have no problem beating me at your own game.”

Ouch, I’ve made a big mistake.

Wow, you’re three for three today, would you like to go for four?

“Where’s Hannes?” I ask when his absence dawns on me.

“Watching Grey’s Anatomy downstairs.” Mikasa answers like it’s the most natural thing in the world; and let’s face it, with Hannes it is.

She deals me into the new round and I try to ignore the stare down I’m getting directly across the our makeshift circle. An hour later, and I have over 15 cards. Armin is in the closest boat to mine with 12, Isabel and Farlan each have less than five, and Mikasa and Levi are both down to two. Fucking Ackermans. Armin draws puts down 2 threes, and because it’s Armin, nobody really questions him. I have been waiting for this moment for the last three rounds, and I can only hope Levi calls it first.

“My friends and Levi, I put down 5 Aces.” I say as I slowly put down my cards face down, knowing full well one of them is going to question it first.

“Bullshit!” Mikasa exclaims.

I wait, ready to spring up at any moment. Mikasa’s face grows dark when she flips over the cards to find all the Aces and a joker on top of the giant pile. Here it comes. “I am going to kill you.”

And I’m off like a bullet with her on my heels. Funny, this is the second Ackerman I’ve had to run from today.

“Just leave them.” Armin sighs heavily. I’m pretty proud of myself, I actually make it to the swing before she tackles me. In a dress too! Farlan better not be looking or I’ll have to murder him in his sleep. Well, not in his sleep because that’d be a dick move.

“Fuck, Mikasa!” I yell as she captures me in a choke hold. “Let go!”
“You know the rules, Eren”

“You really, let go!”

“Say it, Eren.” She tightens her hold.

“Fuck, fine!” I contest by grumbling, “You are the best that has ever been and that will ever be.”

“And?”


“You’ll have to speak up, our guests can’t hear you.”

“You’re evil, you know?”

“Yes.”

I groan and physically swallow my pride, though, that proves difficult through her choke hold. “I hereby declare that I, Eren Percival Jaeger Thorn, am King Wimp.”

Isabel tries to hide her laugh behind her hand, Farlan snorts, Armin just shakes his head, but all I see from Levi is rigidity, like he’s trying to hold something back. Mikasa releases me with a look of content and doesn’t seem to notice his change of attitude. Actually, nobody does or if they do they don’t think anything of it. But I can see the stiffness of his shoulders and his lips. Something’s made him mad or annoyed or... something.

I put on a face when I step back in better light and decide to let him have a moment inside his own head.

Not too long later, Farlan and Isabel both declare they’re too drunk to drive, so Mikasa suggests they stay here. The three of them, then, turn to Levi, who is already in a some kind of mood, and try to convince him to stay too. Finally, after so much whining even Mike would contest, he gives.

“Where exactly will we sleep?”

“Isabel,” Mikasa starts. They really seem to have warmed up to each other. “If you want you can share my bed.”

“Sure!” She exclaims.

“And, Farlan, there’s a couch downstairs. It’s actually really comfortable. Would that be okay?”

“More than okay.” He smiles.

“Amin,”

“Nah, I’m going home.” He shrugs. “Someone’s gotta let Colossus out.”

“Thanks, Armin.” Mikasa sighs. He responds with a thumbs up.

“That just leaves…” She looks between Levi and I. “Eren can take the couch.” Mikasa declares with absolutely no regard for me. “And Levi can take his bed.”

“Hey! You can’t just give my bed away!” I protest because it’s my room dammit! Besides, if there’s one thing I’ve picked up on it’s that Levi doesn’t really sleep, so why should he get my bed? “Make
him take the couch!”

“He’s the guest, Eren, so no. If Armin’s not staying then you don’t need to share it.” She looks at us like she got an idea. An idea I don’t think I’ll be too keen with. “Unless you two want to.”

“No.” We say in unison. Well that wasn’t suspicious at all.

“It’s okay, Mikasa.” Levi shakes his head. “I’ll take the couch.”

I pull my fist down in victory. Yes! I win!

“If you’re okay with that.” She shrugs.

“It seriously doesn’t matter to me. Personally, I’d rather go home. I don’t know why I let you guys drag me into your little slumber party.”

“Because you love us.” Isabel bats her eyes. He rolls his.

Armin bids us farewell and Mikasa hands out pillows and blankets to Levi and Farlan. That dark look hasn’t left his face since we were outside so something’s still bothering him. I’ll just have to wait try and figure it out until everyone’s all tucked in for the evening. The stairs creak loudly as we walk up to our rooms. Mikasa and Isabel disappear in the one straight down the hall and I turn a corner to get to mine. Once the idle chatter from Mikasa’s room dies out, I decide it’s safe to carry on with my mission. The stairs groan no matter how lightly I try to step, but I sense no movement downstairs. So, I’m not too surprised to spy, with my eagle eye, Levi’s silhouette on the porch swing out front. I close the curtains so that hopefully nobody would see us through that window and as quietly as possible I open the front door. He doesn’t even look at me as I sit myself next to him. We sit like that for a few minutes, just the sounds of cars and the creaking of the swing to fill the air between us.

“You guys are really close.” He finally breaks the silence. “You and Mikasa. You always have been, always will be.”

I look at my lap and let the hollowness of his voice sink to the pit of my stomach. “Yeah. We were all each other had, you know?”

“I do, actually. For a long time Farlan was like that to me.” He lifts his head to stare blankly ahead. “Would you believe me if I said that there was a time that I was actually foolish enough to try to come back for her. To save her. But when I got here... I saw you.” I look at him still staring ahead. ‘When I got here.’ Does he mean here here? When? “I saw the way you laughed with each other how you ran with each other, I saw the way you wrestled with each other; and, fuck, it was heartbreaking. To know that she didn’t need to be saved. That she wouldn’t want to be. She wouldn’t want me because how the hell could I measure up to all this?” He throws his hands up to gesture at the house. So he does mean here. “How could I ever measure up to you?” Now he looks at me with so much pain in his eyes that all I want to do is to wipe it away, but I don’t know how. I don’t know if there’s anything I can do. “And, you know, for a time I was actually selfish enough to think about taking her with me anyway.” I move my hand over his, he doesn’t move it away. “And it was then that I realized, I wanted her to come back because I needed her to save me.” I don’t speak. I don’t know what I could possibly say. I’m still trying to process what he’s telling me. So I squeeze his hand and move closer. He hangs his head. “Because, fuck, Eren, I was so broken.” His voice cracks, his face contorts, and I think I see a tear drop from eyes. I trade hands to move the one closest to him on his back. He shifts, leaning on my side, his head rests on my shoulder and he takes a deep breath. Then, barely more than a exhale, he adds, “I still am.”
We go back to sitting in silence. I keep holding him, he keeps breathing me in, and our fingers intertwine.

“I’m sorry, Levi.” I say just above a whisper. “I didn’t know.”

“Would you stop apologizing?” He drones. "How could you have known?"

“Sorry.” Without any sort of warning, he brings his free hand over to flick my nose. But I’ve sharpened my reflexes and capture it lightly between my teeth just as a warning before letting it go.

He chuckles- I repeat, chuckles- darkly. “Tease.”

With a small smile I turn my face to place a light kiss on his forehead. He looks up at me, but I stand. “It’s fucking freezing, we should go back inside.”

“You’re probably right.” I pull him with me back inside. He tries to drop my hand. *Tries.* “What are you doing?”

“It can get pretty cold up in my room.” I start with a smile. “I could use some extra body heat.”

He smirks but lets me lead him up. Once the door closes behind us, I turn to capture his face in my hands. "You know what, Levi? Despite how fucked up everything is right now. I'm thankful that you happened into my life."

"Fuck that was cheesy." He smiles. "But, I guess, I'm kinda thankful for you too, brat."

I lean down to press our lips together. Nothing urgent, no hint of leading somewhere else, just a kiss. Gentle and sweet and *meaningful*.

It’s the kiss that should have happened on that bridge in the snow; it’s the kind of kiss that says ‘I won’t let you go.’

Chapter End Notes

I just to thank you all again from the bottom of my heart for all of the hits and the kudos and comments! They really really really mean a lot to me and I can't thank you enough! You are all just amazing!
A Choice With Impending Regrets

Chapter Summary

Eren opens up to Levi, and he doesn't know how to handle it.

Chapter Notes

Necessarily shorter chapter
...
I apologize in advance.

By the time his lips pull away from mine, as his taste lingers in my mouth, my body is covered in goosebumps. It’s a reaction I’ve never had to another person before. Then again, Eren’s unlike any other person I have known before. He simply intoxication, fucking electric. I don’t think I’d ever be able to get enough of this kid. He makes me feel wanted, he makes me feel safe.

“Levi,” He starts by leaning away just enough to look me in the eyes. “I know how hard it must have been to tell me what you did,” Fuck, I honestly didn’t even mean to. “But I’m glad that you did. So,” He takes a deep breath in. “I think it’s only fair for me to tell you something personal.”

Oh God, please don’t. I won’t know how to react. “You really don’t have to, Eren.”

“I know,” He smiles at me and I lose my breath. Then he takes my hands and pulls me to sit on the edge of his bed. “But you trusted me enough to share, and I want to trust you the same way.” I don’t say anything as he closes his eyes and takes another deep breath. “My mom was killed by some crackhead hiding in an alley.” Eren looks at his lap. “It was my 7th birthday, and she was on her way back from picking up my cake, she wanted to surprise me with it.” His breath catches. I bring my hand to rub his back. “Because I couldn’t just settle for a homemade cake. I had to have a fucking ice cream one!”

“Oh, Eren,” I turn his head to look him in his eyes and wipe away the tears from his cheek. “It wasn’t your fault.”

“I know, I-I just-” He closes his eyes and leans into my hand. I stroke his cheek again as he takes a breath. “My mom left while I was throwing a fit in my room and asked our neighbor to come over to watch me. Anyway, it was me who answered the door when the police showed up. They asked for my father and I had to tell them he was on a business trip.” He clenched his jaw. “He was gone a lot, my old man, only this time, after he found out about mom, he didn’t come back.” What a fucking asshole. I couldn’t imagine leaving my child behind like that. Funny, that’s exactly what you did to Mikasa. Those were different circumstances. “Since he never came to claim me, never even called, I became a ward of the great state of California. They didn’t know what to do with me so they dumped me in the first home that came available. When they got sick of me, I moved to another one, and that’s when I met Mikasa.” His face contorts as more tears stream from his eyes. “You want to know the last thing I said to her?” His voice cracks. “I was throwing a fit because dad wasn’t home
again, I didn’t want regular cake, and I didn’t understand why I couldn’t have a party like Billy did on his birthday! I told her that I didn’t want her as my mom, that I wish she would go and never come back!” He drops his head to my shoulder and his fingers knot themselves in the back of my shirt. “And sh-she d-d-didn’t”

“I’m so sorry, Eren.”

“He croaks as he buries his face further into my shoulder.

“But you know that it wasn’t your fault.” I say as I stroke his hair. He sobs harder. “You couldn’t have known.” Eren just nods and clutches me tighter. I hush him as I pull him down with me to lay on the bed. “It’s okay.” I kiss the top of his head. “You’re okay.”

I hold him, running my fingers through his hair and down his back. His arms are desperately wrapped around my waist with his face in my chest. I know he’s fallen asleep when those arms relax their hold and his hot breath evens out. But I keep stroking him. I keep holding him as if I have any chance of keeping him. And after a couple hours of going through his story, of the kind of trust he had to share it, I can’t help but realize that I’m unworthy of it. Of him. I am truly touched that he shared what he did with me, and when he wrapped me in his arms, when he kissed me, it felt like he would never let me go. And if I'm being honest, part of me, no, most of me never wants him to. Just as I want to be able to hold on to him the same way so that he never feels alone again. Still, there are a few things scratching at the back of my head that are keeping me from allowing myself to stay in these warm caring arms.

First of those being Mikasa. She’s the key in all this, after all. I lost, no, I gave her up once and it ripped my heart out. Now, I feel like I have a real chance at starting over with her, a real shot at getting back the person I have literally (almost) killed for. And I can't fuck it up. I don't think I could live with myself if I did. Because it's no longer a matter of life or death and I would never be able to convince myself that it was for the best. Even though, I still maintain that she would've been better off never seeing me again. Scars would've just stayed scars, nothing would have had to be reopened. But it's too late for that now, wounds have been opened and exposed, waiting to either be stitched back together or have salt poured in.

Second, I'm his mentor. A relationship would do nothing but jeopardize his placement in the program. Zackly's been looking for any reason to shut down Erwin's scouting program for the last couple of years. Don't ask me why, it's not like the studio's short on money, but that's the situation. He could be blacklisted, and I can't do that to him.

Third, fuck, there is so much he doesn't know and especially after hearing his anguish, I don't want him to. I have so many skeletons in my closet that would scare any sane person away. Though I don’t know if I’d say Eren is completely sane. The point still stands: I’m too broken to mend. I don’t want him to exhaust himself trying to put me back together. Honestly, I don’t even remember what it was like to be whole anymore, and even if he managed to put some of me together, I don’t know if I could function. So, I guess when it comes down to it, I'm a fucking panzy. I'm terrified of feeling anything beyond what I've grown comfortable with- of feeling anything for anyone who challenges what that idea of comfort even is- and dammit if that's exactly what Eren's done to me.

Shit, the warmth of his breath on my chest is ironically chilling to the bone.

What am I doing? What is he doing? We agreed to end everything, let it all go, and now? Well, now we’re fucking it all up. Maybe he’ll wake up tomorrow and regret everything as he has before. But there was something in that kiss that was different. The mere fact that he opened up to me, that makes me think he won’t. Fuck, if all this would’ve happened a week ago, even a few days ago, I would have let myself try to make things work. But that was before all this pent up emotional shit got
stirred back up. Before he opened himself up to me as if I knew how to help.

And of course, it’s all my fault. Mine and my big mouth that exposed my vulnerable heart. That
made him feel like he had to expose his too.

Maybe I’m overthinking this.

I take a deep breath in and close my eyes as I exhale.

“Hmn.” Eren groans as he nestles closer to me. My eyes shoot open.

Or maybe I haven’t thought this through enough. Fuck knows he hasn’t, and what about everyone
else? What about Mikasa? What about all this would do to her? All this would do to Eren?

Eren. Imagine his heartbreak when he realizes I have nothing but pain to offer. This can’t happen. We
can’t happen.

I should really go before I do any more damage. Before he has a chance to get too comfortable with
me.

God knows the only thing I truly excel at is hurting people, and I can’t hurt him. I won’t hurt him.

Sure, he’ll be angry, he’ll be hurt for a while and hopefully, for his own good, he’ll go back to hating
me. Things were easier when he hated me.

But you don’t want him to hate you. No, but I don’t want him to waste his time on me either. I’m not
worth it. I can’t make up for all the heartbreak he’s had in his life. And he deserves someone who
can. He deserves better than me.

Having far too many experiences with one night stands, I’ve become quite the expert at rolling out of
somebody’s arms and I am able to soundlessly acquaint the pads of my feet with the plush carpet.
Eren doesn’t even twitch. I know how cliche it sounds, but he looks so at peace when he sleeps. His
features are soft and almost otherworldly with the slim streak of the street light peaking through the
curtains. It’s as if all that sorrow has long since melted away. I hope with all my heart that he finds
someone who will make him look like that all the time. I wish with even more that that person could
be me.

The back of my fingers brush his cheek as nearly every part of me is screaming to stay, to fucking try .
But I can’t. So I settle for a soft kiss to his forehead as my way of saying goodbye.

I make it down to the living room with only a few protesting groans of the stairs, grab my jacket from
the couch, and sneak out the front door. The sky's still dark and the air is chilly as I jog to my car.
After turning the ignition, I read a bright 4:50 on the dashboard. Well, that makes it an even 35 hours
of consciousness and at least 2 more hours until I can call Petra. She flew back to New York with
Erwin to spend time with her family a few days ago so she’ll definitely be up by then. Thank God
for timezones because if I tried calling her in LA in two hours she would tear me a new asshole.

I hope she's enjoying her break because as soon as Monday rolls around it will be nonstop rehearsals
til the day after Christmas followed by a month of performances. And if everything goes well, I'll be
joining her for that time. Anything to, A. Get me out of town, B. Keep me occupied, and C. Give
Eren time to forget that anything ever happened between us.

That will, of course, mean I'll be gone for my birthday...Isabel and Hanji aren't going to be happy
about that.
And what am I doing thinking about rehearsals and my shitty birthday?

I’m trying to occupy my mind with seemingly shallow thoughts, when all I keep seeing is Eren. His face when he was comforting me, his face after he kissed me, his face as he cried. Keep seeing his body curled to mine, and the way he looked as he slept. And worse is that I keep imagining his face when he wakes up alone while I’m on the other side of the country. I can imagine clear as a picture his face twisted in confusion and pain before turning to utter contempt. I already hate myself for this decision.

Too late now, though. There’s no turning back.

~

“What do you think gives you the right to call me on my holiday?” Petra asks clearly annoyed when I call her later in the morning.

“Does Stephen still need a Johnny?”

“Why?” She asks skeptically. “Change your mind?”

“Something like that.” I pause mid fold of more clothes to add to my suitcase. “Look, does he or doesn’t he?”

“Whoa, grumpy. What side of the bed did you wake up on? Or whose bed did you wake up in?” I hold my tongue. “And to answer your question, yes he does, and besides, it’s not like he has time to start from scratch.”

“So the understudy hasn’t stepped up?”

“Ironically, he broke his leg. Besides, he still says you were the best Johnny he’s seen so I’m sure he’ll take you up on it in a heartbeat.”

“I’m still kind of surprised you agreed to go back.”

“Why?”

“Wont Erwin mind?”

“Hmm,” She then turns away from the phone to yell. “Hey, honey, do you mind that I’m taking time to be a part of one of my favorite broadway shows?”

I can hear floorboard creak in the background. “Why would I mind, you’re the best Baby.” Then hear the distinct sound of a kiss.

“Oi! I’m still here.”

“Is that Levi?” Erwin speaks from a small distance. “Hi, Levi, to what do we owe the honor?” He’s taken the phone completely to talk.

“He wanted to know if Steve still needed a Johnny.” Petra answers for me.

“Am I on speakerphone?”

“Yes.” They answer in unison. Sometimes I find the fluidity of their relationship disgusting.

“Oh, good.” I know they could hear my eyes roll.
“So,” Erwin starts knowingly. “What’s going on that makes you want to run to the other side of the country?”

“I’m merely interested performing on Broadway again.”

“And the real reason?”

Dammit, he knows me too well. “I just need to some time to myself to clear my thoughts.”

“You mean,” Petra jumps in. “You need a distraction.”

I sigh. “Yes, I need a distraction.”

The line is quite as I feel them trying not to press it, and thankfully they don’t. “Okay.” Erwin breaks the silence. “I’m assuming you already have a flight?”

“I leave at 10.”

“So we’ll meet you around 7?”

“I’ll call a cab.”

“Nonsense.” Petra says. “We’ll pick you up, just give us your flight information.”

“You two are impossible.”

“Hi Pot, we’re Kettle.” Erwin chuckles at his own joke.

“Har, har.” I drawl.

By the time I had loaded the car I called to take me to the airport, I gave them all the flight information they insisted on. On a normal day, Eren and I would have finished our morning workout by now. He would’ve cursed me for waking him up so early then go on and try to beat me at everything we did. He wouldn’t be able to, but I’d give him props for trying. Lucky for him, I gave him the day to sleep in. Well, I suppose it was more lucky for me. Hopefully he won’t be up until I’m well above forty-five thousand feet.

I settle into my first class seat next to a complete stranger who won’t stop looking over at me while trying to hold back asking me if I am, in fact, me. I put on my headphones, turn my attention out to the window, and try not to think about how that stranger isn’t a bright eyed brat in need of comfort before take off. As the plane rumbles of the ground, I try not to think about holding his hand or humming in his ear. I don’t want to remember the hollow feeling I had when I had to let go of that hand as we landed back in LA. I try, but I can’t help it. Can’t help but feel reluctant butterflies as I think about his smile, and I can’t drown out the sound of his laughter from my ears.

Tears sting the back of my eyes and a knot forms in my throat.

I’m a hopeless mess.

Sometime after the third shot of brandy, I wake up to the New York skyline. The sun is hanging low in the sky, casting a brilliant orange and pink glow on the reflective skyscrapers. The Statue of Liberty stands proudly in the distance. I’m sure Eren would love to see her. I’m sure he’d love to be here. I look at my watch, which is still in California’s time zone, and it’s a quarter til 4. He’s definitely awake, and I’m sure there are several missed calls waiting for me.

12 to be exact. I checked my phone as soon as I stepped off the plane, and I have 12 missed calls
from him, 3 from Mikasa, 4 from Isabel, and 6 from Hanji. I don’t even want to look at the 27 text messages waiting for me. My phone begins vibrating in my hand and I completely panic until I see the screen light up with Erwin’s impression of Blue Steel. It’s a picture I was lucky enough to snap while he was drunk. He hates it. “Hey, Eyebrows.”

“Hello, Levi. Where are you?”

“Making my way to Baggage claim.” A series of shuttering echoes in my ears. Great, they found me. I immediately try cutting to the thick of the crowd, but I can still feel them watching me. “I’ve got a little pest control problem, Erwin.”

“Try to shake them.”

“Sound advice.” I start sarcastically. “I sure never would have thought of that.”

“Change of plan.” He says seriously, his commander mode is kicking in. “What does your bag look like?”

“I have a closet full of clothes in my apartment, so I just have a carry on. I was going to meet you guys at baggage claim.”

“Good. Find a stairwell to the garage on the East side, go down to the third level. We’ll have a car waiting by the door.”

“Yessir.”

I hang up and slip my phone in my pocket before pulling down the bridge of my cap. My unwanted guest is gaining on me, and what’s worse is that a more and more heads are turning in my direction. Well, I guess this mean there’s no subtle way to do this. Picking up my pace as I cut through the crowd, I can hear footsteps following. There’s a bathroom up ahead, but I know the same trick I used with Eren won’t work here. There are too many of them, and this is too public a space. I’ll just have to keep my head down and book it. At least I only have a duffle bag which is much easier to run with. I finally see a tiny notch of a space ahead of me. Then I wait for a small oblivious crowd to cross in front so that I can sneak in its corner. Quickly, I tug off my sweatshirt, and take off my hat. Hey, what better way to ditch the masses than hide in plain sight. As long as I’m quick about finding that stairwell, they’ll still be occupied looking for a grey hoodie and blue cap. For good measure, though, I do pull back the longer strand of my hair above my undercut into a tiny ponytail. A hairstyle only a select few have seen on me before.

Almost five minutes later, I find it. Just as I slip inside, my phone begins to ring again. Half thinking it’s Erwin again, I almost answer it, but piercing green eyes and a pink tongue sticking out of his mouth stops me. It keeps ringing, and I let it, just so I can stare at him, trying to work up the courage to answer it. Then it stops and another missed call memo pops on the screen. What do I say to him? Nothing. He’s going to keep calling. He’ll give up eventually.

I pinch my eyes shut, lean against the back of the door, and rub my forehead. “Fuck.”

I groan. I knew this question would come. “I really don’t want to talk about it right now, Petra.”

“What about over dinner?”
“Petra,” Erwin comes to my defense. “I’m sure Levi’s tired.”

“Maybe another night.” I offer. “But I’ve been traveling for nearly 6 hours and all I want is to shower, shit, and sleep.”

They both just roll their eyes at my bluntness. Well good. If they aren’t used to it by now, I don’t think we could continue being friends.

The rest of the drive is spent in idle conversation and communal cursing at the idiots that somehow got a license.

When we finally pull up to my apartment complex in the heart of Manhattan, my phone begins vibrating again. Loudly. Surprise, surprise, the same boy making a ridiculous face lights up my screen. Petra cranes her head to see. “Awe, that’s a cute picture!”

“The brat stole my phone and made it his contact.” I say stiffly, obviously annoyed, before I stuff my phone back in my pocket.

“Aren’t you going to get it?”

“Does it look like I’m going to get it?” I snap. She looks a little taken aback, but before either of them can say anything, I’ve pull my bag with me as I slide out the door. That may have been a bit harsh, but I said I didn’t want to talk about it! My apartment is the top floor penthouse which looks exactly the same as I left it. Looks like the cleaning company I called before leaving actually did a decent job. I’m still going to redo it, but it can at least wait til after a few shots. Amber liquid fills my freshly washed shot glasses to the near rim. Two of them in a row, because I need it. I knock both of them back and head to take a steaming hot shower. The last time I took a shower- because surprisingly I was in too much of a fluster to take one before I left- was after Eren pulled me into the pool fully clothed. That fucking brat knew exactly what he was doing to me. The strip tease, the closet, fuck, even his dripping wet body was all planned out. I still don’t understand why he was toying with me? Was it all a game to him before last night? Before the porch swing or the kiss, what the fuck was he playing at? One second he was hot the next he was fucking ice, and I get the whole thing with not telling Mikasa. It’s honestly been eating at me, too. Sometimes, it just felt like he was using me. However, other times, when he’d look at me, it felt like I was the only one in the world.

Goddammit, what is wrong with me!?

Why is this so Goddamn hard?

Once I’ve wrapped my waist in a towel, I head straight for the liquor cabinet… again. Just until I either get him out of my head or pass the fuck out. The latter being most likely.

The phone vibrates on the counter. Fucking hell! How many times until he gets the hint?

Oh, wait. It’s only Isabel.

“‘Ullo?” I slur.

“Levi.”

My heart beats like a hummingbird’s and my mouth goes dry. This s’not Isabel. “Eren.”

“What happened to you? Are you okay? Where are you?”

“N’thing ‘appened t’me.” I pinch the bridge of my nose. “I’m fine, ‘an you don’ need t’know where
“I’m.”

“Are you drunk?”

“So wat if I’m?”

The line goes silent, and tenses as it’s stretched out. “Did I do something wrong?”

“Fuck, ‘Ren.” I look up to the ceiling. “No! I jus’-you di’n’t do anything.”

“Then why did you only answer your phone when you thought it was Isabel calling? Fuck you Levi! You were blatantly ignoring me! Do you know how fucking hard it was to tell you what I did?!” I sigh. Yeah, I do. “Then how it felt, after all that, to wake up completely alone with absolutely no word as to why?”

“Eren, I’m s’rry.” I mummble as tears sting my eyes.

“You’re sorry?” He scoffs. “Yeah,well so am I.”

“What d’you want me t’say?”

“How about why the fuck you left in the middle of the fucking night? Or why you’re fucking hiding?”

“‘M not hiding!”

“Really? Then tell me where you are.”

Dammit. “I can’t.”

“Because you’re hiding.”

I sigh before admitting lowly. “Fine, you got me. I gues I’m.”

“What?”

“B’cuz ur better off.” I whisper.

“Says who?”

“Says me.” I say firmly. “Sides, you’ll get o’er it.”

“Isn’t that my choice?”

“Not when ur wrong.”


I hang up after that. I can’t listen to his voice any longer. He doesn’t know what he’s talking ‘bout. As long as I cut all of the contacts between us for the time I’m here, then he’ll go back to hating me, and he can move on.

Because life’s just that simple, right?
He. He. Don't hate me. Levi's only human, and he's a severely damaged one at that. And I know the last chapter made it seem like everything was looking up and that the next big problem was telling Mikasa (which is still a problem). But I figured that, after all the shit Levi's been through— all the lies, and the blood, the betrayals, and the pain— it was only natural to kind of freak out the moment he not only exposed his vulnerability to someone, but they turned around and trusted him enough to share some of their own. I mean, the guy's kept all his emotional turmoil at the bottom of Marianas fucking Trench for as long as he can remember. Only a few people have ever gotten to the top of the abyss of those problems, but nobody has ever been able to get straight down there so quickly. And, c'mon, that's gotta be pretty fucking scary. Especially for someone like Levi.

All I can say is that it does get better! The chapters are also going to get shorter because I will be bouncing between their POVs more often. Plus side of that is that the time line will pick up which makes for a quicker resolution! Which is good? Right? Yay?
Closure

Chapter Summary

Levi's gone, Eren's bitter, and Jean's sorry

Chapter Notes

Less than a week! Woohoo!
*High fives self*

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The Monday after Levi cut his losses, his face appears on the cover of not only People magazine, but US weekly and E! news. One shows one of his head shots with a picture beside it of him on the phone wearing a grey sweatshirt and blue cap. Another is a closeup of the same picture, but head on. But US actually caught him with his hair pulled up over his undercut, wearing a tight tee-shirt and sweatpants. There's a cigarette hanging from his lips as he leans against a brick wall. I've only seen him pull his hair back like that when we're working out. He looks damn good like that, the bastard.

I read over the headlines.

People: Levi Hiding in Plain Sight. The Superstar was seen lying low between filming.

Yeah, "lying low" is a nice way of saying "hiding".

E! News: New Romance? 'Levi Ackerman Spotted Getting into a Woman's Car.'

That one actually gets my stomach in knots. I know I'm probably overreacting, but, at the same time, it's not like we've ever talked about the fluidity of his sexual preference. For all I know he could be something other than strictly gay, and the thought that maybe this chick does mean something really kind of terrifies me.

US Weekly: Levi Ackerman Returns to The Big Apple! Rumors Say He's Making a Comeback to Broadway.

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New York, huh?

Well I guess running to the other side of the fucking country is one way to get away from your problems.

Goddammit, Levi! God fucking damn you! I can't believe he would do that. I mean I honestly never saw this coming. Aren't I the one who is supposed to freak out and avoid people? What did I ever do but open up to him?

Well, you have been twisting him through the rails of your emotional rollercoaster. Not to mention
the mind games you've been playing. So you can't really blame him for freaking out after all you did to him. I mean, it was **you** that personally blamed him for not being able to control your own fucking emotions.

I still wouldn’t have snuck out of **his** bed and flown across the country without a God damn word to anyone.

*There were times you would have if you'd have had the money....*

Shut up, conscious, I'm angry! But, yeah, I must admit I'm nowhere near the poster child of emotional stability. Still- considering the things we shared with each other- I couldn't have just left. Had he stayed, I think I would have done the exact opposite. I would find a way to work it all out because that night I discovered that I didn't want to be without him. I wouldn't go as far as saying I'm 'in love" or anything, but I am infatuated by his presence. With just being with him. He's kind of enchanting, even when he's being an ass.

Out of curiosity, I flip to the continued page in US Weekly. There, in the margins, is a photo of Levi under a spotlight in a barely buttoned black shirt. His arm is extended and connected to Petra's. Her other arm is in the air like half a star. Her hair is twisted to half of her head and she is wearing 'Baby's' classic soft pink dress. They both look like different people in this picture. Must have been a few years ago because his hair is different. Uncharacteristically so. It's the same length all the way around, except for the top which is styled with a small floof to it. A true 60's deco do. I wonder if he's going to have to cut it again, but I doubt it. His undercut has kind of become a trademark for his 'David'. I actually smile to myself as I look at the size of Petra's heels. Barely a stiletto stump so that she's only an inch or two shorter than Levi. Of course she would have to be 'Baby'. I doubt anyone else would be that much shorter than him. I move on to the article.

*It seems that Hollywood's greatest hunk- best known for his role as Captain Stevens in Regime's 'Goliath' - has returned to New York City. The star was seen several spots around the city. Outside the airport, in time square, and, most exciting, outside of one of Broadway's theaters. It's in it's off season now, but the critically acclaimed stage adaptation of Dirty Dancing is set to premier this holiday season the day after Christmas. I, for one, hope these rumors are true! Two years ago, when the show first debuted, I had the great pleasure of watching Levi toss around his co stars (Petra Ral as 'Baby' and 'Nora Johnson' as ...) with remarkable ease.*

Wonder how tall she is.

*The way that man can move his hips-*

Don't get me started on those hips.

-**and carry a tune**-

I didn't know he could sing.

-**is enough to make any one in the audience swoon. His Johnny is positively sizzling. He's a true rival for Shwayze himself! All I can say for certain is this: if he steps on that stage, I'll be waiting in the front row!**

Out of the three stories, I find this to be the least realistic. Levi may have been apart of the show before, but I don't see him doing something like that now. Besides, Petra has work and Erwin, so I doubt she'd actually be joining him if he were. And, honestly, where are they going to find someone short enough to take her place?
Whatever, I don't care what he is or isn't doing. Or who.

I toss the article back on the newsstand more aggressively than strictly necessary. When the guy behind the counter looks at me funny, I mumble, "Sorry."

"Hey," He begins slowly. Before his eyes light up with recognition. "You're that guy from that show!"

"Yeah." I sigh and smile. "I guess I am."

"That's awesome!" He turns around and rummages for something underneath the counter. A few seconds later he lays a small pristine poster of the title screen for the show in front of me. "Hey, do you mind signing this for me?"

"Um...sure?"

The guy carefully slides it out of its plastic cover and hand is over with a fine tip silver sharpie. I eye it with interest. What is something like that doing somewhere like here? "You'd be surprised how many celebrities stop by here on the go. So I started keeping that with me. I'm going for the whole cast!"

I smile widely because, frankly, I'm honored to be associated as "one of the cast". This thing is filled! I recognize the staple cast members- Frieda, Aurou, Gunter- but my smile falters and my throat goes dry when I see Levi's own large signature. It is easily the most noticeable one on the poster, being in white instead of silver or black, and sitting right below the title itself. Bastard really does have to be the center of attention. Not really, that's more you. Shut up. "Yeah, Levi Ackerman was the first one to sign it at San Diego Comic Con, and all I could grab was a white out pen!"

I make the decision to put my own name right on top of the title, parallel to his. I try to make it the same size, but I also don't want it to look like shit, so whatever. "Here, I hope that's okay."

"Yeah, thank you!" He blows on the ink before carefully sliding it back into plastic. I nod and turn to walk away. "Hey can I ask you something?"

"Uh, sure."

"What's it like?"

"Being on the show?" I shrug. "It's awesome. Everyone I work with are incredibly nice and very talented." Except Aurou, but I won't say that.

"And what about Levi?" He asks and my chest tightens. "Is he really a complete ass?"

And that pain in my chest has been replaced with anger. "Who said he was ass?"

Because, if anyone's gonna call him an ass, it's gonna be me!

"I don't know," He shrugs. "People, I guess. I've just heard he can be hard to work with."

"Well, he's not." I say defensively. "He's actually really passionate about everything he does. He's also been incredibly patient with me," my voice is getting less aggressive and I realize I'm no longer looking at him. "Really, if it weren't for him I wouldn't have had a shot."

"That's a relief." The man sighs. "He's one of my favorite actors, I'd hate it if he were secretly a complete douche."
"No," I feel the corner of my mouth twitch. "He's not."

"It is interesting, though."

"What is?"

"I mean," He leans closer with his elbows on the counter and lowers is voice. "It would make sense if he were."

"Come again?"

"If he were an ass, then it would explain why he's been single so long."

I gulp. Define single. "Maybe he's just good at hiding it."

"Well," he nods to the People cover. "If this is right, I guess he's not so good at hiding it anymore."

Okay, enough of this. "Well, have a good one." I say as I turn my back.

"Y-yeah, you too!" He calls. "Hey!" I sigh and look over my shoulder to see him smiling widely.

"Thanks again!"

I nod. As I continue walking, I'm sure take out my chunky sunglasses and pull down the brim of my hat. I'm actually on my way to my final final.

Ha, more word play... I'm such a dork.

Anyway, this one's for Voice Production and Speech. The one I've been pulled out of on multiple occasions. My poor professor.

When I enter the classroom I find I am one of the five people unfortunate enough to have to take the final. Everyone else, Krista included, had been excused because of either their perfect attendance or grade point. She probably had both. And, honestly, I'm not doing that badly in this class. I mean, sure, my grade would be higher than a low C had I been able to be there more, but ce la vie. Credits are credits, I guess. If I could, I wouldn't change it anyway. It was totally worth it. After this, I have an appointment with Hanji. I think it's just an end of the semester check in, at least that's all I hope it is.

“Eren-Eren” Hanji bursts into the room. “-bo-Beren-bana-fana-fo-Feren-” They plop down into the chair beside mine instead of the one behind their desk. “Me-my-mo-Meren-” They lean back and throw up their arms before while singing off tune, “EREN!” They put their arms back down and turn their chair to face mine. I do the same so that we are sitting across from each other. “Good to see you, mon loup!”

“Good to see you too, Hanji.” I chuckle.

“Now,” They then lean forward and reach across the space between us to pat my hand. “How are you holding up?”

Huh? “What do you mean?”

“Levi, of course.” Hanji squeezes my hand. “I know how upset you must be.”

Okay, if this was all they wanted to talk about, I'm out. “Trust me,” I roll my eyes, grab my bag, and stand. “I'm not upset at all.”
“Fine,” They start in a hurried voice when I go to leave. “We won't talk about it if you don't want to, but, as your counselor, there are a few things we do need to go over.”

That's more like it. I reclaim my seat and fold my arms. “Like what?”

“Like the fact you haven't registered for the Spring yet.”

Crap. I drop my head in my hand and groan. “I completely forgot.”

“I figured you would.” They say with reassurance. “So I took the liberty of registering for you.”

I lift my head to bask in the glow of this saint sitting in front of me. “Seriously? Thank you so much!”

“But of course.” Hanji reaches for something in their loose briefcase. “After all, it's my job to look out for you.” Oh, right. They straighten back up. “Not that I would've done it anyway.”

They wink before handing me a packet. I try to surpass a groan when I find a new nutrition chart mixed in. But, much to my surprise, “Hey Hanji, I think there might be a mistake, I have one less class.”

“No mistake, hot stuff. Zackly agreed to let some of the time you spend filming be substituted for credit.”

“I thought my mentorship already did that.”

“It does, but this will cover your Acting II and III credits as well as your requirements for some of your workshops.” 6+ credits just for doing what I would rather be doing anyway? I'll take it! “But, Eren, it's incredibly important that you pull a B or better in all your courses, and Levi has to be the one to sign off that grade for your filming.”

Oh fucking fabulous.

“Like, how important is it that Levi sign it exactly?”

“Like the program's future depends on it.”

“Oh,” I take a deep breath, my palms are sweating. “Only that. No big deal.”

They sigh sympathetically. “I know how much pressure this puts on you, but those are the cards you've been dealt and believe me when I say we will do everything in our power to help you succeed.”

Well, my heart is trying to put on the breaks before I have a fucking panic attack. I take a deep breath in and close my eyes. “Okay. So, what's next?”

“That would be your cross department training.”

Ah, I think I remember Armin mentioning something about that. And if memory serves… “Please don't say it's-”

“Music Production.”

I groan. “Awesome.”

“Yeah, and I'm really sorry, Eren.” They start as if trying to comfort a wounded animal trapped in a
corner. “But the Zackly asked for you to be partnered with the best young successful artist.”

My eyes widen in panic. “No.”

“Yes, I do mean Jean Kirstein.”

Why, Fate? Why do you hate me so?

"Is there anyway-"

"Nope."

"Anything I can-"

"Nope," They sigh. "I'm sorry, Sugar Biscuit, but there's no way around it. Consider it another one of Zackly's trials."

"And I thought living with Levi and being his bitch for 40 hours a week was trial enough."

"Look," Hanji says seriously and leans on their forearms toward me. "You said you don't want to talk about Levi-" I take a breath to stop them but they hold up their hand. "And that's fine, but you need to listen." I cross my arms defensively. "I can listen." I know he's the villain in your story, and I can understand why you would feel that way. But I think in all the energy you've spent on hating the man you've overlooked everything he's done for you." I furrow my brow, but, fuck I can't think of anything to counter with. So I do the only thing I can, and I deflate. "When you hit him, first off you're lucky he didn't press charges-" I roll my eyes. Armin's already beat you to this punch, Hanji. "Second, Eren, he could have had you out no questions asked. It was only your second callback so it's not like kids aren't pruned all the time. But he didn't do either. Instead, he stuck his neck out for you, defended your position in the program when nothing was in it for him! He agreed to not only mentor you, but give you a place to live while doing so." I guess I forgot how much he did for me even before I really knew him. "Levi took a HUGE chance when he brought you to Mike. Do you understand how bizarre that whole thing was? Completely unheard of! But Mike trusted in Levi's judgment, and Levi trusted you to uphold it. And look at how well you have! You blew Mike away to the point where he asked you to come back. And what about when Zackly was coming down on you for even filming!?”

"I know, I just-" I start in a small voice.

"Hell, Eren!" They throw their hands in the air. "The man jumped on a plane just so he could be there to defend you!" They deflate when they see my head hanging in my lap. Yeah, I've been an asshole, there's no denying that. "I'm not saying this to try and make you feel bad," I scoff because why the hell else would they be saying anything? "All I mean is that you're really lucky to have a man like Levi on your side because you don't find many men like him"

"God, I hope not." I whisper. I hear them chuckle a little before reaching over and patting me on the back.

"We're all doing our best to help you, Eren, but-" They sigh and when I look up I see them smiling. "He's the one who has done the most, and will keep doing the most he can for you. I don't know for sure or anything..." They smile widely, oh no, it's that mischievous look they get sometimes. "But I think he's got a soft spot for you."

They wink and I roll my eyes despite the heat growing in my face. "Are you done?"

"Were you listening?"
I sigh. "Yeah. I was."

"Okay then!" They clap their hands together. "Then, I guess we're done for today!"

Huh? I follow them as they hop to their feet and open the door. "Um..."

I step through skeptically, then, not five steps out, they call at my back. "Oh, right! You start your cross department training at noon Wednesday!" Great. "It's at MP studios, do you know how to get there?" Unfortunately I know it too well. "Do you need a ride?"

"I got it, Hanji." I wave at them without turning around. "Thanks though."

Two days passes to motherfucking fast! You'd think that staying locked in your room doing nothing but playing games, having The Neverending Story on a loop, and stuffing your face would make time seem infinite. It doesn't. It only acts as a bandaid in comparison to an impending surgery. Feebly temporary. I park pull into the garage in Levi's Mercedes. Mainly because it's the only revenge I can think of without fucking everything up even more. Besides, I haven't driven in almost a year and it handles like wet dream. Also, I didn't want to tell anyone I was coming here of all places with he of all people. I figure I'll do what I've always done which is keep everything a secret until it's already done. Unless I fuck up, then I keep it all in the dark. Oh, like with Levi?

Enough from you, conscious.

I stare blankly at the concrete wall in front of me and my chest gets tight. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck, I don't want to go inside! Calm down, Eren. You were able to spend an entire night together without killing trying to kill each other...mostly.

But, I wasn't alone in his territory at his mercy for my credits. Fuck you, Zackly. I'll put all my money that the old fucker knew exactly what he was doing when he paired us together.

After taking an impossibly deep breath, I step out of the car into the city's heat. And I hold that breath until the elevator doors dinged open to the 15th floor, I.E my destination. Jean is slouched in a chair waiting for me outside the doors, which forces me to panic and press the close door button over and over as if it'll make them close faster. Before they comply I see Jean sigh heavily, but the point stands that I'm safe for now. My legs are shaking so badly that I'm forced to follow the wall to the floor. I lean my head back to look at the unusually warm lights for an elevator. Aside from Jean's voice echoing through it, it's not a bad place to hide. I get about a minute before the doors slide open and Jean catches them to lean in.

"You know," He starts smugly. "It usually helps to press a different floor." Shit, I can't believe I did that. I can. I roll my eyes and get to my feet. He moves out of my way as I step into the huge hallway. Huh, I'm surprised to find, once again, that the only thing I feel for Jean when I see him is general annoyance and a kind of panic over not being panicked or filled with hatred and rage. It's weird. After a couple seconds of silence, he looks me over and smiles. "You look good, Eren."

You too. "Have you gained some weight?"

"What's that supposed to mean!?" He leans close baring his teeth.

I shrug innocently. "Pretty sure you heard me."

"You're an ass."
Oh no he didn't. I mimic his movements. “Oh, *I'm* the ass!?”

He smirks. “Pretty sure you heard me.”

“Don't make me wipe that ugly smirk off your face.”

“Oh, I dare you.” He starts again smugly. “Good luck getting your credits.”

I back off. “Low blow, Horseface.”

He does the same. “Sorry.” His face is still slightly smug, but his voice is apologetic. “Look, can we just agree to be civilized?”

“I don't know, Jean, I don't want to push you too far from your comfort zone.” He looks at me in exasperation and I realize he's right. If we want to make it through the next few days, we'll have to play nice. I mumble a quick, “Right, civilized, I can do that.”

“Whatever.” He rolls his eyes. “Normally I'd start with a tour, but I think it's be little redundant.”

“Yeah,” I begin. “I've been here more times than I'd care to admit.”

“Yeah.” He face has fallen and he's turned his focus to the ground. “Anyway, I think the quickest way to get this over with is to jump right into the deep end.”

We reach the end of the hallway and he opens the door to a sound room with a window of glass I know from experience is tinted on the other side. But from here, there's a perfect view to a mic with headphones hanging from it. This room is a huge switch board that kinda reminds me of the one Erd uses in the Soundstage I've called my home away from home away from home for the last few months. I step passed Jean through what feels like a very narrow doorway. He closes the door behind him. “So…” I start awkwardly. “What now?”

“Well,” He starts by leaning against the soundboard and crossing how arms. “I am recording a single in awhile and I want you to watch the process.”

“Jean,” I roll my eyes. “I can't even count how many times I've watched you record.”

“I know.” He shrugs, “But did you really *study* it?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean watching more than me.”

“Hey,” I start playfully. “You can't blame me for that.”

“Oh?”

“In my defense you used to be very distracting.”

His face falters a little. “Used to be? And now?”

“Now?” I take a strained breath. “Now, I do everything in my power *not* to think about you.”

“Right.” The air between us gets heavier with each passing millisecond of silence. Finally he looks at me with a smile and claps his hands together, an easily recognizable gesture of ‘moving on’. “Well, everyone should be here sometime in the next half an hour.”
“Oh good.” I reply through a dry throat.

“You know,” He starts mischievously. “There's a lot that can be done in all that time.” He wiggles his eyebrows suggestively.

“Oh funny.”

“Sorry.” He sighs again. “You're right… this time.”

I scoff. “I'm always right.”

“Cocky has never looked good on you, Charming.”

Goddammit if the only thing I'm able to think about is the last time someone used that name. ‘Who said you could speak?’ I can remember the weight of Levi, the heat of him as he crawled onto my lap while he pushed me further into that damned couch. ‘Charming’. My breath stops, and I swear my heart does with it. Why did that have to pop into my head? Why now?

“You okay?”

No, I'm not, but he's not worthy of that information. "It's nothing."

He just nods. I elect to sit in one of the comfy chairs and pull out my phone. I can see Jean's done the same, however, he hasn't moved from leaning on the edge of the table which makes him uncomfortably close. After forever of scrolling through my Facebook feed I look in the corner to see that we still have a ways to go of hopeful silence. This is going to be a long eighteen minutes and 43 seconds.

"So..." He starts awkwardly a few minutes later. "How's Levi?"

I narrow my eyes. "How should I know? I'm not his keeper."

"No, but he's yours, right?" He drawls. The muscles in my jaw twitch. "Shouldn't he be, like, checking in or something?" My fingers itch to curl themselves into fists. "How does Daddy feel about you being here, anyway? With me?"

I jump to my feet, knocking the chair down behind me. My fists have fully appeared as I step toward him until we're face to face. "I thought you wanted to keep this civilized."

"My, my." He mouth curls into a half smile. "Have I struck a nerve?"

Fuck the credits. I twist my hand into the front of his shirt with my teeth bared. "What does it matter to you?"

"You mat-" He cuts himself off and pulls out of my grasp. “It doesn’t matter to me, I was only joking.”

“No you weren't.” I reply harshly.

"Yeah, well. Whatever." He scoffs and pushes past me. “Just wait here I'm getting some water.”

I watch him leave.

Once I'm alone I resume my attempts at distraction via technology. Which actually turns into me googling different posts about Levi and his last performance of Broadway, and that really makes me mad at myself because I really shouldn't be doing this. I shouldn't be torturing myself by researching
the man I should be trying to get over.

*Not getting over. Getting back.*

Yeah. Sure. He made it pretty damn clear how he feels about me.

*He panicked.*

He ran.

"You look like you're going to be sick." Jean’s voice interrupts my thoughts perhaps ten minutes later. He regards me from the doorway before bringing the cool water to his lips.

"I'm with you, aren't I?" He throws an extra bottle at me with more force than I believe was necessary.

The door finally opens before he can respond anymore, and a man and two women enter, neither of whom I recognize.

"Mister Jaeger, I presume." One of the woman says snooty as all get out. I nod. "Sit here."

She points to a fold out chair in the very corner of the room. Clearly, too far away to actually see a fucking thing. Great, what the fuck happened to Jamie and Jules?

"Eren!" Oh, there's Jules. She's been Jean's producer since day one, and she was also the one who told me to go home *that* day. I still remember the pitying look she gave me when she did. Jules pulls me into a bone breaking hug. Over her shoulder I can see the Twat Biscuit look away in embarrassment. Clearly she was trying her hand at a power play. "It's been *way* too long! How are you?"

"Let the boy breathe, Jules." Jamie steps closes the door behind him. He smiles widely at me and grabs captures my hand in a firm shake. I forgot to miss these people, but I shouldn’t have. "Eren."

"Jamie." I smile. "It's good to see you guys!"

From the corner of my eyes I see Jean roll his eyes.

"You too, honey." Jules replies before flicking my ear. "But it's not like you didn't know where to find us."

"Sorry. It was just-" I look at Jean sheepishly. He stares back at me wearing an unreadable expression.

“Of course,” She looks between us. “I understand.”

"Ahem." Twat Biscuit starts. "Maybe we should get started."

Jean stands straight and takes a deep breath. "Best idea I've heard all day."

Jamie raises his eyebrows at me as if to say 'Here we go. Good luck kid'.

“By the way, Mister Jaeger." The other woman stretches of her hand and smiles. She's a fairly tall and drop dead gorgeous African American woman with curly black hair that almost bobs just beneath her ears. She wears sleek grey slacks with a silky red tank top of sorts tucked into them. Her hand is is soft and smile welcoming. “My name is Cassandra Barton, but you call me Cas. I work mostly with the synthesizer.”
“Nice to meet you.”

She lets go of my hands before settling into her seat pulled up to the bend in the counter.

“Chet Mikkelsen.” The man grips my hands firmly.

“Hi.” I reply awkwardly as he sits behind the soundboard. Mindy rolls her eyes and offers no kinds of introduction. Twat Biscuit.

“What are you doing?” Jamie asks before I completely sit down in my corner chair.

“S-sitting down, sir.”

“How are you going to see anything from way over there?” I shrug because I was asking myself the same thing. “Mindy,” He addresses Twat Biscuit. “Would you please trade spots with Eren?”

She reluctantly takes my place and I move between Jamie and Chet in the middle of the soundboard. Jules is sitting on the other side of Jamie and closest to the door.

Jean enters the room with the four musicians that make up the Kirstein name. There’s Chris on guitar, Daniel on drums, but the bassist is someone new. New, but somehow familiar.

Their idle chatter provides the background noise to Jamie as he runs me through the uses of all the little knobs and buttons. A lot of it is digitized, but more is still manual. Chet chimes in every once and a while to help move things along.

“What’s the hold up?” One of the musicians, Daniel, asks through the glass.

“Just another three seconds, guys.” Jamie replies through the intercom into the other side. “I’m just finishing things up with a student.”

“A student?” Chris asks now. “MP or a Scout?”

“Never you mind.”

He scoffs. “It’s a scout.”

I narrow my eyes. Why the MPs have such a superiority complex is beyond me.

“It’s just Eren.” Jean almost mumbles.

“Wait,” Chris begins.

“Eren, Eren?” Daniel finishes.

“Yes,” Jean hisses. “Did you want me to spell it?”

“Could you?” Chris laughs. Jean shoots him a look and downs them out by putting on his headphones.

Chet presses a button to speak into the other room. “Okay guys, are you ready now?” They all get serious and move into their positions with their own pairs of headphones.

“For today, Eren,” Jamie starts. “I want you to pay attention to what Chet and I are doing on this switchboard. Just observe as best as you can, and if you have any questions don’t be afraid to ask them.”
Cas, now wearing giant black headphones that match Jean’s, waits for Jean to take a deep breath before she taps the orange pad on the music synthesizer to start the beeps counting down to Chris’s entrance.

Jean starts with his lips practically grazing the mic with each note. I honestly am not paying that much attention to the lyrics, all of my focus is on the way Chet and Jamie are moving their fingers around the soundboard. They look kind of like puppeteers sliding around different knobs and pressing different buttons. I'm trying to match their movements to the functions they Jamie explained earlier. That's when, in the back of my mind, I catch one of those lyrics.

But my heart don't understand

And I make the mistake of looking up to find Jean starting directly at me.

Why I got you on my mind.

Fuck. It’s like his eyes have found mine through the thick tint of the glass between us. They're full of, not quite anguish but not exactly sorrow either. Just amber orbs filled with an unhealthy mix of emotions. I'm glad he can't see the same in mine.

I always hear, always hear them talkin

Talkin bout a boy, bout a boy with your name

Saying that I hurt you, but I just don't get it

You didn't love me, no not really

I scoff out loud, as if he can hear me. I did love him.

I think I did.

Wait. I could've really liked

I bet that's why I'm thinking bout you

It's a shame

You said I was good

So I put it down, yeah I put it down

And now I don't understand it

You don't mess with love, you mess with the truth

And I know I shouldn't say it, but I just can't understand

Why I got you on my mind

I hold my breath and make myself focus on nothing more than their fingers moving on the soundboard. Nothing else until Chris and the bassist echo Jean's voice with: you think you know somebody.

That's rich. All this is very rich coming from him.
What makes you think any of this is about you?

I-I, huh, I never considered that. Part of me wonders who that would be, but that's easy: Marco.

You've got yourself in a dangerous zone

Cause we both have a fear, fear of being alone

And I just don't understand it

Still, I don't see these words particularity lining up with him. And I try to conjure up memories of him, of us, but they slowly get pushed out by flashes of a different kind of us. The us I am a part of when I'm with Levi. I feel the coldness of his hands that warmed themselves as they worked over my body. His soft lips grazing my skin. The depth of his voice, his eyes, his soul. Fuck, I could spend a lifetime trying to figure him out, but somehow I feel I never could. I mean I had no idea he even did theatre. Dancing, singing, being a part of an ensemble night after night, somehow I couldn't picture him in that kind of role. Though, figuring the way he can roll his hips...

“Good one boys!” Jamie snaps me to. I guess the song ended? “Take a break.” Ah, yes, it has indeed. His chair spins to face me. “So?”

So? So I was getting lost in thoughts about a man who left me in the middle of the night as if I was nothing more than a sleazy one night stand. “It was interesting.” I scratch my head. “But I'm not going to lie, it was a little hard to keep up with what you both were doing.”

He laughs. “Can't blame you there. But you get used to it.”

After the short break, we run through the song-sometimes just vocals or instruments- a few more times. Each time I try my hardest to keep thoughts of either of them from my head- mostly of Levi- before Jules calls it a day for us all. Just in time, too. It was getting harder to stop feeling the ghost of Levi’s touch. We part ways with instructions to meet at noon again tomorrow.

There's a low whistle behind me as I step toward the Mercedes in the parking garage. I turn around to find, why am I surprised, Jean walking toward me.

“What do you want?” I demand.

“Does Levi know you're driving his car?”

Not entirely. I find myself calmly repeating the question. “What do you want?”

“Believe it or not, I'm parked down here.”

“I don't believe it.”

He pulls out his keys and presses the unlock button. Taillights flash a few cars from Levi's. “Why don't you ever believe me?”

“Did you seriously just ask me that?”

He winces. “I deserve that.”

“What do you want, Jean?”

“It’s stupid really.” He looks away. “But, ever since Reiner's, ever since I saw you two together, I haven't been able to get you out of my head.”
“Wait…” I narrow my eyes skeptically. “Are you saying you're jealous?”

He looks at me with a serious expression. Jean takes a step closer. "As I told you before," another step closer. "I don't like seeing you with another guy." Bastard! He has no right! I open my my mouth to tell him off, but he interrupts before I get the chance. "I know I have absolutely no right to care," He's directly in front of me now; why aren't I moving away? "But I do and I hate that I do because I'm the one that fucked it all up!" 'Yeah you did!' I want to shout. 'You fucked it all up; fucked me all up and I fucking hate you!' But I don't, because I can't, because I can hardly catch up to his words. Can hardly decide what to do with them. "I hate feeling fucking anything at all because I fucking love Marco! I do, but I just can't let you go!"

"What are you saying, Jean?"

"I don't know, Eren." He's probably far too close for comfort, but, I don't even react to it. I guess, because this was comfort for so long. "I guess seeing the way you look at him, the way you react to him, makes me realize all that I lost when I lost you. I remember how you used to look at me that way, and how much of you I took for granted." His fingers graze my own and he sighs as his amber eyes capture me in their warmth. "I didn't deserve you, and I'm sorry for the time you wasted on me." I think my heart is literally in my throat as it stops when I feel his soft lips on my forehead. His breath warms my skin. At least, it might be his breath, or it might be the tears running down my cheeks, but who's to say? Reader's interpretation, right? Smoot thumbs are trying to rub them away as he looks at me with a small smile. "But I'm grateful for every second you did."

Then he's kissing me, and I'm kissing him. It's soft and sweet, and in it I can feel what neither of us would ever be able to say out loud: Goodbye.

Chapter End Notes

Yay! One unresolved issue down!
Also it's been a long week and it is really late, so I am sorry if there are any typos or fucked up grammar. If there is, don't be afraid to let me know :)
Coming to Terms with Hypocrisies

Chapter Summary

Eren finally confronts Mikasa, and her reaction stirs up a whirlwind of emotions.

Chapter Notes

Things are moving quickly now because wounds can't be left to fester any longer! Also, hidden (or maybe not so) in this chapter is the introduction to the next big arch in this fic because apparently I can't stop writing plot points for this fic...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Are you ready, Eren?” Jamie’s voice echoes through the intercom. After 10 grueling days pretty much living at this place- of going over tech, of listening to Jean’s constant yammering, of choosing the right song and collaborating with, like, 5 different people to figure out the music- all of it has come down to this. Taking another swig of water, I nod. I inhale a deep breath, and my fingertips begin pressing the keys of the piano. My mouth is pretty much grazing the screen over the mic as I start with closed eyes.

Hands,

Slender fingers running down my palm

*put your empty hands in mine*

before being pulled to soft lips.

*And scars,*

His tattoo, beneath all the brilliant colors, were slivers of patched skin.

*show me all the scars you hide*

I never asked, I don't think he knows I noticed.

*And hey, if your wings are broken*

*Please take mine so yours can open, too*

*’Cause I'm gonna stand by you*

*Oh, tears make kaleidoscopes in your (shimmering silver) eyes*

*And hurt,*

*I was so fucking broken....I still am’*
I know you're hurting, but so am I
And, love, if your wings are broken

Sitting on the porch swing and pulling him into my arms.

_Borrow mine 'til yours can open, too_

'Cause I'm gonna stand by you

Jean’s voice joins mine in harmony.

_Even if we're breaking down, we can find a way to break through_

_Even if we can't find heaven, I'll walk through Hell with you_

_Love, you're not alone, 'cause I'm gonna stand by you_

My eyes open.

_Even if we can't find heaven, I'm gonna stand by you_

_Even if we can't find heaven, I'll walk through Hell with you_

_Love, you're not alone, 'cause I'm gonna stand by you_

He takes over the next verse.

_Yeah, you're all I never knew I needed_

My turn.

_And the heart—sometimes it's unclear why it's beating_

Jean: _And, love, if your wings are broken_

_We can brave through those emotions, too_

'Cause I'm gonna stand by you

Me: _Oh, truth—_

I close my eyes again.

Jean: _I guess truth is what you believe in_

And something we need to work on.

Me: _And faith—I think faith is having a reason_

Like making him smile.

_Know-know know, love,_

Jean: _If your wings are broken_
Borrow mine 'til yours can open, too

'Cause I'm gonna stand by you

He goes back to harmonizing as I retake the lead.

Even if we're breaking down,

Remember that time I punched him in the face?

we can find a way to break through

Or that time I pinned him to the bathroom wall?

Even if we can't find heaven, I'll walk through Hell with you

Love, you're not alone, 'cause I'm gonna stand by you

Even if we can't find heaven, I'm gonna stand by you

My eyelids get heavier.

Even if we can't find heaven, I'll walk through Hell with you

Love, you're not alone, 'cause I'm gonna stand by you

Butterflies fill from my stomach to my throat as I think about Levi’s reassuring voice every time I needed it.

I'll be your eyes 'til yours can shine

My mouth slides into a sideways smile.

And I'll be your arms, I'll be your steady satellite

In my mind's eye, a reel begins playing.

And when you can't rise, well, I'll crawl with you on hands and knees

'Cause I... I'm gonna stand by you

He's walking down a snowy hill with the sun setting behind him.

Even if we're breaking down,

I hurl a snowball at his back.

we can find a way to break through

He turns to me.

Even if we can't find heaven, I'll walk through Hell with you

Begin running, heart racing, anticipating his gain on me.

Love, you're not alone,
Being tackled in the cold powdery snow with Levi hovering above me.

'cause I'm gonna stand by you

His cool finger sweep across my cheeks.

Even if we can't find heaven, I'm gonna stand by you (gonna stand by you)

His eyes capture me in their warmth.

Even if we can't find heaven (gonna stand by you), I'll walk through Hell with you

This time we do kiss.

Love, you're not alone, (you're not alone)

Sweetly.

Love, you're not alone(you're not alone)

Passionately.

Love, you're not alone

Full of unspoken emotions.

Cause I'm gonna stand by you

The image fades into the light of the room as I open my eyes.

Jean’s looking at me as he takes off his headphones, I hastily look forward at the tinted window.

“Wow, fellas.” Jules speaks through to us. “We definitely got it.” I smile sheepishly as I stand from the piano bench. “Now, get your pretty little asses some food. We’ll meet in the conference room in half an hour.”

At the mention of food, my stomach gurgles loudly. Jean raises his eyebrows and is trying to suppress a smile. What? It’s a natural response to having coffee for breakfast.

There’s a little sandwich place on the block that I’m able to get to. I take up a seat on the edge of a fountain in front of the studio to enjoy my hero sub piled high with meat.

“Heya, Hot Stuff.” A young Perez Hilton type of guy sits next to me. “That was quite a show.”

“Er-” I respond with a mouthful of sandwich.

“You’re really talented.” He shakes his bleach blond head. “Man, if I had even half of that...You’re a hell of a lot better than both Kirstein and Ackerman.” Flattering, but weird coming from a guy who’s first words were ‘Heya, Hot Stuff’. “You know,” He leans closer to me. “I’ve heard horror stories about them both.”

“Ow,” I start with stuffed cheeks. Just because he's invited himself into my company doesn't mean I have any obligation to stop eating. "Really?”

“Yeah,” He replies seriously. Obviously sarcasm is lost on this kid. “I know for a fact that Kirstein’s the biggest ass,” That’s not really news, pal. “And Ackerman, well, I hear he’s a total faggot.”
“Um-” I choke on my food and start sputtering coughs.

"Are you okay?" He tries to touch me, but I jump to my feet before his sleazy hand can reach. _Don’t punch the stranger, Eren. Don’t punch the stranger_. “I don’t mean to be rude,” I say through tight lips. “but I gotta-” Make you wish you weren’t born. _Don’t!_- I have somewhere I should get to.”

“Oh, of course.” He smiles weakly. “Don’t let me keep you. U-unless you want some company?”

“I’m good.” I say shortly. _He’s not worth it, Eren. He’s not worth it_. His expression gets dark, dangerous. Much more threatening than I thought he could manage in the three seconds I’ve known him. This guy is seriously pissing me off and giving me the creeps at the same time. And not in a ‘perv from an episode of _Law and Order_ SVU’ kind of way, but more like ‘dude from _Silence of the Lambs_’. My hand grips my not-even-a-quarter eaten sub tighter. “Nah, I’m close to where I’m going, so…” I trail off coldly, and because I _don’t_ want to be being going to jail for “assaulting” anyone, or, you know be putting any lotion in any sort of basket, I soften my glare. The struggle to keep the fingers on my other hand uncurled has never been more real; I’m really trying to play it nice. Well, not nice, but not completely threatening. “Yeah, well,” I try so hard to bite back any comments, keep my rage at bay. “Have a good rest of your day, I guess.”

I end up faking a smile for good measure because I am a God Damn actor, and this fucker isn’t _worth_ the consequences of acting on my anger.

“Y-you too!” The stranger looks like I’ve just sucked the breath from him and his face gets red. I bet I could make it redder, blood red.

Just walk away. I strain a smile with a closed mouth, nod, and walk back toward the studio as quickly as possible. Before I reach the doors, however, I swear I hear him slowly drawing out my name. I speed up before I have a chance to turn back around and try to punch his lights out. Then again, that fucking look, his fucking body language made him like the epitome of ‘Stranger Danger’. Maybe I _should_ go back there and teach him a fucking lesson about the use of certain words, and, at the same time, I can make sure he knows I’m not so easily intimidated. _That might play into his hands. Could just be a sleazy reporter trying to egg some answers from you by telling you rumors and judging your reaction to them._

Maybe, but I doubt it. There was definitely something off with that guy, and, you know what? I stop and turn around. I really should go smash in his face until he takes back his words. I begin marching back to the-

“Eren.” Jean steps in my path. “Calm down.”

“What are you talking about, Horseface?” I snap. “I _am_ calm.”

“Yeah,” He turns me back around by my shoulder. “Real convincing.”

“Maybe,” I start by clutching my sandwich with both my hands. “I have a _real_ good reason to be heated.”

“I’m sure you do.” He directs me to the elevator.

“Get the fuck off of me!” I maneuver out of the grip on my shoulder. He raises his hand in surrender and I begin to walk past him. I’m too pissed of at that the prick from the fountain that Jean has lost my interest. Somehow, I didn’t hear the elevator ding, and in less than a second Jean’s pushed me through them. The elevator begins moving, my hero has fallen and I scramble to pick it up. Wait,
there's a reason it's on the floor. I don’t know how far up we get before I try lunging at the asshole responsible. Jean, however, seems to expect it, and pins me on the other wall. I struggle, but he’s gained the advantage from taking me off guard.

“I know that look, Eren.” He starts. “Because it’s usually directed at me.”

“Usually? Look again, Jean, it is directed at you!”

“Better me than whoever it was downstairs.”

*He’s got a point. At least he would neither press charges if you hit him, nor potentially wear your skin.* Reluctantly, I relax both my glare and my body.

“You better now?” I re-tighten my glare. He loosens his grip. “I just want to be sure you’re not going to go postal on me.”

“I will if you don’t let me go.”

He backs off his his hands up before tucking them in his pockets. We don’t speak for a few moments, then I notice that the elevator’s not fucking moving.

“Jean,” I start as the flashing red light on the panel catches my eye. “Please tell me you didn’t hit the emergency button.”

“Yeeaahh, right before I pinned you to the wall…” He rubs the back of his neck and looks away. “I forgot about that.”

I groan and slide to the floor. I crawl to the death spot of what remains of my lunch. Part of it is settled on the sleek tiles, but the other half is sprawled across the paper wrapper. Broken apart, but I think there might be hope for it yet! With surgical precision, I reconstruct what I can of the wreckage. We’re gonna be here for a while and I'm still hungry.

"You're disgusting."

"You're the 'ne oo m'de me dr'p it." I reply with my mouthful. He curls his lip and looks in front of him. A few minutes pass before silence is broken by a heavy sigh of content, indicating that I've finished my floor food.

“You were thinking about him,” Jean- who has copied my position on the floor on the wall to my right- starts blankly. “While we were recording, you were thinking about him, weren’t you?”

I take a deep breath and lean my head up to look into the blinding fluorescent lights. “Was it that obvious?”

“You forget how well I know you.”

The corner of my mouth twitches. “Sometimes.”

Part of this exchange feels strange, bordering on tense, but truly, things between us are closer to feeling **friendly** again. I mean, we have only been **forced** into corroporation the last 10 days. So some sort of friendliness was inevitable. Even if it's only temporary, it's been nice, I've missed his friendship. But not his stupidity which still irritates me to no end.

Jean takes an audible breath and drops his head to his knees. “Does Mikasa know?”

“Why wouldn’t she?” I bite.
“That’s a no.” He mumbles. “You know, you’re gonna-”

“Have to talk to her, yeah, I know thanks.”

We sit in silence again simply because we have nothing to say to each other without potentially starting something.

“Do you wanna tell me what happened downstairs?” He breaks the silence again.

Okay, I take back what I thought earlier, fuck friendly. ”None of your business.”

“Fine.” He snaps. “You know, you’d be out of the studios by now if I hadn’t stopped you!”

“Whatever.” I mumble. I’m mentally tapped out for the day and he’s not worth the argument. I can feel him pouting the rest of the time we wait for the elevator to jerk to a start.

“And Ackerman, well, I hear he’s a total-” I fucking hate people. So much fucking ignorance and arrogance. They judge so quickly based on their own self righteous prejudices. Would he even care about the fact that Levi is one of the strongest people I have ever known, one of the harshest yet kindest. Would he care that the man he so blindingly threw contempt at could squash him in an instant, but wouldn’t because he’s so much better than that. And that’s what makes him so wonderful, isn’t it? He looks at everyone with equal disinterest and only passes judgement on them based on who they are and how they treat others. Even so, as far as I can tell, he never truly hates someone. Sure Levi generally dislikes everyone, and some of those people earn a deeper level of dislike, but true contempt doesn’t last in his heart unless you’ve done something horrible to earn it. Conversely, it seems to take a lot to move out of the ring of general disinterest either way, but it’s even harder to gain his affection. Isabel, Farlan, Hanji, Erwin, and Petra have all done something to gain his trust, something to deem them worthy of a sliver of his heart. Once someone has earned that, he will do everything in his power to protect them. Thinking about all this, dissecting the inner workings of his mind (in the sense that I’m getting how it works even if I haven’t seen all the little cogs and gears) I realize that I’ve come to understand him a lot more than I thought I did. Then he thinks I do.

Only thing is, only question now on my mind, where do I fall? I’d like to think I moved up from disinterest to cared for, but what about now that he left? Have I fallen from his grace? Or have I become something else entirely? I feel trapped between his affection and frustration. His happiness and his sorrows. I feel like, in his mind, I’ve become Icarus, and he thinks that if he pushes me away I won’t get burned. But it’s too late for that, I’d rather burn in the sun than be condemned to life alone in the dark.

With that thought, the elevator jerks to life and we spring to our feet. Its doors open to the lobby a few seconds later, and the only face we see that’s not smothering us with worry is Jules’s. Instead, she wears an expression of ‘really?’. I awkwardly scratch at the back of my head and Jean grabs his arm and looks away.

“Well,” She starts nonchalantly. “That was a longer lunch than expected, we’ll just have to make up that time before we leave.”

Fuck. My lips curl in on each other as I suppress a groan. But Jean doesn’t try to hide his annoyance.

“Really?” He whines. “It was Jaeger who made us late anyway!”

“Hey!”

“So, Eren pushed the emergency button?” She asks him knowingly.
He doesn’t answer.

Man, when it comes to reading Jean, she’s on the same level as his mother.

The rest of the day extending into the late evening is spent on planning. We work through a release date, because that’s part of this whole “experience”, and even begin outlining the music video that is also part of the package. Horseface and I, of course, have to work together with the director before filming. Thankfully, none of this had to be done until after the new year. Though, not as thankfully, since I’m being fucked by Zackly from every angle, I will have to do this on top of my classes and work with Levi. The Levi who’s not taking to my general existence. Jules says it’s because this part of the program usually isn’t until senior year, as such I’m still obligated to the classes at my level.

“At least this way you’ll graduate sooner!” She tries to encourage me after physically watching me die a little inside.

This is going to be impossible. That’s the point, he wants you to fail.

Yeah, and it’s fucked up.

I end up staying seated in the room after everyone else leaves.

“You’ll have to go soon, they’re locking up the building.” I don’t move my gaze from the floor, I know it’s Jean who's come back. He sighs and squats down to intercept my vision. “Eren?”

“I can’t do it, Jean.” I whisper.

“Probably not.”

“Fuck you.”

“I’m just being honest.”

“Yeah, well, I don’t want honesty right now.”

“What are you complaining about?” He starts seriously. “You’re every teacher’s pet. The fucking protege, as far as Zackly’s concerned. And you’re upset because you have to work a little harder than everybody else? I would kill for that kind expectation.”

“If you’re so jealous,” I sit up. “Then you do it!”

“Obviously,” He starts bitterly. “I’m not the one they want!”

“And I’m starting to question whether putting myself through hell will even be worth it!”

His face softens. “It will be because you put yourself through hell to get there.”

“Thanks, Tony Robinson.”

“I’m trying to be optimistic!”

“Well, don’t quit your day job!”

Jean rubs his temples. “You are the most impossible human being I’ve ever had the misfortune of caring about.”

My mouth twitches into a smile at that. “Okay, fine, say it is all worth my while.” My shoulders fall and I put my head in my hands. “It wouldn’t even matter because there’s the kinda huge stopping me
from, fucking, triumphing or whatever.”

“What’s that?”

“Levi’s avoiding me I’m straight up Bubonic.”

“Wait.” Jean’s brow furrows. “Why is he avoiding you.”

Because he’s stubborn and broken, and I’m stubborn and an ass who wouldn’t stop playing mind games, mix all that together and he freaked out. “It’s a long story.”

My tone warns him not to press this conversation.

“Well, you’re going to have to fix whatever it was, or you’re royally fucked.” I roll my eyes. What does he know? “Don’t you live with the bastard?”

“I’m staying in his house,” I strain. “But he’s not currently living there.”

“Oh, right. He’s doing that broadway thing.” I scoff. “I don’t see the problem here.”

“Excuse me?”

“We’re on holiday. Just fly out and set things straight again.”

“Yeah,” I drawl. “Cause that’s going to work.”

“Do you have a better idea, Grouch?”

“I could just die alone in a hole.”

He shrugs. “Not like it’d be a great loss.”

“Is there a reason you’re still here?”

“C’mon, Eren.” He looks me dead in the eye so I can’t miss the flash of pain in them. “We already talked about this. Please don’t make me say it again.”

I gulp. “I’m sorry.”

He straightens up and smiles like nothing ever happened.

“Fuck,” He looks at his watch. “Security is locking up in exactly seven minutes, so you have that time to figure all this shit out.” He stands up. “As for me? I’m going home. Marco’s dinner is probably already cold.” I look at him with guilt. I know that I’m the reason he stayed, and the reason Marco’s probably up worrying about him now. “Good luck with your everest of troubles!” He waves in the doorway.

I roll my eyes. “Thanks.”

I count two steps before he leans back. “And, Eren.”

“What?”

“I know you’re trying to figure things out for yourself.” He starts lowly. “But you’re only going to make things worse if you don’t tell people how you feel.” As he continues, his tone shifts to a warning. “I’m not just talking about Levi- though,” He curls his lip in disgust. “You really need to
confess your-” He physically gags over the words. “undying love-”

My cheeks get hot. “I don’t love him.”

He rolls his eyes dramatically. “Who do you think you’re kidding?”

“Whatever, Jean, you have no idea how I feel, but thanks for the advice.” I drawl, expecting him to fucking leave, but when he doesn’t I remember that he said he wasn’t just talking about Levi. My stomach knots instantly. He better not be about to say what I think he is.

“You know I’m not Armin.” His voice get stern.

And he is. “Jean, don’t even-”

“I care about her too, Eren.” He snaps. “And she deserves better than this. Especially from you.”

I simply glower at him.

“Before you do anything else, you need to tell her.” His eyes are stone cold and dead serious. “Or I will.”

“You wouldn’t.” I challenge him, but he just turns back. I get to my feet as he walks away.

“Horseface!” I yell after him, but don’t move.

I hear him say without looking back. “Two days, Eren.”

Ass. Dick. Fucking Horsefaced bastard! I want to sprint after him and tackle him to the ground so I can start beating the shit out of him. I mean, who does he think he is? How could he think he has ANY right to interfere!?

That doesn’t matter now. He’s given you what nobody else has, a proper push.

Whatever. Next time I see Jean Kirstein, I’m going to rip his throat out.

...

The following evening, after a day well spent sleeping and swimming, I cave to Jean’s threat and ask her to meet me for breakfast in the morning. It’s a Sunday and our favorite breakfast place, Waffles, is usually packed with families, old folks, and church goers. Hopefully their presence will be enough to dampen her inevitable outburst.

As promised, the place is packed. We have a hard time finding a seat, so we’re forced to settle with the smallest booth in the corner.

My leg is shaking uncontrollably under the table as Mikasa sits across from me taking a sip of her tea.

"Eren," She says. "You're the one that said we needed to talk."

"Yeah." I let out a deep breath. "I know I did."

All I knew this would be hard, but I wasn't planning it to be damn near impossible.

"So?" She asks. I let out another labored breath and run my hand in my hair. Ew, I'm sweating. "Eren? Are you okay?" I try to nod but it turns into a shake of the head. "What's wrong? What
happened? Who am I killing?"

I take a huge drink of water before rubbing my hands together under the table. Okay, okay, time to make like Shia and JUST DO IT! "Well, it's...complicated and a long story, but hopefully you won't feel the need to kill anyone."

"Is this about Jean?"

"What?" I look at her panicked. She couldn’t know about the kiss, could she? "No. It's about-" I cut myself off.

"What, Eren?"

"This has to do with- er- has to do with Levi."

"Levi?" She eyes me skeptically and I can't tell if she truly does not know where this conversation is going. "What did he do?"

"He didn't really do anything." Except me a few times. And, I guess, he's also responsible for turning me into a heart fluttering mess. "But there is something I need to tell you in-involving him." I hold my breath. "And me."

"You and he?" She raises an eyebrow. That is my only peace offering. It is a chance to just drop it like her eyes are asking me to, and neither of us would ever have to speak about this again. It is a good deal, but I didn't come all this way not to tell her.

"Yeeaahh." I draw that one syllable out to three, slowly and hesitantly stepping past the point of no return. No take backsies now. "Us..."

She hangs her head to her half empty cup and asks in a blank voice, "What happened?"

I sigh. I don't want to talk about it, I don't want her to hate me or him. But, again, I already crossed that line. I look down at my cup now too. "A lot has happened, Mikasa."

I can see her mouth quirk to one side. "This is about Vancouver, isn't it?"

"This is about more than Vancouver." I answer quietly. At least she hasn't stormed off... Yet. "I- I mean, it is about that too, but- fuck this is hard."

"Just tell me, Eren." Her voice is teetering on... exasperation?

"Mikasa," I start trying to simmer her down because, even though she seems unusually relaxed, I don't trust her not to boil over. "I didn't mean for anything to happen." She sighs heavily again. "But, I mean, it just did."

"I see." Her response is barely above a whisper into her raised cup. She seems far too calm about all this.

After a few silent seconds pass, after watching her brow furrow and unfurrow and her eyes close, I realize it. "You knew, didn't you?"

"I guessed." She shrugs with a twitch of her eyebrows. "I'm not a complete idiot."

"How did you ' guess '?"

"First of all, I work at a high profile law firm, I can spot a lie from a mile away." She sighs. "And I
"have known you since you were 8."

"And," I start skeptically. "You're okay with it?"

"Not really." She answers bluntly. "I'd honestly rather you both let whatever happen lie in the past and never talk about it again." There it is. "But seeing the way you look at each other, I doubt that's going to happen. So, I've been trying to warm up to the idea..." She takes a drink before looking at me with a slightly less serious expression. "Besides, you've done worse."

"I can't argue there," I chuckle nervously. Something about this doesn't seem exactly right. And just like that, a thought occurs to me. "How long?"

"Since the hearing." Mikasa looks at her cup as she stirs her tea that must be nearly empty by now. "It was all in the way you looked at each other."

"Huh."

"And, God," She rolls her eyes dramatically. "Don't get me started about how you both have been since you've been back."

Well, yeah, she's got me there. But, damn, I had no idea she suspected anything, neither did Armin. I guess we figured if she knew we definitely would have realized it. God damned Ackermans and their poker faces!

"Can I ask you something else?" I begin skeptically. She smirks but I cut her off. "And don't say I just did!"

She sighs. "Shoot."

"Is that what you were talking about in the hallway that day?" I fold my arms in the table and lean closer. "And what was he meant at Reiner's party about keeping his promise?"

Her upper lip gets stiff. "That's two somethings, Eren."

I ignore her. "I know you guys had been spending a lot of time together..."

"And?" She starts a little too defensively. "Is it not okay to try and rebuild our relationship?"

"Of course it is! If..."

"If what, Eren?"

"If that was what you were doing." I start accusatory.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Well," I lean back again to eye her. Man, I'm on a roll, the thoughts keep coming and my mind is finally trying to string it all together. "Mikasa, you've known about him- where he lives and everything- for how long? And you never tried reconnecting in all that time."

"What's your point?"

"What changed?"

"That was before-" She cuts herself off.
"Before what?"
"It really doesn't matter."
"Before what?"
"You are going to overreact." She raises her eyebrows dangerously. "Just drop it."
"Before. What. Mikasa?"
"Before you decided to go and start throwing your life away!" Her raised voice catches a few people's attention.
"Did you see my life before?" I start defensively. "It wasn't what I'd call glamorous."
"That was only because you hadn't applied yourself to anything else."
"That's what this is really about, isn't it?" I scoff. I should have known. Should have pieced it together sooner. And okay, obviously they have been able to salvage their relationship in the process, but it seems it was only possible because- "You were just using him to keep an eye on me."
"Yes." Her answer is straightforward with no trace of an apology.

Ouch, well this is not going as I expected. Instead I'm the one who's been in the dark. I scoff again. "Wow, Mikasa."

"Are you really that surprised?"
Her question takes me off guard. I want to say yes, because it truly has; but at the same time, it's not really her I'm surprised with. "Was any of it real?"

"What do you mean?"
Shit, I didn't mean to say that out loud. It's not really an answer I can get from her. "Nothing."

I shake my head and restate the question with a new objective. "I mean, was my all my luck, my auditions, the show, any of it real?"

"Of course it was real." She rolls her eyes.

"Levi didn't help at all?"

"He probably did." She shrugs. "I asked him to help you succeed, and he probably pulled a few strings, why should it matter?"

"I can't believe you." I can't believe either of them. I stand and walk away because I need to know for sure. All this time, he's been nothing but a glorified babysitter. Where all of those looks, all his words, all his kisses nothing more than an act? I'd like to think not, but honestly, I don't know. He's more than an absolutely fantastic actor, he's won several awards and has been up for an Oscar a couple times. He could have pulled off the act.

And maybe, just maybe, that's the reason he freaked that night. Maybe it got too real, maybe he revealed too much and realized....fuck, I don't know, something.

There's a hot pit in my stomach that's making me nauseous. I need to know what was the truth and what were the lies.
And there's only one person who can tell me that.

... 

"New York?" Armin speaks into my ear as I frantically pack a couple hours later.

"Yeah, New York."

"Just like that?"

"Yup."

"What about MP?"

"I finished there Friday."

"Oh, yeah. And?"

"And what?" My voice echoes in the spacious bathroom as I try to rummage up toiletries.

"Well how did it go?"

"Um...fine, I guess. Can I take a 16 oz bottle of shampoo if there's only 12 oz left?"

"No, it has to be in a measurable container." He answers in exasperation. "What did you do for the week? You worked through last weekend too, right?"

"Ahh..." Do I need a toothbrush or should I buy one when I get there? "I don't know, just stuff. I manned the soundboard with one of Jean's technicians. Then I messed with some of the autotune—which Jean complained about because I made him sound like a deranged hippo!"

Armin laughs with me. "Nice."

"Well it made everyone else laugh. Then the last few days I spent sometime on my own song. I recorded, and helped them mess with background stuff and plan out something we’ll have to work on after the holiday. Overall, it was pretty cool, actually."

"So are you becoming a Rockstar now?"

I grimace on my way back to my room. "Nah. It was cool, but not entirely for me. I'd rather spend my time in front of a camera."

"And now you're running after Levi?"

I grab a pair of pants from the floor and bring them to my nose. "How important is it for your clothes to be clean before packing them?"

"Eren, would you stop for a minute and talk to me?"

"I need to see him, Armin." I sigh and drop myself onto my bed. "I need to know."

"You do know, Eren. You know what was real."

"No," I croak. "I don't."

"Stop being dramatic."
"I'm not being dramatic!" I whine. "Okay, maybe I am, but still."

"Okay," His tone indicates that he's given up this argument. "So, New York."

I sigh. "Yeah, New York."

"Where are you going to stay when you get there?"

"Well, I haven't figured that out yet, but Isabel had mentioned that Levi actually has a place out there."

"I don't know if it's a good idea for you to stay with him."

"Probably not, but where else am I going to stay."

"Well you're not exactly broke anymore, so you have options."

"I at least want to try and talk to him first."

"Fine," he sounds annoyed. "But I'm still making you a reservation at the Seasons. That way, if things go south you won't be sleeping on the streets."

"Thanks mom."

"Do you want me to go with you?" He starts in a worried tone. "Because truth be told I have some jobs I'm picking up for Petra while she's gone, and I can swing a few of them as a reason to visit our branch out there."

"Armin, I'll be fine."

"Sure you will, but I'm still coming."

"Armin," I sit straight up. "No."

"Actually, since it'd be part business, I bet I could get the studio to pay for it...well some of it. Like my ticket and the room."

I sigh. "You're not backing down from this, are you?"

"Nope."

I groan into the phone and fall back on my bed. "My flight leaves at 7."

"I doubt I can make it on that one because I'll have to talk to Pixis. So do you think you can wait, like, 24 hours?"

I sigh. "I already bought my ticket, Armin."

"Well, I'll see what I can do." He takes a deep breath.

"Eren, let me ask you something."

"Okay..."

"Levi," He starts curiously. "Do you really feel like he's worth all this?"

I sigh and throw my arm over my eyes. "I've been asking myself the same thing. But...I figure I
wouldn’t feel the need to go through all this shit if he wasn’t, ya know?"

"So, this is about more than just ‘getting answers’ ."

"I guess it is." I sigh. "But I need those, too."

"I still can’t believe Mikasa knew ."

"Me neither."

"I can’t believe she didn’t say anything !"

"Dude, Armin, me neither." I get back up to start grabbing more clothes. "The only thing I can figure is that she didn’t say anything because of her deal with Levi. Like it was part of their whole plan."

"I doubt that ."

"Well, then, what do think happened, oh wise one?"

"I don’t know, but I do know Mikasa wouldn’t do something like that. She must have different reasons. Reasons she hasn’t elected to share just yet."

"Yeah, well, at this point I don’t know if I’d believe her if she did elect to tell me."

"Be fair, Eren. Despite the fact that she knew anyway, you had been keeping this whole Levi thing from her for how long? I mean, you’re actually pretty lucky that she didn’t completely freak out and disown you both. I mean, that’s what you were afraid of, right?"

Fucking ass has a point. "Okay, yeah, I get that, but I still have a right to be angry!"

"I’m not arguing that, but don’t blow it all out of proportion either."

"I can’t help it, Blue, it’s in my nature."

"You can say that again."

"Well, let me know what Pixis says."

"Can do."

"Oh, hey, Armin?" I begin sheepishly. "Either way, do you think you could give me a ride to the airport?"

“What, tired of joy riding in Levi’s car? ” He chuckles.

“Ha. Ha. Tell him, and I’ll remove you from the color wheel."

“Technically, if you did, there’d be no green. So, really, your existence depends on mine."

“Shut up.” I smile to myself because he’s right. I wouldn’t be able to function on the planet without him. Though, I might blend with the martians...who’s to say? “But seriously, can you take me?”

"Of course, Eren."

"Thanks."

"I’ve got to go. Need to make a few calls, but I’ll pick you up in a couple hours."
"I'll be waiting. Green out."

I march out of my room with an armful of laundry for the machine across the hall, but I almost end up dropping it all when I catch Isabel leaning against the wall. She moves to catch some of the clothes and helps me load it all into the wash. After closing the door I turn to her.

“So you’re chasing after him.” She deadpans before I have a chance to say anything.

“Wha-Where did you hear that?”

“I was standing outside your door, Eren.”

“You were eavesdropping?”

“Only accidentally...at first.” She grabs her arm self consciously. “I just wanted to know if you wanted take out, then I heard you talking about New York and seeing Big Bro and whether or not to find a hotel or just show up on his doorstep.”

“Oh, so pretty much everything.” I say sarcastically and fall against the washer machine. It’s not like I was trying to hide anything from her, but I didn’t necessarily want her to know either. “You’re not going to tell him, are you?”

She sits against the purring machine beside me. “Of course not.” That’s a relief. “That’d suck all the romanticism out of it.”

“Romanti-what?”

“That’s what this is about, isn’t it?” She looks at me with her brow furrowed. “Telling him how much you love him, and how sorry you are for driving him away.”

“Excuse me, he left!”

“Yes,” She starts calmly. “Because my Big Bro, invincible as he is, has never liked the idea of falling, and, Eren, you pretty much pushed him over the edge.”

“How’s that my fault?”

“You didn’t jump with him.” She looks at me with a mixture of pity and anger. “You just let him fall, and right now he doesn’t know that you’ve jumped in after him.”

“You always have the most complicated analogies, and I think follow you, but just incase say everything again because I have no idea what you just said.”

She sighs. “What I mean is that he knew how he felt about you a lot longer than you recognized it. Then, whatever happened in Vancouver, gave him hope that you snatched away when you came back. And, now? I don’t know what happened after we all fell asleep, but I’m willing to bet he let himself trust you enough to expose some of his wounds.” Damn, she nailed it. “You have to understand how hard that must have been. He hardly has shared those memories with me, so to open himself up to you, and at the same time be terrified that you would reject him.”

“I would never reject him for that.”

“Which is even worse!”

“I don’t follow.”
“It would have been easier for him to close himself back off and cut you out than try to accept that someone else might accept him the way he is...and knowing how fucked up Big Bro’s psyche is, well, shit, it’s no wonder he ran away!”

I get quiet as the weight of her words settle in. It all is clicking into place now because I know that kind of self loathing. The deep dark pit you throw yourself into because you can’t accept yourself or what you’ve done, and how the hell could anyone ever love you when you feel like you are so fucking unworthy of it? Of anything. So, I get it because I’ve been there, and it took the two people I hold nearest to my heart to pull me out. But, there’s another thing, I was more than willing to let them help me where Levi’s in so deep he’s used to the dark. Used to the pain of being alone to the point where he’s more comfortable that way.

Even though, to an outsider’s eye, he has everything he could ask for. He’s rich, he’s handsome, everybody knows his name! How could a man like that be broken? After all, he doesn’t look broken. There’s no way he understands true struggle because he’s just so above everything.

And I admit, I thought the same things before I met him, before I knew him.

Once my laundry is finished, I’m only vaguely aware of my movements as I fold and pack them all away. I don’t think about the time or how much has passed until I hear Armin knock on the door while leaning in my doorway.

“You ready?” He asks like he can read through the blank expression on my face. I smile and follow him downstairs. Isabel is waiting for us with two boxes of take out in her hands. We both eye them skeptically.

“Fine.” She mocks offense and pulls them back. “But you’ll be sorry when you’re stuck with airplane food.”

I look at Armin: ‘She’s got a point.’

We shrug and accept them with a thanks.

“Well,” Armin starts. “We really need to go if we have any chance of catching our flight.”

“Our flight?” I ask enthusiastically. “Pixis gave you the checkered flag?”

“Um…” He rubs the back of his neck sheepishly. “Not in so many words, but you always say that it’s better to ask forgiveness than permission.”

“I. am.” I sniffle and wipe away a fake tear. “So proud.”

“Ooh,” Isabel hops. “I’ll be right back, don’t go anywhere!” She returns not even a minute later now twisting a silver key between her fingers.

“You may need this.” She tosses it to me, and I barely catch it. “I’ll text you his address when you land.” She pulls me into a tight hug. “Bring him back for me, yeah?”

“I’ll do my best.”

We leave in good time with our bags in the back and our dinner on my lap. Armin is talking to me about work and how excited he is to see New York and other things to which I shallowly pay attention to. Only because I have other things occupying my thoughts. What will I say when I see him? What will he do? Does he even want to see me?
I won’t know any of these answers until I’m in front of Levi, but now I realize that Armin was right again.

I might not know everything Levi hid from me or did for me in fulfilling his promise to Mikasa, but I know the storms of his eyes, and I know the heat of his touch, and I know that everything that truly matters couldn’t have been faked.

Chapter End Notes

I love you guys. You are so inspiring and encouraging and I want you to know how much that means. Thank you from the deepest part of my heart!
Sorry, Not Sorry

Chapter Summary

Eren gets some advice on how to approach Levi, but...well, things don't go exactly to plan.

Chapter Notes

Supes explicit in this chapter.
A tiny bit shorter than the average chapter, but 2/3rds of this is pure, unadulterated smut.
I hope that makes up for it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I don't really know what Armin spiked my drink with, but I was out like a light. I did even know we had taken off yet until he was shaking my shoulder telling me to grab my bag. We were bumped up to first class because all of coach was full, so I was curled completely in my seat by the window.

"You have a little bit of-" He gestures to the spot right below his lower lip. I mirror him and end up wiping away a pool of drool. Shrugging, I wipe it on my shirt. "Gross."

I can definitely tell we're not in Kansas anymore because, as we step into the gate, the air is heavy and frigid. People push through us on the way to baggage claim, at baggage claim, and as we try putting on our jackets before stepping out the doors. Yeah, this is definitely New York. Standing right beside the door is a man holding a sign for Arlert.

"Does anyone know you're here?"

"Aside from Mikasa and Isabel, I don't think so." He shrugs.

"You told Mikasa?"

"Of course I told her, it was that or she was going to go with you herself."

I scoff. "Like I would have let her." Armin's breath hangs in the air in what is a sigh in the upmost exasperation. "So, do we head to the mysterious stranger holding your name?"

"Might as well check it out."

We approach the man cautiously. "Is one of you gentlemen Armin Arlert?" Ooh, gentlemen? I like this guy already. Armin shyly raises his hand. The man puts down his sign and leads us outside to a small limousine. The frosted air bites into my nose and my glasses fog up immediately. Crystal flakes of snow fall carefully to the ground before they melt into the heat of the pavement. It's not the crisp, powering stuff of dreams, of unnamed trails outside of Vancouver, but it is enchanting nonetheless.

The man opens the door for us before loading our bags in the trunk. We slide into the unexpected luxury awaiting us. I have no idea where this all came from, but I'll take it! Worse case scenario, he...
drives us to an abandoned lot and kills us, but at least we'll go out sipping champagne on hand stitched leather seats! I childishly begin playing with the window controls when, out of the corner of my eye, something twitches on the other side of the limo.

"Shit!" My head hits the roof from how much Petra and Hanji scared me. I think my reaction actually freaked Armin out the most as he clutches his chest. "You can't just do that!"

"Do what?" They both snicker.

"Sneak up on people!"

"Technically," Armin begins. "They were here first."

"Thank you, Armin." Hanji tilts their half full glass of champagne at him.

"May I ask how you knew we were coming?"

"Oh, hunny." Petra begins. "Nobody in my department leaves without me knowing."

"Did Pixis call you?"

She laughs. "Next time you're expecting to surprise someone, don't call the boss to ask permission!"

I turn to Armin. "I thought you were all for asking forgiveness not permission."

"Erm-" He scratches the top of his head. "Well, I did call Pixis, but he was already on holiday, so I didn't think he'd get my message until we were back. So, technically, I never got permission, and had full intentions of asking forgiveness."

"He gets his messages forwarded." Hanji shrugs after taking a big swig.

"Does that mean..." I start. My throat feels like sandpaper and my stomach has fallen at the thought that maybe this whole trip has been for nothing.

"Levi doesn't know you're here, hun." Petra smiles softly. I relax in my seat with a deep seeded sigh of relief.

"Props to you, mon loup!" Hanji toasts me. "For coming all the way out here to get yo man!"

My cheeks get hot and I avert my gaze to the slow passing city. People hustle on the sidewalks, faces down, bags in one hand, cell phone pressed to their ear with the other. So much like L.A, yet so different. People here walk with blinders, when at home it seems everyone's got their eyes out for something (really, someone). Plus, I mean, snow. It's beautiful as it falls in front of the strings of Christmas lights decorating the awnings of shops.

Wisps of steam coming up from the manholes in the streets bellow around their feet, creating a strangely mystical atmosphere. It's a unique beauty of this city that I can't help but feel goes unappreciated by most its inhabitants.

"-Eren?"

"Huh?" I hadn't realized somebody was speaking to me.

Hanji is pouring themself another glass of champagne. "Your plan, boy?" They lean forward to hand me the glass. I reach for it, but Armin intercepts.
"You're underage, Eren." He brings the glass to his lips and take a sip out of spite. I glower at him, but Hanji has another glass at my fingertips. They give me a wink as I immediately take a gulp before Armin can do a damn thing about it. He rolls his eyes.

"But you haven't answered my question, dear." Hanji raise their eyebrows expectantly.

"Well..." I take another long sip.

"He doesn't have one." Armin answers. I cough on my swallow.

"Oh, Eren." Petra sighs sympathetically.

"What?" I sputter while wiping the golden liquid from my chin.

"He will eat you alive if you go in there unprepared."

_I know._

I gulp partially because I'm terrified, partially because I'm exhilarated.

"Okay," Hanji leans forward with their elbows on their knees. "Here's what you're going to do..." We all mimic them, leaning between the space between us as if we're preparing for a great heist.

"Your primary objective is to show him that you are serious."

"Okay." I nod. "And how do I do that?"

"Well," Petra starts. "He needs to know that there are consequences for his actions. You need to hold him responsible for those actions before revealing anything else. Tell him how much it hurt you. Demand answers. Make him feel like he could really lose you if he doesn't give them to you."

"Doesn't that seem...manipulative?"

"Yes and no." Armin answers. Kind of. "For Levi, it may actually be a necessary approach."

"Otherwise, he'll have a chance to put up his walls." Hanji explains. "You'll be taking him completely off guard, so break through while he's still in shock so he won't be able to lie to you."

"He'll get defensive," Petra starts. "But be persistent. He'll ask you why you came at all, what do you say?"

"Um..." I hesitate. "I want answers?"

"Yes." Armin nods.

"And you deserve them." Hanji urges.

I nod, trying to commit everything they're saying to memory. Fuck, they're speaking quickly.

"After that," Petra speaks softly. "It's important to offer some answers yourself."

"What do you mean?" I ask on the defensive.

She sighs. "He's got questions, too, Eren."

I bite my tongue, I know she's right. The car pulls to a curb.

"Okay, Mon loup." Hanji sit back and rubs their hands together. "Show time!"
"I'm sorry, what?"

"We're here." Petra explains. "Don't worry, he won't get home for another hour or so."

"What?"

"Isabel gave you a key, yeah?"

"B-but-"

"You got this, Eren!" *Et tu, Armin?* "I'll take your things to the hotel."

"What if I need them?" I don't really plan on having to go to the hotel.

"You don't." He answers sternly.

"Yes." Petra starts, almost motherly. "Probably best you don't stay over."

"What?"

"No sex, Eren!" Hanji exclaims clear enough to bring a shade of red to all of our cheeks. At that, I think I'll take my leave.

"Remember what you're here for." Petra says reassuring.

"What am I here for?" I ask desperately.

Hanji hangs her head, Petra takes a deep breath, and Armin pinches the bridge of his nose.

"Answers, Eren." Armin tells me.

"Oh...yeah." The door snaps shut behind me, and I feel like I'm going to have a fucking heart attack. I didn't think I'd be seeing him so soon. I don't think I'm ready to.

Too late now.

I straighten my glasses and take a bracing breath before stepping inside.

"Excuse me, sir." A big burly man intercepts me on my way to the elevator. "Is there something I can help you with?"

I.E 'What are you doing here?'

"No," I take Isabel's key from my pocket and wave in front of his face. "I have a key, so..."

I try stepping around him but he moves with me. "And exactly what unit is that key for?"

Um..."The penthouse?"

"The penthouse?"

Pretty sure that's what Isabel said. "Yup."

The man scoffs. "I suggest you turn around right now."

"Nonononono" I stammer. "See, I know Levi."
"Sure ya do kid." He straightens up. Fuck this, I turn around and wait until he relaxes and looks to the side before I turn and try to bolt past him. He seizes my arms and begins pulling me with him.

"He's expecting me!" I lie as I struggle against him.

"Okay, kid, you're coming with me."

He sets me in a small room off the main lobby, takes away my suitcase, and asks for an i.d. "Look," I start after he pulls out a phone. "I'm not some crazy fanboy! I'm really do know him."

The man is not at all amused. I wonder if he's calling head of security. "Mister Ackerman." Fuck! I throw my head in my hands. So much for the element of surprise. "Sorry to bother you, sir, but were you expecting any company?" ... "Well, I just caught a kid trying to sneak his way to the penthouse. He says he knows you."...the man looks me up and down. "Well, he's tall...a little scrawny," Hey! "Brown hair that looks like it hasn't seen a shower in a few days." Whoa, what the fuck, man? "Glasses. And he's got nothing with him except phone, wallet, and a key he claims goes to your flat."..."According to his license, his name is Eren Thorn."..."Okay, I understand, sir." I glare at the man when he turns around. "Lucky for you, your story might just pan out."

"So, can I go now?"

"Sure." He holds a hand up to me when I try to stand. "You're welcome to leave this building, but Mister Ackerman still has to come identify you himself before I can let you any further inside."

I groan. This is not exactly how I envisioned my surprise visit. I'm not even allowed my phone as I wait, which I'm pretty sure is illegal, but the man does remind me that I am welcome to any of my things as long as I walk out of here and didn't come back. Consequently, I have to pass my time staring at the face of a clock, literally watching time pass. About twenty minutes later, I see raven hair just in front of the man outside of the door. My heart is pulsating throughout my body. I think I'm gonna be sick. I drop my elbows to my knees and hang my head. It snaps up when I hear a sharp whistle.

"C'mon, Sparky." He's already walking away before I get a chance to look at him face to face. The man hands me my phone and wallet as I see Levi's back with one hand tucked into his pocket. When I reach him, he's twirling Isabel's key in the other. "Where'd you get the key?"

That's it? No hey or how are you, not even a what are you doing here. He won't even look at me.

"Isabel." I answer. The door dings and he hums thoughtfully before stepping in with me on his heels. Levi twists her key in the slot for the penthouse suite. He smells strongly like stale tobacco which means he must have just finished smoking. I'm not surprised, I'm the cause of his stress, after all. We pass a few floors in silence, but silence is deadly so I turn to him. "Levi, I-"

"Not here, Eren." He deadpans. I swallow my words. I guess deadly it is. Looks like that whole 'breaking walls before he has a chance to build them' thing didn't pan out. Once we reach his floor, once the doors close, he turns to me. His silhouette is practically black against the city shining through the windows. "What are you doing here?"

And there it is.

I was prepared to answer, had practiced in my mind over and over, I'm going to start by demanding an explanation for everything. Going to hound him until he tells me what the fuck's been going through that incomparable mind of his this whole time. Because I'm fucking angry, right?
Only, now that I'm in front of him, all that anger, all those questions are gone. My mind's been wiped clean, and all I can focus on is the man in front of me. The man with his sleek dark blue peacoat undone with a grey scarf hanging loosely around his neck. The man with the silky ink black hair and soft skin. The man I have been both dreading and dreaming to see. Only one thing is wrong with the picture. I can't see his eyes. I walk purposefully across the room, hook my hand around his neck underneath his scarf to hold him in place. There they are. Steely grey orbs ensnaring me in their tempests. I can feel his pulse race underneath my fingers, watch as his pupils dilate to take more of me in. Then I pull his head so that his lips are pressed tightly to mine. I wrap my other hand around the back of his head to hold him closer, never wanting to let go. But I do because I want to see those enchanting eyes again. Levi stares straight into my own like he is seeing me for the first and the last time. He slowly brings up one of his hands to thread his fingers in the hair where my head meets my neck, then, holding my eyes until the very last moment, he gently leans up to recapture my lips. The kiss is so soft that it's almost like it doesn't even happen, yet, as we part, I know it was a kiss I won't forget.

"I missed you." I whisper as I stare at his soft expression. His mouth parts with any response lost upon his lips. So lean back in as if I can capture it by stealing his breath once more. The moment there is a breath sized gap between our lips, Levi crumbles his shoulders so that his forehead is tucked to my chest.

"I missed you too." He sighs while running his hands down the thin fabric over my back and settling themselves on my hips. I place a light kiss to the top of his head. My fingers are folded over his scarf on the back of his neck and I slowly pull it over his head before dropping it to the floor. Then, with my fingers placed beneath his chin, I turn his face up to meet my lips. His jacket is next to fall. I feel him smile more than I see it. Feel the butterflies in my stomach and the heat in my cheeks before he slowly pulls off my glasses and carefully sets them on the small bar that rises from the counter. As he steps back, his fingers begin trailing underneath my shirt, nails grazing over the muscles hiding beneath my skin, and he pulls it over my head. My mouth falls to find his pulse point and I graze, then lightly clamp down my teeth over it just to feel his breath catch. "You really are a fucking brat."

"You love it." I mumble into the crease of his neck and shoulder. He sighs heavily and leans his head back to give me better access. I take my time kissing his warm skin while I hook my hands on the backs of his thighs. His hitched breath is cut off when I suddenly lift him off the ground. He instinctively wraps his legs around my waist as I walk until I can push him onto the kitchen counter. With his legs still wrapped around me, I lean him back. My fingers make slow work on the buttons of his shirt with my sloppy kisses trailing right behind them. Once I reach the top of his belt, I pull the shirt open to fully expose him to my hungry eyes. My tongue lightly traces a path all the way up to his pert right nipple. I pause for a moment to lick my lips before running my hot, wet tongue over it as I bring up a thumb to roll over the other one. His back arches as he shamelessly Levi-moans. I call them Levi-moans because, much like his stomping, he doesn’t moan per say. Rather, the rhythm and loudness of his breath changes. I move my hands to firmly grip his hips so I can keep him in place with his legs spread wide and hooked around me. I lightly grab his nipple between my teeth and slowly pull while I grind my body into his. This time he does moan. Then in one quick motion, he sits up to pull me into another passion swept kiss. The angle of his body changes just enough that he now, if it weren’t for the counter, rides my hips. Through his very inconvenient pants, his firm erection is pressed between our bodies. Mine runs into the counter as the overhanging part of his ass rubs against it. Levi’s mouth goes straight to my jaw and works it’s way to the lobe of my ear. He grinds into me and I push him away enough to start working on his pants. I pull them off and throw them somewhere behind me. There it is. Loud and proud and aching for attention. I take my time to run my hands up Levi’s chest, his shirt still splayed around him, and he slowly leans back on his elbows. My fingers run down his sides to pin him down by his hips. First, I nip at his left hip bone. Simply because it looks so soft and delicious. Next, I trail my tongue to the top of his short and...
curlies. I make eye contact as I curl it up and off his skin. Even in this dim light, I can see his eyes blown wide. Keeping that lustful gaze, I position myself up far enough to slowly wrap my mouth around his tip and suck it off with a loud pop. He throws his head back and groans. I do it again, this time going a little further, and again further still. I repeat this process until I’ve taken all I can of him, and I begin setting a rhythm. Levi’s eyes find mine again. Just staring as I hollow my cheeks. He wraps his fingers in my hair and begins matching my steady rhythm with light thrusts. He watches me the whole time as he fucks my mouth and even as I pull off to grab a breath. He pushes himself back up to grip my neck and slam our mouths back together. Licking every inch of my mouth, sucking on my tongue, and biting my lower lip when he pulls away.

“Damn, Eren.” He gruffs, voice raw and full of lust. “I almost forgot how talented you are with that fucking mouth.” I smile widely before leaning in for another long, meaningful kiss. He nips at my tongue as he pulls back. “And, as much as I’d love getting fucked on my countertop, I really don’t want to have to spend the next three years cleaning it.”

I kiss him again before replying lowly in his ear. “So where’s the bedroom?”

Levi pushes himself forward. I only hold him tighter against me. As if I’m going to let him go. He smiles under hooded eyes, wraps himself around me with his legs around my waist and arms around my neck, and he whispers into my neck. “Down the hall, to the right.”

My lips press against the side of his neck as I pull him off the counter. He wriggles out of his shirt and leans himself up enough to bite at my mouth just as I get to the edge of the hall. I stumble. “Do you want me to drop you?”

“I want you to hurry the fuck up.”

Well, that surely sets a fire in my stomach. Adjusting my grip to move him higher around my waist, I turn around to pin him against the nearest wall before attacking his lips. I moan as his tongue curls in my mouth and his legs tense around my body. But he’s starting to get heavy so I pull back and start in the direction of the bedroom again. Levi’s attached his mouth to my neck, wet tongue licking my jawline all the way to the bottom of my ear where he drags the lobe between his teeth. I try to ignore his movements, the heat of his fucking everything, until I’m able to throw him onto the bed. In the way his legs are wrapped and the grip he doesn’t loosen around my neck, Levi pulls me on top of him. His breath catches the same time I moan as our throbbing hard cocks get pressed even tighter between us. Levi’s already made my stomach wet with precum, and I am sure I’ve soaked through the front of my boxers by now. But that can wait. All I want is to taste every inch of this man. Want to be sure he’s really here, if nothing else. I start by intertwining our fingers and pulling his hands up one at a time so that I can kiss them. I move on to bouncing between his wrists, then his arms (admittedly skipping his armpit) down his right side first. I suck on his the skin beside his belly button just to feel those tight muscles contract. After doing the same to the other half of his torso, my tongue delves in his belly button. He groans and hips roll. I run that tongue, lap up the salty traces of perspiration, from the bottom of his happy trail, back over his belly button, all the way up his sternum to begin kissing his collarbone. His breaths are coming in shorter and shorter with each press of my lips against his skin. So impatient that by the time I reach the side of his other hip, he tightens his knees around my waist and flips me over. I smile widely at the sight of him looming over me, at the feeling of his weight pressing down on my stomach. My fingers slide up his thighs and dig themselves into the well toned meat of his delicious ass. He sits up and leans over me to fumble with the drawer of the nightstand and settles on his knees so he is off of me. He takes one of my hands from his thighs.

"If you're gonna grope my ass,” His voice is gruff while he squeezes warm lube on my finger tips. "Might as well be useful."
For a moment I'm taken aback by the desire in his eyes. I move my fingers around his body to my ring and pinky finger (because they're unlubed) are able to find that puckered entryway. When I do, when my forefinger begins to push through the rim, Levi lowers himself. He winces while adjusting and after a few moments, I begin slowly moving my finger in and out. When the time comes to add another one I use my other forefinger that was gripping the other side of his ass. This way, I'm actually able to move them opposite of each other. One slides in as the other slides out, then they slide together and curl apart to graze his inner walls on the way back down. He arches his back and throws back his head as my fingers run over his prostate. I smirk as I massage it with alternating rhythms. One of my middle fingers joins the fun as Levi begins bouncing himself on them. Fuck! Beads of sweat glisten all over his body, his hair is falling in front of his face contorted in pure pleasure. His muscles ripple underneath his skin with each of his movements. I could cum just watching him.

"F-uck!" After a gurgled grunt, he pulls off of me and leans above me to catch his breath. His mouth swoops down to mine.

"Enough playtime." His drool is still connected to my lips as he whispers that. My dick twitches achingly. Fuck, I need to touch it. No he needs to touch it! And he reads my mind by making quick work of ripping off my pants. Levi slowly, softly, cruelly follows his finger from the base of my angry red penis along the most prominent vein. "Shit, Eren." He chuckles. "Do you have any blood left anywhere else in your body?"

I growl because, now that the kraken has been released, it needs to be fucking relieved. He smirks and slowly climbs back over my waist.

I don't think he has ever looked at the human body before because my waist is not exactly my where my cock is!

He pours some more lube onto his hand and moves it behind him to (finally) grasp my hungry cock, slathers the warm gel around it, and squeezes ever so slightly. My eyes flash and he smirks. Levi guides my tip to his entrance and ever so slowly- so slowly it hinders on torture- lowers his body.

And he is so fucking hot around my dick. Inside him is so tight and wet in all the right ways. I wait to move until his brow relaxes, then I thrust my hips up. He gasps, I grab the bend in his knees and do it again. My teeth bites into my lower lip, I watch his movements with so much lust, I wouldn't be surprised if my eyes looked black. His certainly do as he begins to pick up the pace. His ass hits my hips noisily. His head is thrown back with the curve of his neck and I twist my hips to get his attention. It works. His eyes snap to mine, his mouth stuck open in a half smile and he begins rotating his hips. He moves in a figure eight, taking my dick with his each twist of his hips. His eyes close, jaw drops, and body tenses when my hard cock rubs against that burning spot inside him. He ruts against me again and his face contorts into a silent moan. His fingernails have attached to my hips and he's pulling them further up with each of my thrusts. God, he's fucking breathtaking. My dick shudders inside him and I know I am able to cum the moment Levi gives me permission to. For now, I hold out, try my best to keep it up because I want to see every expression he can make, hear every fucking sound.

There's so much to say, too much, but the way our bodies move together speaks better than words ever could.

I move my hand up his back to hold him in place as I sit up. I keep thrusting into him, he keeps grinding down on me. Our sweat makes holding each other a little more difficult so our solution is to dig our fingernails in just enough to keep our grips. I claw to his back, he to my shoulder. Our mouths, breathless, heaving, lazily press together. Grazing teeth on skin when we have no breath to
"Eren," He purrs. My body shudders when I look into his eyes. "You're so fucking-" His breath hitches. "GOOD!" My balls are swollen, my cock's pulsating with the desire to cum. But I can't. Not yet. I lick his chest, my fingers scratch down his back, he moans, I whimper. Fuck, if he makes that noise one more time... He moves his hand from my shoulder to tug back my hair. In one fluid movement, I flip him on his back to finish him off. My thrusts become less fluid, more urgent, desperate. My abs rub against his swollen penis with every fucking one. His balls roll with the rhythm of my hips. I can feel the heat rising, his pulse fucking hammering through it. Levi's back arches and he jerks me around with a wiggle of his hips.

He leans forward. Fingers laced in my hair pulling me closer to grunt in my ear.

"I need you to cum." He commands hungrily.

God, Mary, Satin, Baby fucking Jesus, FUCKING FINALLY! I muffle my holler into his skin as I shoot into him hard. His body spasms around me, his ass clench which milks another orgasm out of me. I clamp down my teeth to keep quiet. He throws his head back and screams louder than I could ever have imagined from him. I collapse on top of him. His body is too fucking hot right now, and he must feel the same because he almost immediately tries to push me off. I chuckle and roll onto my back by his side. We stay there, heaving, wheezing every now and then, and I slide my hand along the sheets until I find his and intertwine our fingers. Then he starts laughing. It's such a beautiful sound, so light and careless it makes me want to find a way to bottle it up so I could always carry with me. My cheeks hurt from holding the smile I can't get rid of and I find myself laughing with him. Our laughter eventually fades, but we have done nothing more than twitch our toes. I'm the first to attempt to move my jelly legs to the side of the bed, my hand slips out of Levi's as I do.

The sheets are completely soaked in our sweat and semen, it's fucking disgusting, plus I feel slimy and sticky and need a fucking shower. Even though I don't want to stand, I know I must.

"Levi, we're gross." I look down at him. He barely moves his head to look at me with a smile plastered on his face. I swear he looks 10 years younger that way.

"I know." He drawls. "Trust me, if I could move, I would."

I sympathize completely. All of my muscles ache. He hoods his eyes and settles that smile into a smirk. "Oh no." He slips his tongue over his lower lip to draw it between his teeth. "Don't give me that look, I'm not carrying you again."

He snorts. "I can't believe you carried me the first time. No offense."

"Some taken. What do you think I've been doing every damn day?"

"Eating, gaming, sleeping."

I glare at him. "Besides that."

"Working your ass off?"

"That too, but I mean training."

"So, you've been training this whole time so that you'd be able to carry me to my bedroom?"

"You were the one training me."
He leans up on his elbow to slowly look me up and down. "And a damn fine job I've done." I feel my body flush. And when I respond by tearing the covers off the bed, he laughs again. "Accept the compliment, kid. You're fucking gorgeous."

I roll my eyes because if I'm gorgeous, he's fucking Godlike. With red cheeks, I finish stripping the bed. Well every part of the bed except where Levi stays laying. "Do you want to sleep like this?"

"Fuck no." He leans up a little more. "Help me out here, Sparky."

I hook my arm underneath his still sweaty and gross armpit and help pull him to his feet. "Aren't you the one who has more stamina than I could hope for?"

"What can I say, Eren." He looks me in the eye and half smiles. "You're fucking good."

I snort. "No pun intended?"

"You are such a nerd."

"Yeah, yeah." With my arm around his waist, I help guide him into a nice cool shower. Then I finish stripping the bed. My movements are stiff as hell, but I manage to remake the bed before Levi pretty much limps over and throws himself back on it. He groans. I smile to myself and take my turn scrubbing myself down. He left more marks on me than I thought. Scratches on my shoulders and hip sting under the water, but I can't help reveling in it. It is a sting well earned. By the time I come out with my boxers and tee shirt back on, I find Levi curled beneath the covers. I turn out the lights before molding myself behind him.

Sorry, not sorry, Armin.

With my nose in his soft, damp hair, I take a moment to breath him in. There's that mint I love, and of course, since I just used his shampoo, I'll still smell like him tomorrow. I tuck my head over his and close my eyes. But he catches me off guard when he takes my hand and places a firm kiss to it. I returned the gesture by kissing the top of his head.

"Eren?" He asks.

"Hm?" I smile into his hair and nestle closer.

It comes out lower than a whisper. A breath, really, warming my fingers before kissing them softly. "I'm sorry."

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for your comments, your kudos, your patience, and most of all your kindness. I appreciate it more than you know, so I will keep telling you until you get the idea :)
My nose is nestled in the crevasse of smooth skin. With one breath I'm overwhelmed with the scent of blueberries and amber underneath the smell of my own shampoo. It's warmth and comfort and absolutely Eren.

This is far from the first time I've woken up in his arms. Actually I'm usually the one to wake before noon if I can help it. His body is molded to mine, head resting on top of my own as I'm curled into his chest. I feel the steady rhythm of his breaths both in the rise and fall underneath me, and above me as he lightly blows my hair. My bladder tells me to move, but my limbs protest when I do.

Fuck, I'm sore.

It's been a good long while since I've been bottom, and even so, I have never had sex like that. It was...sensual, to say the least. The way we moved together went far beyond two people on a hunt for pleasure. Rather, it was as though we were two people doing our best to become one. To join in such away that we couldn't be broken apart. I guess that's what they mean by 'making love'.

Holy shit, super sore as I saunter into the bathroom. It's like I've done a million squats, ran a million miles, and, fuck, every other physical exertion you could think of all at once.

"I'm getting old." I mumble to myself after splashing cool water on my face. How I managed to take a shower last night is beyond me. I don't bother getting dressed for the day, I'm competently content in my pajama pants, thank you very much. I'd be more content staying naked, but it's winter and it's too cold for that shit even after the heater kicks in. After vigorously cleaning the counter and picking up the clothes strewn all over the place, I put the coffee on (because it's a coffee kind of day). Then I slowly begin trying to stretch out my aching muscles. I finish when I'm comfortably moving my limbs about 10 minutes later and I hear rustling coming from my room. Sounds like sleeping beauty's ready to greet the day. And before 11, too? I'm impressed. Maybe I'll actually be able to spend some time with the kid before going to rehearsal.

I'm pouring myself a cup of coffee when Eren comes up behind me. Enveloping me in his warm arms, he tucks his head beside mine to kiss my cheek. I can feel his smile against my skin. "Good morning."
I lean into him and lift my head to the side for a proper kiss. His mouth tastes like spearmint. "You brushed your teeth."

He smiles. "I know how much you hate morning breath."

Dammit if that's not the sexiest thing! This time I turn around before pulling myself up for a full french frontal. Eren's arms hold me close to him. My bare skin rubs against the soft sweater he's wearing over his boxers. A sweater that, when I'm back to my own level, looks more like a belly shirt with three quarter sleeves. "You're gonna stretch out all of my clothes, kid."

"Well," He starts, bringing a hand to rub the back of his neck. "It was cold and I don't have my bag with me."

"I was wondering about that." I finish stirring in the creamer into my giant mug of coffee. It's a black mug and on it, in bright red letters letters, is hand painted 'Levi Ackerman: Black Coffee. Black Soul'. As endearing as it is false, isn't it? Not the soul part, if I had one I'd imagine it'd be black, but the coffee part because I hate black coffee almost as much as I hate unfinished sentences. I'll give you one guess who made it for me on my 26th birthday. And if you need a hint...let's just say their voice is as loud as their ponytail is high. "Where is it? You didn't lose it, did you?"

"No, but..." He slowly pushes his glasses up his nose. "I wasn't really supposed to stay over."

"Oh?" I lean back on the counter and take a sip of coffee. "Said whom?"

He hops up on the one across from me. "I probably shouldn't say." I smack his knee. "Really? After last night?"

"I was passion swept, and you know better."

"Well then, Mr. Ackerman," He leans back, spreading his legs. "Sweep me away."

Damn he looks good, but my there's still a burning in my legs. "Don't tempt me." He begins to lick his lips. "But I think you're avoiding the topic."

"There isn't really a topic." Eren rolls his eyes and slides back to the ground. "It doesn't even matter now."

"Was it Hanji?" I think about it. "They love surprises, but, no, encouraging celibacy isn't really something they do. So, Petra then?" I look at he whose eyebrows are raised in annoyance. "She is the only other person here who would hand deliver you with those kinds of restrict."

He cuts me off by pulling me into a kiss. "You talk too much."

I snort. "This coming from you?"

Eren smiles into my jaw as he leads with biting kisses down my neck. His hands move down my back, sending shivers throughout my spine. His tongue flicks over a particularly tender spot on my shoulder where he bit me last night.

"I love seeing these marks on you." He husks into my ear as his fingers lightly skim over their shallow bruises on my hips. The roughness in his voice and the pure fucking heat of his breath goes straight to my dick. Normally, I would love nothing more than to fuck the brat senseless, but I don't think now's the time. We probably should talk, and I'm still sore.

"They're marks you'll have to pay for." I tease and push him back just as his tongue curls on the shell
of my ear.

"I think," He pulls his[my] shirt over his head revealing angry scratches and purplish bruises all across his torso and back. "I already have."

I stare at the damage I inflicted on him last night. I hadn't realized I was that rough. "I didn't mean-"

He cuts me off with another kiss.

"You didn't hurt me, Levi." He brushes the hair from my face to look me dead in the eyes. "Did I hurt you?"

I roll my eyes. "No."

He smiles. "There you have it. Neither of us got hurt."

"Physically." I scoff before I can think better of it. As his face falls and his eyes unfocus, I wish I hadn't said anything.

"Yeah." He clears his throat. "Physically." Eren sighs and rests his forehead against mine. For a minute I just hold him. The backs of my fingers stroke the warm skin down his sides. "We need to talk, don’t we?"

“Yes, I suppose we do.” I tilt my chin up to press my lips to his. “But I have rehearsal in a couple hours, so we’ll have to postpone that talk just a little bit longer.”

“Or…” His hand skims down my arm. “We could just not talk.”

“Eren.”

He sighs. “I know, I know.”

He looks apprehensive, scared even. He needs a distraction.

“Hey,” I turn toward my room. “Put your disgusting clothes back on, we're going to get some fucking food.”

His excited smile is clear in my mind as he jogs up behind me. “Where are going?”

“Well,” I start as I pull a tee shirt over my head. So much for staying in my pajamas. “What do you feel like?”


“Yes, I did,” I sigh in defeat. “Breakfast burritos it is, then.”

He is working on the button on his jeans when he walks over to peck my lips.

“Thanks,” Eren smiles widely before adding, “Babe.”

I push him away and glare. “Excuse me?”

“Sheesh,” He shrugs. “I was just testing it out.”

“Well don't.” I've never been a fan of pet names.
“C’mon, Pookie,” My lip curls in disgust. “It's only fair. You gave me a pet name, why can't I give you one?”

“Yes, but that is different.”

"Oh really?” He narrows his eyes in suspicion. "How so?”

I smirk devilishly. "You like it."

The kid cocks his jaw and raises his eyebrows. "No, you just decided that I liked it."

"You don't?"

"Are you going to stop calling me Sparky?"

"Probably not." I shrug.

"Then it doesn't matter. But I still think it's unfair."

"Life's unfair.” I deadpan.

He rolls his eyes dramatically. “Oh, right, how could I be so stupid?” He runs his hand through his hair. “You already have one?"

I raise an eyebrow. “Come again?”

“Yeah… It's asshole.”

I roll my eyes and walk out. He's still not out when I finish buttoning up my peacoat. I whistle. "Here Sparky!"

I get the finger as soon as he steps in the hallway. "What about Captain?"

"Captain?"

"Yeah," Eren shrugs into his coat and steps through the elevator doors I'm holding open. "You're bossy enough. Besides," He turns to pin me against a wall. "It's kind of sexy."

" The Adventures of Captain and Sparky! " I start sarcastically. "That has a horrible ring to it."

"You're right," He backs off and rolls his eyes. "We should just stick with Asshole."

I smack him upside the head. The bell dings at the lobby floor and we trade places with a small group of people that flood into the elevator.

"Well, this Asshole's buying you food, so-"

"I am capable of getting it myself." He drawls. "I could even get yours."　

"Thanks, kid, but that's okay."

"No, really, Levi." He grabs my arm to stop me. "Let me buy you breakfast."

"I mean, if you want to, I'm not opposed to being doted on, Daddy." I wink.

"Yeah," He snorts. "And I'm the dork."
I resist the urge to grab his hand, and I notice his hand twitch toward mine before he pushes it into his coat pockets. Guess great minds think alike. Fucking people and their fucking opinions and the fact that they somehow fucking matter. Perks of being famous.

He half smiles at me as I lead the way. The only place I can think of that has breakfast burritos is a few city blocks away. So by the time we get there, Eren's shivering, his teeth are chattering, and, would it be rude to laugh at his half fogged glasses?

What a California baby.

I hold the door open for him and as he passes, I follow him in with my hand on the small of his back. At once, I see the tips of his ears turn crimson. That should warm him up.

We ordered our food to go (Eren practically slapped my credit card out of my hand) and hurried back to the hotel. Eren was still unknown, so him walking around the Big Apple is no big deal. I, on the other hand, am always on the lookout for flashing bulbs and I could feel one going off just outside of that little restaurant. I nod to Tony when we walk into the lobby, he salutes me but narrows his eyes at Eren.

"Something seems off with that guy." Eren mutters to me while we wait for the elevator.

"You're just bitter that he stopped you."

"Am not!" He whines. "And he didn't just stop me, Levi, he locked me away like some sort of criminal."

"You could have left at anytime."

"Would you rather I had?" He looks at me with puppy dog eyes. Our magic carpet arrives and we step in.

"That's not what I said." As soon as the doors slide closed, Eren turns toward me. I keep my gaze ahead and try to ignore the half-lidded look he’s wearing as he shamelessly runs his eyes up and down my body. “There are cameras in here, Eren.”

“So.” He presses forward, his hand runs up my arm. “Don’t you have faith in your Big Bad Security Man?”

“It’s not a matter of whether or not I trust Tony.” Christ, can’t he tell that not pinning him against the wall is killing me? “It’s just a precautionary measure in case someone hacks the security feed.”

He leans closer so that his hot damp breath engulfs my ear, sending shivers up and down my spine. “Let them see.”

Fucking hell!

“Eren–” I growl in warning as his lips brush the shell of my ear. He huffs and backs away. I turn to my head to look up at him. “You know it’s not that simple.”

I can tell by his expression that my words sting him as he looks away from me. I look up at the lights and sigh. We ride the rest of the way up in silence. The kid pouts as he kicks off his boots and hangs up his coat, and once he's done he tries storming away from me. You're not getting away that easy. My fingers wrap around his wrist before he’s completely out of my reach. When I tug him back easy enough, he’s still pouting at his feet, but there’s a smile at the edge of his mouth that needs to be coaxed out. I move my thumb over his soft lips which works in smoothing that small smile that send
my heart in a flurry. He closes his eyes to meet me halfway with a soft kiss. I keep mine open to watch any semblance of troubles melt away from his brow. *Goddamn, he really is beautiful*.

I move the hair from his face when he straightens back up. “I’m sorry I can’t do that all the time.”

Eren cocks his head with concern, then suddenly there’s the back of his hand pressed against my forehead. “Eren, what are you doing?”

“Are you feeling okay?”

“Of course I’m feeling okay.” I swat back his hand. “Why wouldn’t I be?”

“It’s just,” He starts with a lopsided smile. “That’s the second time within 24 hours that you’ve genuinely apologized to me.”

“I’m always genuine.” I deadpan.

He rolls his eyes dramatically. “Sure you are.”

I playfully punch his arm. He winces. “What? Are you okay?”

“Yeah.” He laughs. “I’m just sore from having to carry your fat ass!”

This time the punch is not as playful, but he only laughs harder. The burritos have cooled so I pop them each in the microwave. The faucet springs to life behind me; my head turns as Eren’s lathering up his hands. *I’m so proud*.

"Good Boy." I smirk at him over my shoulder. What? I can't help pushing his buttons. He replies by flicking the soapy water from his fingertips to my face. "Don't start that again."

I feel it before he shows it. *Too domestic*. His smile is still in place, but they're clouded by the newly placed apprehension in his eyes. My chest tightens as the air seems to become heavier. *We're fooling ourselves, aren't we?*

Eren finishes drying his hands and grabs our plates from the microwave. I replace him at the sink and watch his movements. The tiny slump in his shoulders, the tense creases around his eyes- I watch the blood drain from his cheeks and realize how fragile we are right now. Not two minutes ago, we were acting like lovestruck kids, a day ago we were on opposite sides of the country trying to move on, and right now we've entered the middle ground. I've never really been big on religion, but I get some of the concepts; and right now, we've entered a sort of relationship purgatory. We need to talk, and whatever comes of that talk will either damn us or grace us. I know that and I can tell that he knows it just as well, which is even more fucking terrifying.

"Eat up, Sparky." I say as I hand him a fork and knife.

"Thanks." He manages a small smile.

I gulp. "Yeah."

And we begin eating in silence.

After a few minutes, the clanking of silverware of his plate stops. When I look up I see him looking intently at the floor.

"Mikasa knows." He starts lowly. "I told her but apparently she figured it out awhile ago."
"Oh." So maybe that's what he got so tense about. Maybe it didn't have anything to do with doubt in where we might be heading. I feel as though a weight has been lifted from my chest. And in regard to Mikasa, I guess I'm not too surprised, but I would have thought she would have sent me more menacing death threats by now.

"Did you know she knew?" He looks at me, face twisting into something violent.

"No." I answer simply, setting my mug of newly brewed coffee on the table. "If I had I would have told you, Eren."

He scoffs before mumbling, "Yeah right."

"Something you wanna say?"

"Well, it's not like you're the patron saint of honesty."

"To what are you referring?" I ask warningly.

"She told me, okay." He starts as if I have any fucking clue what he's talking about. "You can drop the act."

"And exactly what act am I supposed to be dropping?"

"C'mon, Levi." He drawls. "I'm serious."

"So am I when I say I don't know what you mean." I respond scornfully. We've come too far to keep up these mind games. "But before we continue, you need to drop the attitude and speak to me like a Goddamn adult."

He glares at me a few seconds longer before he deflates. "I mean the deal you made with her."

Oh...that. "Is that what's got your spidey boxers in a twist?"

"Well..." Eren starts discourage clear in his voice and his eyes. "Yeah."

I stand up and close the distance between us. I lean on the edge of the table beside him and begin stroking his cheek. "It shouldn't. I would've looked out for you anyway."

He ducks out of my touch. "I don't need to be looked after."

"I know you don't."

"Don't be condescending, Levi." He snaps. "It would have been better if I had gotten into everything on my own instead of on your fucking request."

I raise an eyebrow. "First of all, don't mistake me for Mikasa. I haven't done anything outside of a mentor's duty; I haven't blindly handed out any favors."

"Yeah you have." He protests. "You vouched for me to get into the program, took me into your house, and got me a part in a fucking tv show! You can't tell me you weren't pulling strings."

"I'm not denying that our situation isn't extremely unusual. But, a) Zackly didn't really give us any other choice; and b) you have an interesting interpretation of my intentions."

"Then, please, enlighten me."
"First of all," I start. "Sure, I fought for you to get into the program. Partially because Mikasa asked me to, yes, but more because you peaked my interest. I was impressed by both auditions and I wanted to find out just how far you could go. And I sure as fuck am glad that I did, because, believe it or not, kid, you're pretty damn talented."

A blush creeps onto his cheeks despite his still tense expression.

"What about Goliath?" Eren drawls lowly. "Are you trying to tell me you didn't pull any strings there?"

*It's interesting how quickly he can slip into being a brat again.* I shrug before answering. "A spot opened up, and I believed in your abilities enough to offer you a shot." He still looks apprehensive. "And, by the way, it was actually Nanaba who convinced Mike to let me pull you out of class. In the end, though, it was you who got yourself in. And the fact that Mike rewrote your character and make him as important as he is in the show...well, that was all because of your talent, Eren."

His face relaxes and he leans forward to rest his forehead on my ribs. "You really think so?"

I answer him by bending to kiss the top of his head. He stands, hands sliding up to keep my in place as he leans down to press his lips to mine in a chaste kiss. When we part, I smack his ass and push him off me.

"I really need to get going." I say and he twists so that he can lean on the table and watch me go. I grab my rehearsal bag and begin folding a change of clothes to pack into it. Along with shoes, water, deodorant, etc.

My phone lights up on the surface of my bed four times in a row which seems like something important. The messages are from an unknown number and each of them seem to have a picture attached. I know I should probably delete messages from an ominous source, especially considering that they somehow managed to get my number, but curiosity gets the best of me. So I press the icon for the unread messages, and I regret it instantly. The message that pops up first reads: *When Daddy's Away...* .

The attached photos aren't the greatest of quality, but clear enough to see what's going on. The first is a shot, through a window it looks, of Jean and Eren laughing with each other as they walked down a hall. They look like they're standing close. In the other room, I hear Eren begin humming as the faucet is turned off. A few moments later, the dishwasher starts up. My heart is beginning to pick up beat as I'm terrified to go on, but I do. The next has Jean standing behind Eren in what's recognizable as a recording room. A recording room with pretty much a two way mirror so how could they have known someone was watching. Jean's hands hover over Eren's shoulders as Eren's eyes are closed and neck is kinked to one side. These get my blood boiling, but neither of them are really condemning. Until I see the last picture on the slide. The picture of the two of them in a seemingly empty parking garage. The two of them are lip locked in front of what looks like *my motherfucking car*!

So one kind of betrayal isn't enough, he had to drag Vanessa into it?

The hairs on the back of my neck stand on end as the floor behind me creaks. I wish I could remember how to shake myself out of shock. The breath from Eren's sigh seems to envelop me as he wraps his arms around my waist. He smiles into the small kiss he plants on my neck. I can't move, can't say anything, don't know how to respond to his touch while the pixels of that very touch being enjoyed by somebody else burns into my eyes. His lips press beneath my ear, his warm breath feels like ice against my neck in a way that gives me goosebumps. My rigid body doesn't go unnoticed.
"What's up?" He leans away enough to try to get me to look at him, but I can't. Can't tear my eyes from this fucking picture. "Levi, are you okay?"

My voice gets stuck in my throat until he looks over my shoulder. I can tell he's seen it when his entire body tenses and he drops his hands from my waist.

"I'm curious." I start lowly. "Did you fuck him the same way you fucked me last night?"

"Levi," He starts. "Where did you get that picture?"

"Does it matter?" I still haven't pulled my eyes away from the screen. I guess I'm hoping it'll just disappear.

"Yeah, it does!" He steps in front of me. "You know any monkey with a computer can use photoshopping now a days."

"Is it photoshopped?" I lift my chin to pierce him with my gaze. I know the truth, I just want him to be man enough to say it. His face is panicked, his eyes are wide and oh so full of shame.

"I promise, Levi." His brow furrows and his eyes are glowing with tears brimming the edge. "It wasn't what you think it was."

I clench my jaw and tighten my glare. "That's a no then."

As I turn and walk past him to my bathroom, I hear him let out a huff of breath like it was the tail end of a whimper. I know he's frozen to the same spot I left him in, trying to find the words to defend himself. Well, good luck, Sparky I think bitterly as I begin splashing cold water on my face. When I finish patting my face dry, Eren's reflection appears in the doorway.

"Levi-" He starts desperately.

"Save it."

"It wasn't anything. It meant nothing!"

"I said save it!" I yell and rarely yell.

He looks like he's been slapped, but that shock of the sting quickly shifts into a fire itching to return it. "You're a fucking asshole, you know?"

"Get out, Eren."

"I'm talking, Levi."

"You offer nothing I want to hear."

"Levi!" He snaps. I arch my eyebrow and cock my head.

Oh, he wants to play, fine I'll play. "Eren."

"You left." He bites. "No word, no explanation, just gone. So the mere fact that you're upset at the prospect that something happened -which nothing did- in the time you were hiding really pisses me off."

"Oh?"
"You fucking ran away from me! You have NO right to get mad at me for anything I've done!"

"No right, huh?" I step toward him. "Maybe not in general context, but after last night? Fuck, Eren, I did have the right to know! I had the right to hear it from you, not some fucking stranger! Did you at least wait a few hours, or was it the moment I turned my back that you decided to jump on your ex's cock?"

He charges forward and stops right in front of me. His entire body is coiled; I put my weight on my hands and lean on the counter behind me.

"Don't." He looks away and lets out a shaky breath. "You have no idea what it was like waking up without you. No idea the way it felt to learn that you flew across the country just to avoid me. No idea how rejected I felt, how betrayed, how..." He pierces me with his eyes. "unwanted." His voices is trembling. "So don't think for one second that you can climb on your high horse and make me into the bad guy."

"Being hurt doesn't make up for the fact that you didn't even try telling me."

"Um, okay, when last night did you want me to squeeze that in? Before I sucked your dick or after I fucked your brains out? Shit, Levi, neither of us were thinking about anything else last night!"

"So what about this morning, huh? We've been together for a few hour, and you didn't tell me then. Are you sure you were going to tell me?" He gets quiet and gulps. "Nice. You were just going to keep it in the dark along with everything else, right? Why am I not surprised?" I curl my lip. "Fuck, Eren, you keep so much in the dark I can't even tell what's real."

He scoffs and curls his lip in disgust before he steps back to curse me with a venomous glare. "That's real rich coming from you."

"Am I supposed to know what you mean?" I drawl while folding my arms. "Or are we still on the abandonment thing."

His eyes flare and, yeah, that was a shit thing to say. I just feel so fucking guilty about leaving that the easiest way to cope is by being the fucked up toxic bastard that Eren's better off without, and lash out at the person I know I hurt. The person I never, in a million years, wanted to hurt. But I did, because I'm a shit excuse of a human being, and hopefully he's starting to get that.

Mikasa got it.

"Fuck you." He growls. I don't move a muscle as he storms away from me. A few seconds later I hear the door slamming behind him. I wait, take a few deep breaths that turn into choked sobs, and crumble to the floor. I look up to the ceiling as, not for the first time, I find myself crying over him. Hot tears run down my cheeks in earnest

I fucked up. There's no denying that. He deserved none of it, but I just had to push all of my anger, all of my pain, my insecurities, my guilt onto that beautiful fucking brat! How much lower can I go?

As low as it takes for him to get the damned message!

My throat closes on another sob, and my head falls in my hands. Well, I think I made the message very clear this time. I bite down on my hand to try and stop shaking. I doubt he'll ever come back from that, and I sure as hell wouldn't blame him.

And, as much as I'm glad he's gotten the fuck away from me while he could, it really fucking hurts. It hurts that he's gone, but what hurts most about seeing those pictures is knowing that he could move
on so quickly, that he could truly be happier with somebody else. Which is comforting, right? At least one of us should be happy. My breaths are coming in shorter and shorter, my body begins rocking back in fourth as I try to calm myself down. My chest feels like it's caving in, and I have half a mind to let it. Just get it over with so I can stop hurting the people I love.

Love? My breath catches, my movements still, and I feel myself regaining control.

Is that what this is, then?

Am I in love with Eren?

By all accounts, it doesn't make sense. I've only know the kid for a few months and he spent almost half of that time hating me. At least, I think he did, but there were times his eyes suggested otherwise.

Doesn't matter, it still doesn't make sense. I have right, no claim to Eren's affections. Yet, he's burned his face in the back of my eyelids. Every time I blink I see the bastard. I see his smile, the way the sun catches in his hair, the delight in his face at the snow, the passion when he steps on set. But mostly, I see his eyes and the thousand shades of blues and greens shifting, swirling with each expression. They say eyes are the windows to the soul, and, God, I hope not. I'd hate to know what of my soul he sees when he looks in mine. But, if it were true, Eren's soul would have to be the deepest most brilliant soul of all. I close my eyes now just to see them, just to feel the way they make sparks fly through my body. How weightless they make me.

So, maybe it's not too far out of reach.

Maybe I am in love with Eren Percival Jaeger.

And maybe I've just made the biggest mistake of my life.

...

Two days. Two fucking days later, and I've finally worked up enough courage to seek Eren out. I've tried to excuse my cowardice by telling myself I was busy with rehearsals and interviews, but I knew the reason in the pit in my stomach.

Snow is now catching on my eyelashes as its friends practically melt when they hit the sidewalk. The hotel I'm looking up to is a brightly lit and colorfully decorated for the season. I'd expect nothing less from a Four Seasons. This is the place Pixis gave me when I called, and honestly I'm surprised he's still here. People hustle in and out of the warmly lit lobby. The rotating door never ceases. Unfortunately, even with my scarf covering half my face and stocking cap pulled over my ears, the passersby’s wondering eyes are beginning to light up with recognition. I take a deep breath and step inside.

“I need the room number under either Jaeger or Thorn.” I spill out as soon as I reach the counter.

“I'm sorry, sir,” the clerk begins politely. “But I can't give that information out.”

I groan. Of course they can't, that's why celebrities so often stay here. “I understand, but can you please at least tell if anyone has checked in under either of those names.”

“Certainly, though, again, I'm not able to share that information with you.” She smiles unapologetically. “If you'd like, I'd be happy to call him down to meet you himself, Mister?”

“Best you don't, sweetheart.” I smile back. “But thanks.”
Well, fuck, this plan's a bust.

"Levi?" Someone behind me calls. I know that voice. I turn to find Armin bundled up in a light blue coat with a black scarf wrapped tightly around his neck. I look at him while trying to find the words to explain myself or say hi or just something, but before I get the chance his face softens and he flicks a room key at me. "He's upstairs."

"W-" I start, but he's already halfway out the door.

"Room 1064" He calls over his shoulder.

I show the room key to the bellhop manning the cramped elevator. He's nods and another button lights up on the panel. I ride 6 floors with a family of four who keep eyeing me. When they get off another girl steps in wearing a bathing suit and, no doubt, heading for the one of the upper suites with a hot tub on the balcony. She looks me up and down, squints her eyes to study my face as I glare at her, then she squeals. Like a fucking piglet discovering slop for the first time.

“OMG!” She starts. “You're Levi Ackerman, aren't you?” I peel off the hat from my head and sigh. It's fucking hot in here and she's already figured me out, so what's the harm? She squeals again. “Are you, like staying here? Ohmigawd, could I, like, get a selfie with you?”

The door beeps for the 9th floor and, you know, a flight of stairs won't be too bad. “‘Fraid this my stop.”

I slip a $100 to the bellhop and nod to the girl. He has the doors closed again before she could step out. Well, now she thinks I'm staying here. Great, place will be swarming with paparazzi by morning. At least they'll be looking for me on the 9th floor. The stairs I take one at a time because I wasn't really blessed with legs like fucking trees, but I still make it up faster than anyone of those bastards would have. I've pulled my hat back low on my forehead as I walk down the hallway. Nobody pays me any mind. That's one thing I love about New York, most people could see the Dalai Lama and wouldn't bat an eye. There are, of course, exceptions, such as the Brittany wannabe.

I finally reach their room, and peer down at the piece of plastic in my trembling hand and gulp heavily. I can do this. But should I do this?

For his sake, no, a thousand times no. I should leave. But he deserves an apology at the very least. So before I have a chance to talk myself out of it, my knuckles begin wrapping the door.

I hold my breath feeling my heart hammering with anticipation through my body.

Nothing.

Not even the sound of footsteps approaching the door. I try again.

Nothing.

I hang my head. Maybe this is for the best. I turn to leave.

“Oh, fuck it!” I turn back around and slip the key into the slot. “Eren?”

Nothing. No semblance of reaction as I close the door behind me. I try again. “Eren?”

Again I'm met with silence. Now I'm getting worried. I begin frantically searching through the suite which has a full kitchen, bathroom, living room, and king bed. All of which are vacant. Where the
fuck is this kid? My eyes scan the room one more time when something catches them outside. Who the fuck sits on a balcony in the fucking snow? Well...Eren, I guess. He's barely bundled up in an unbuttoned jacket over a regular tee and a pair of sweatpants. His head is rested on his knees which are curled to his chest, making him look so small up on the corner of the ledge he's sitting on. Damn kid with these damn high ledges. The frames of his glasses under the stocking cap are easy to see from the bright lights of the city. My heart steadies at the sight of him. I would smile if it weren't for the solemn expression he's wearing as he looks toward the horizon. I take a deep breath and slide open the door. His head snaps to the side. He looks at me like I'm the last person he expected to see.

“It's freezing, kid.” I say pointedly.

He returns his gaze to the distance. “I'm fine.”

“You're shaking.” He shrugs. I take off my coat and walk over to place it over his shoulders.

He holds up his hand. “I don't want it.”

“What do you m-mean you d-don't want it?” I ask through chattering teeth.

“ Exactly that.” His voice is so hollow. “I don't want anything from you.”

Ouch. That leaves me colder than any ice storm ever could. “Eren, I-”

“Just leave.” A trail of tears begins to run down his cheeks. From here I can see his glasses fog up.

This was a bad idea. I sigh. “I'm sorry.”

His lip quivers, but he doesn't move his gaze. I nod and try to push down the lump in my throat and shake out the frown frozen on my face. I take a deep breath before I turn back inside.

The instant difference in temperature seems to melt away my composer. Tears blur my vision just as air keeps getting caught in my throat. With my hands in front of me to help me guide myself, I find the edge of the couch closest to the balcony doors. Even with my head buried in my hands, I'm shaking back silent sobs. This wasn't supposed to go like this. To hurt like this. And, fuck, it hurts so badly. It's like my heart has been impaled by an icicle, and that icicle is going to be the death of me. Somewhere in the back of my mind, who knows how long later, I hear a door slide behind me. I feel someone's bright eyes on my slumped figure, but I can't pay attention to that until I have a chance to breath again. A freezing cold hand rubs at my back as a body stands in front of me. I take a deep breath and lean my head into his stomach just below the ribcage. He wraps his cold arms around me while I just press myself on him. His fingers move to rub at the base of my skull, his thumbs move in tiny circles down my neck as his fingers thread through the buzz of my undercut.

“I'm sorry.” I whisper to the floor between us.

“Shh.” Eren tries to soothe me by running his fingers through my hair from the sides all the way down my neck.

“I'm sorry.” I mumble. “I'm sorry.”

“Sshh.”

“I'm sorry.” I croak. I tilt my head to search those impossible eyes for some kind of acceptance. He catches my tears with his thumb and brushes it away while settling his hand to the side of my face.

“I'm sorry.”
He strokes my cheek again. Then I see it in his eyes, a spark of forgiveness, of longing. I lean my head forward again and place a soft kiss on the cool fabric over his well-toned stomach. When he doesn't move, I do it again. He strokes my hair and I lift his shirt enough to do it again. This time with a little more fervor. My hands run up the back of his legs to hold him by his hips. With my nose pushing his shirt further up with each kiss, I feel his hands move down my shoulders. My hands roam up his sides so that by the time my wet hot mouth makes its way to his collarbone, it takes hardly any effort to pull his shirt over his head. Hardly because his glasses do almost fall off his nose. Now that I am fully standing, I drop my hands back to grope his fine ass. My teeth graze from his collarbone to the bottom of his jaw. “I'm so sorry, Eren.”

One of the hands he was using to roam my back has now thread its fingers in my hair. With that grip, he pulls back my head to, well, basically fuck my mouth with his tongue. It curls around my cheeks, my tongue, behind my teeth. He pulls back his head to suck on my tongue before delving back in with his own. My fingers dig into his ass and I pull him into my lap as I sit back on the couch. He keeps kissing me and I do my best to match him. I pull him tighter to me by the bends of his knees. My hands creep back up to do the same to his hips so that he's flush with my body. Eren's hands travel up my chest and, without warning, he holds me in place as he pulls back.

“Levi,” He starts breathlessly. “Wait.” What? I take a deep breath and relax back into the couch. I raise my eyebrows for an explanation. “We can't.” He slides of my lap and I reluctantly drop my hands from following him up. Eren looks down at me seriously. “Not until we talk about a few things.”

“You wanna talk?” I deadpan. Can't the whole talking thing happen later? We were on a healthy roll. "Now?"

He looks at me and bites his lips. “Not really.” I smirk and lean forward again. Then he takes another step back and shakes his head. “I mean ya. Yes, I do.” I smirk again and get to my feet, hands outstretched in front of me, I find his hips all too easily. He gulps. “A - Armin says we can't solve our problems by fucking.” I shamelessly look over his perfectly exposed torso. “H - he says it's unhealthy and that we really just…” I pull my body to his. “- need…” I nip at his throat as he gulps. “Levi.”

God, there's that need again. And, selfishly, I want to fan that flame until we're consumed by it, but his words echo in the back of my mind. “We can't solve our problems by fucking... it's unhealthy...”

Morally, I can't keep going. He has a right to get some answers. So I deflate again. He looks disappointed when I fall back into the couch.

“Okay,” I gesture toward him. “So we talk.”

Chapter End Notes

Mwahahaha, bet you thought there'd be some sort of resolution here, huh? Well, no, sadly I could not do that. They would not permit me. Unfortunately, I felt like Levi had to be stripped down- had to realize exactly what he'd lose and how he really felt- before he'd actually be able to open up. Also, I feel like Eren was waiting for Levi to come after him for once. That's why he stayed instead of just flying home, and yeah, he was clearly heartbroken, but he stayed. So that when he saw Levi, when he saw him break
down, he knew whatever they revealed to one another would be completely genuine. I feel that Eren would otherwise always question whether or not Levi was being honest. And the Jean thing had to come to light eventually the way that it did because of reasons.
Not So Small Talk

Chapter Summary

The boys finally have a sit down conversation.

Chapter Notes

Here we are, the moment you've all been waiting for: some sort of resolution! Yay! Things are getting sorted and stuff. Also, there is a small section in this that there is a POV switch so sorry if it's weird.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Well, fuck. I think I just cock blocked myself. Actually, if you think about it, Armin did in a roundabout way. Yeah, that's better, just blame it on the Mushroom.

Levi's looking up at me expectantly as I gulp down the ice in my throat. "Where do you want to start?"

He snorts. "That's a loaded question."

"Well," I start defensively. "I'm just not really sure how to do this, okay?"

He sighs and leans forward with his forearms onto his knees. "How's this: we just ask each other whatever is on our minds and go from there." I nod silently. "So...do you want to start or do you want me to start?"

"I don't want either of us to start." I mumble.

"C'mon, Eren, this is long overdue."

"Yeah, yeah." I grab my shirt from the floor and pull it back over my head. The backs of my legs find the adjacent couch and I let myself fall back. "You sound just like Armin."

I run my hand through my hair and sit up. I mean, I don't even know where to begin.

Why did you come after me?

Why did you leave me?

Why did you leave Mikasa?

Where are you from?

Have you ever been in love?

What do I mean to you?
Do you think about me as much as I think about you?
What do we do now?
Will I always be in the shadows?
... Will you leave me again?

"Eren?" Levi snaps me out of my thoughts with a concerned expression.

"Huh?" I shake myself. "Sorry, um, you can start."

He takes a deep, deep breath before starting slowly. "What exactly happened between you and that shitface Kirstein?"

Oh, um, I guess I wasn't really expecting that to be his first question. Huh, does that mean he's... I can't help smiling a little bit to myself because...he is actually jealous. Though, he certainly showed it in Canada, but part of me was drunk and excused it because he was also drunk.

"What the fuck's that look for, Brat?" He snaps

"Why does it matter to you?" I half smile.

"Don't make me come over there and wipe that grin off your face."

"Levi, are you jealous?"

He gets up and moves to me to pull me by my hair into a bruising kiss. His eyes pierce mine when he pulls me back. Cold steel blades ready to cut me in two. "You're damn right I'm jealous. Now answer the question."

"Well, which part of it do you want to know?"

Levi (much to my disappointment) lets me go to sit back on the coffee table and crosses his arms. *Hypocrite*. If that were me, I'd be berated for having the audacity to put my ass on something that wasn't a chair or a couch or his dick.

"He's a tool with a fake tan and an ego bigger than the state of texas."

As if anyone can argue such truths. "Is there a question in there?"

"Is that the sort of thing you go for?" He asks, no, more like *accuses*. "Tall, orange, and douchy?"

I roll my eyes. "No, apparently I go for tiny, pale, and sadistic." He flicks my forehead. "Ow!"

"What do you see in him?"

"You mean," I begin after rubbing at my forehead. "What did I see in him."

"Just answer the question." He snaps.

"Sheesh, fine. I don't know." I shrug. "He wasn't always such a... actually, yes he was, but I guess it just didn't used to bother me as much. To tell the truth, though, we didn't really even get along when we first met, then he just kind of grew on me, ya know?"

Levi regards me thoughtfully. "Yeah, I understand the feeling."
I clear my throat before continuing. "He was smart and funny and seemed so out of my league that when he actually asked me out I was completely swooned." I can tell Levi's trying his best not to gag though he doesn't hesitate to grimace. "What? I was young and desperate to be loved."

Desperate to be loved... Where did that come from? I didn't mean to say that at all.

"And you thought he loved you?"

"I know he did. Just...not the whole time."

"No," Levi starts almost mockingly. "He started loving other men."

Ouch. "Yeah, well. I guess couldn't hold his interest."

"You're pretty good at holding mine."

I feel my mouth curve into a half smile as a look at the edge of the coffee table. "I do my best."

One of his legs swings into mine rather playfully. "Cocky brat."

I can't help but chuckle before clearing my throat to ask my question. "What was your last serious relationship?"

"Haven't had one."

"Really?"

"Nope. Didn't take long for me to drive anyone who got close away." He shrugs. "None of them were as stupid as you."

I roll my eyes. "Like you're fucking Einstein for staying with me either."

"Eren," Levi calls for my eye contact with an apprehensive tone. "What happened between you and Jean while I was gone?"

"Nothing."

"Bullshit."

"Nothing like that happened between us, Levi."

"Right." He narrows his eyes. "So you just kiss all your coworkers goodnight?"

I smirk and reply without thinking. "I kiss you goodnight."

Oo, wrong answer, Jaeger.

It's not jealousy that I see; it's anger, hurt, and I swear a dark shade of red flashes in his eyes. So, yeah, maybe I shouldn't have said that. Ya know, since he kicked me out after seeing that photo. Oh that's another thing: where the hell did he get it?!

"Oh?" Levi draws out dangerously as he leans into the space between us. Did the door just fly open? Because I'm feeling a bitter chill. "So I'm on the same level as your ex?"


"Does this mean you are fucking around with him too?"
"First of all," I get to my feet to look down at him seriously. "Thanks for having any faith in me and my judgment. Second, like I said before, it was not anything like that."

"Then what exactly was it like?" He asks while getting to his feet and crossing his arms.

"I don't know, it was, like," I scratch at my head. "Closure, I guess."

"Closure?"

"Yes." I say in exasperation. "That was it. There was nothing more and will never be anything more than that."

Levi looks at me for a minute like he's lost in thought. His mouth thins after taking in a sharp breath. "Okay."

"Okay?"

"No, it's not okay, but unless you have someway to manipulate time, there's nothing we can do about it now." He replies coldly. I suppress an eye roll. "And, you did have a point. If I hadn't left, it wouldn't have happened at all."

Wow, is he actually taking responsibility for his actions? This is already going a lot differently than any other time we've tried to talk. I wonder what's changed with him. I know for me, when I flew all the way out here, I decided that I wanted to actually make it an effort to make us work. Maybe he's decided the same thing?

"Levi," I start tentatively as I step toward him. "Why did you leave?"

He looks out at the balcony and I watch him physically tense. "I'm toxic, kid. I wanted to save you the trouble."

"Then why did you come here?"

"Fuck, Eren." He groans before he takes another deep breath. "I came because not seeing you was killing me." Hearing that makes my heart skip. "I mean-" Levi clears his throat loudly before falling back into the chair with a stone-like mask. "I felt like I needed to apologize."

"Oh." I reply blankly. It's not like I was expecting a confession of his undying love, but I guess I wanted more than that.

He gulps heavily. "My turn, Sparky."

"Huh?" I'm still not satisfied with his answer, but I'll just have to loop back around to it. I sit back on the couch. "Oh, right, shoot."

Levi takes a deep breath. "Juvie: what happened?" Great, of course that's his question. That is not exactly a memory I like reliving, nonetheless sharing. "Mikasa told me a little about what happened to her, but nothing about you or what happened after you got to her." His hand reaches across the small gap to rest on top of my knee; I tense and subconsciously flinch back. "You don't have to answer, I'm only curious."

Here's your chance, Jaeger. "And I'm curious why you walked away from your baby sister." His hand jerks away. I gulp heavily and clear my throat. "What do you say? I tell you, you tell me?"

Levi is silent, head hung low, from here I can see his body coil. "I guess that's fair."
I take an unbelievably deep breath. *Okay, here goes.* My voice is hoarse as I speak. “What all did Mikasa tell you?”

“That you guys were dumped with ’Mommy Dearest’ and she made you both go outside where that fucking predator watched you and waited til Mikasa was alone before grabbing her.” So, she didn’t tell him that it was *my* fault she was alone in the first place. That I was being a fucking brat and refused to go home with her. “She told me that he beat her up pretty badly, but you got there before anything else happened.”

“Yeah okay,” I take a deep breath and look to the ceiling. “So, are you looking for what happened then or why I went to Juvie?”

“Were they not the same?”

“They’re related, but no.”

“Whichever you’re comfortable with sharing.”

“Juvie it is.” I don’t want to do this, but I want to know his story. “Um...I stabbed a guy.” Levi’s eyebrows twitch up for a moment, but otherwise his expression stays fairly indifferent. “I was like 11 and Hannes hadn’t even finished signing all the adoption papers. It was one of those rare soggy days and I saw the bastard that took her. Kyle Dreiz.” My fists clench. “He was let out way earlier than his sentence which was shit to begin with.” I look up at Levi with disgust painted on my face. “*Three years*, that's all he got before he was set loose.”


“Yeah. Well, that’s the shitty world we live in.” He scoffs but lets me continue. “Anyway, he was standing in the shadows watching all the little ballerinas leave the dance studio across the street. So, once he was done creeping, I followed the bastard and waited til he was alone before I, um, *confronted* him.”

“Confronted?”

I nod once as I straighten in my seat. “I was enraged. I wasn’t thinking about how much bigger he was, just that I wanted his blood. I wanted him to pay for what he did.” Levi looks at me sympathetically. “But, little did I know, the place I confronted him happened to be right in front of the stoop to his home. He pulled me inside when I started yelling about him being a monster.” Levi tenses and his mouth tightens into a thin line. “He beat me around a little bit—*a lot*.” My hand grabs my shoulder to hold myself. “Everything happened too quickly, I don’t really know how I even got it, but there was—” A shiny beacon of what I took for hope—“A knife. When he came after me again I slashed his leg and when he fell I stabbed him in his chest. He was lucky, I missed anything important.” *Yeah, lucky.* “I couldn’t even run away. Instead I chose to go outside and sit in the stoop. Someone saw the blood all over me and called the cops.” I take a deep breath. “I was arrested, Hannes put up my bail, and we waited until my trial. They wanted to try me for attempted murder in the first, which if you consider the fact that I did pretty much stalk the guy home, they had a decent case.”

“So how did you get it talked down?”

“I had one hell of a lawyer.” I smirk. “Actually, it was Rico who took my case. Her firm wasn’t as huge as it is now and I guess she owed Hannes a favor. She got me off with a claim of self defense out of psychological trauma.”
“So that's why Mika puts up with her shit.”

“Yeah. Rico’s kinda the reason she wanted to become a lawyer in the first place.”

“So what happened next?”

“I got time in Juvie.” I sigh before smiling fondly. “But while I was gone, Hannes bought a house, and when I got out, he had my room all set up.”

“You really are lucky, kid.”

“I know.” My smile falters. “The thing is, though, I kinda wish I did more. Then he’d be gone and the world would be short one more scumbag. How awful is that?”

“Considering what happened to you both, it's understandable.”

“But it's not excusable.”

“Trust me, kid.” Levi starts lowly, piercing me with his steely eyes when I look up. “Sometimes you just have to believe that the end justified the means. You don’t always know the outcome, but once it happens there’s no going back and you have to learn to live with it the best way you can.”

“Sounds like you know from experience.” I begin slowly prying.

He looks away from me. "You don't know the demons I hide. The number of skeletons in my closet."

I stroke his cheek with the backs of my fingers. "Then tell me." "You wouldn't understand."

"Right." I drop my hand and push his hand away. "Of course not." I stand and begin to pace in front of the balcony door. "I can't believe you, Levi. You're so fucking good at this, you know? Making it so easy to reveal myself, trust you with my wounds, yet you stayed clammed up. Completely untouchable."

~ Levi ~

I want to argue. To tell him that he has no right to go probing into my past, but I think about everything he's told me. About the honesty in his voice and the complete trust on his eyes. I sigh heavily. This is a mistake, I know it is. I know I'll regret saying the things I've never even said to myself, but here I am, about to rip open my heart for this doe-eyed kid who's in way over his head. "What do you want to know?"

"Everything."

*No, really you don't.* I scoff. "It doesn’t exactly help me ‘open up’ when you won't tell me where to start."

Eren walks back, drops to his knees between my legs, and he strokes my cheek before leaning up for a chaste kiss. He's a sweet kid. Sweeter than I deserve, but the kind of sugar I selfishly can't get enough of.

"From the beginning." He says as if that helps. I roll my eyes, but the hand on my face holds me in place. "What happened with Mikasa? Why did you leave?"
I lean forward until my forehead is resting against his and take a deep breath. “I’m sure Mika’s told you a little about what happened—”

“No, actually.” He turns his face away. “She never told me anything about really anything. All I ever got from her was about how great you were.”

Ah, more guilt. “Well, they died. Car accident. We lived outside Santa Barbara at the time, but our only relative lived in L.A.” My lip curls when I think about him. “Kenny. Real piece of work, that one.” I pull myself back to look him in the eyes, trying to decide the best way to describe the bastard. “Imagine the slimiest, ugliest, most disgusting thing you can think of. Now add 30 years of bitter cruelty and a gang of brainless thugs to back it up.” His eyebrows shoot to his hairline. “Yeah, well multiply that by ten and stick in beneath the lowest of the scum and you’ve got Kenny Ackerman.”

“Damn.”

“Mhm. I still can’t believe our father shared that blood.” The thought sends shivers down my spine.

“So,” Eren gets up and parks his ass back on the cushion adjacent to me. ”You were sent off to live with your...uncle? How old were you again?”

I scoff. ”What are you, preparing for a pop quiz?” He nudges my knee with his, I smile (at least internally) before I sigh. ”I was thirteen.” Eren furrows his brow in pity. Not that I can blame him, it’s all pretty pitiful. ”We moved to a rundown shack in the heart of Compton.” He lets out a low drawn out whistle. ”Mhm. Just where a couple of kids should be. We were welcomed with crossed arms and a pair of .45s. It wasn’t a big gang, nothing too serious, but we had our turf and our business and everyone knew not to fuck with us. They learned that even better when I took over.”

“When you—wait, what!” He shakes his head in disbelief.

“All in good time.” I pat his knee as I get to my feet. The mini bar is only a handful of steps away. Eren arches his eyebrow when he sees me grab the bourbon. ”What? You expect me to talk about this shit sober?” He sighs. I down a shot first before filling a tumbler. Eren shakes his head after I silently offer him a drink. ”So,” I begin on the way back. ”Kenny, the scum of the universe, saw the ’raw potential’ in me, and—”

“Raw potential?”

“That’s what he called it,” I take a rather large swig of the warm amber liquid before sitting back down. ”Others called it ruthlessness, bloodlust, Erwin called it ’ambition and unwavering determination’. But whatever the fuck you want to call it was exactly what Kenny wanted from me.”

“Wait…” Eren pinches the bridge of his nose. ”How does Erwin fit into this?”

“Do you want me to tell you what happened?” I snap. He pulls his lips into his mouth and nods. Damn, I was hoping he’d say no. I knock back more of my drink. The burning in my throat helps redirect my discomfort. ”Make no mistake, Kenny is the most twisted, evil human being I have ever had the displeasure of knowing. He was obsessed with the idea that Mikasa was somehow holding me back. That I was soft because of her. Like I said, he saw potential for me.”

“Potential for what, Levi?”

“For becoming a monster.” I breathe, my gaze faltering to the quarter full glass in my hands. “An unfeeling pawn willing to do anything for him. I think he wanted me to be his second in command.” I scoff, remembering the look on his face when all ‘his boys’ turned their back on him to follow me.
“Look at how well that turned out for him.” Eren cocks his head curiously, but does not comment.
“Anyway, one night I overheard him talking to one of his guys, Baxter. Brute of a creature, but
dumber than a bag of bricks. Kenny told him to make sure it looked like a murder; that there’d be no
way anyone could mistake it as an accident. To set it up like something from another gang. He
thought that such a tragedy would harden me with hatred and rage-into something he could use.” A
smoldering boulder has settled in my center. I feel like I'm going to be sick “So I packed her a bag
and dropped her off on the steps of a church.” My chest tightens and I have to smother a tearless sob
by finishing off my drink. The effects of which are definitely blurring the edges of my inhibitions. “I
will never forget the sound of her sobbing as I went to leave.” I continued blankly. “I promised I
would be back. I made the promise for both of us. Because she was my lifeline. Honestly, just
knowing she was alive is what kept me going as long as I did.” I look back up at Eren who has tears
rimming his beautiful bright eyes. *Damn kid's emotional enough for the both of us. “Then the rest
you know.”*

“What?” He exclaims. “What do you mean I know the rest? You didn't even talk about taking over
anything or Erwin or Farlan and Isabel!?”

“Did you ask about any of that?”

He narrows his eyes and I think he might try to hit me. “I'm asking now.”

“Sorry, Sparky.” *I'm already overwhelmed with what I did share, and that wasn't even the worst of
it.* I smirk to hopefully keep him from seeing all of my vulnerabilities. “My turn.”

~Eren~

Okay, fine, he's already shared with me more than I know he's comfortable with. I could see it all
over his face as he was talking. His voice stayed calm and even; but his body was tense and eyes
distant, pained, and red. Whether that was from the alcohol or holding back tears I can't tell. Probably
both. Asking for more information was a selfish attempt to satisfy my own curiosity. Even now, I
can recognize the precision of his smirk. So perfectly placed that people across the world would go
weak in the knees just looking at it. Fake and calculated, and maybe in the past I would have fallen
for it too. But I know him better now. Obviously better than he realizes. I just wonder what he wants
to know. His smirk has faltered, replaced with apprehension. He opens his mouth a couple of times
as if he can't quite figure out how to word whatever question he has.

"Why didn't you fly back?" He looks at me with the expression of a kicked puppy. As though
everything about him was supposed to scare me away. That when he practically shoved me out of
his life, it should have been the end of it and he truly can’t understand why it wasn’t. “After…..” He
holds his breath. “The other night.”

Armin asked me the same thing right after drying the tears from my eyes. I told him that I wanted to
see more of the city, but the truth was, arguably, so much more pathetic. Especially since I had't once
left the room since I locked myself in. Okay, that's a lie. I left once meet with a director and Petra
about setting up an audition; but mostly I sulked in this room. All for a man who- from Armin's
perspective- fucked me (not his words) then tossed me aside like garbage more than once. I didn't tell
Armin this, but I can't exactly hold any of that against Levi because I did the same to him first. "I
guess I was waiting for you."

He looks away before grumbling, "You shouldn't have."

*Seriously? Again with this shit?*

"Maybe not, but I *did* and you *came.*" I start irritability. "So, you really need to shut the hell up about
what I 'should' or 'shouldn't' have done or be doing!" He regards me carefully, almost condescendingly. A raising eyebrow prompts me to continue. "Believe it or not," I draw out pointedly. "I am capable of making my own decisions; and, Levi, I stayed for the same reason I came all the way out here. Because I love you, toxic or not."

Oh shit. Levi looks truly taken aback. As the words leave my lips, I watch him lose his breath. Fuck, I join him in it. What was I thinking!? His eyes are wide, lips parted, and he is frozen stiff. Did I really just say that?

Fuck fuck fucking fuck motherfucking shit! Mission abort! Mission abort!

We sit, silently staring at each other for what feels like hours. His expression of utter shock is slowly changing into something else, something heavier. It’s enough to make me realize that he doesn't feel the same. And that I just made a huge fool of myself. "I, um, I-I didn't- Just forget I said anything."

Levi lets out a long breath I didn’t see him take and pushes himself from his chair to sit next to me on the couch. I'm shaking like an oversized maraca in an amueter fucking mariachi band. Mainly, though, I'm seriously calculating just how quickly I can run away and bury my head in the sand. His cool hands envelop mine on my lap. My shaking doesn't stop, but it does settle down a bit. I turn my face toward him. Levi's eyes are swirling with near indiscernible emotions- apprehension, passion, pity. One of his hands lets go to brush through my hair. "That...is an awfully big word, Eren."

I look away because I don't want to face any of what's in his eyes. "Don't."

"Eren-

"No, Levi, just let it go, okay!? I get it." I pull out of his touch and get to my feet. "I shouldn’t have said anything. It was a mistake, just forget about it!"

He stands up and tentatively steps toward me. "But you did mean it, didn't you?" With my gaze still fixed to the balcony door- to the flakes of snow lightly falling to the ground- I bite the inside of my cheek. I mean, yeah, I guess I did, I do, but I shouldn’t have said anything because how could I think he felt the same way? And, Goddammit, are those fucking tears rolling out of my eyes? Why the fuck am I always such an emotional wreck?

"Eren," Levi's fingers cup my cheek, his thumb swipes away my tears. "Please look at me."

I do, and what I'm greeted with takes me off guard. Levi's mouth is curved slightly up, his eyes are filled with sincere admiration and trepidation. He slowly pulls the glasses from my face and sets them on the table behind him. With his other hand wrapped around my waist, he pulls me into a soft kiss. A soft kiss that has me gasping for breath.

"Levi." I whisper against his lips. "I-

He leans up to cut me off with another small kiss. I can feel the shortness of his own breath just as I can see his smile growing wider. "I've never been good or even proficient at expressing my emotions, but, I think I-" He leans back so that he can look me straight in the eyes. "I know I'm not gonna survive you, kid."

Well, it's not 'I love you too', but it's close enough.

For now, that's as much as I need.

He kisses me, and when I fall back on the couch he climbs in my lap and kisses me some more. I have a strong hold of his hips, but nothing urgent comes of it. I simply hold him as our mouths slot lazily together. In the feeling of the heat in his breath and the silk and velvet of his tongue, in the
weight of his body and the steady rhythm of his heart beating next to mine, fuck, it all feels so **right**. Being with him feels like all is okay in this messed up world we each have seen too much of.

When we part, Levi runs his hands through my hair and hooks them around my neck. He stares at me thoughtfully, the gears in his head must be turning to piece together another borderline intrusive question. “What is your favorite color?”

I'm sorry, what? “Are you joking?”

“Do I look like I'm joking?”

“I mean, you *sound* like you're joking.”

He shrugs before sliding forward on his forearms to give me another chaste kiss. “So sue me for wanting to know something about you other than the tragedies of your past.”

I eye him skeptically. “You're serious?”

“Yes.”

“Blue.”

“Blue?”

“Yup.”

“Huh.”

“Yours too, isn’t it?”

“No.”

“No? Then what is it?”

“Your eyes.” He answers absently before scrunching his face in panic.

“Um…” *What do you even say to that?*  Fuck if I know, conscious!

“*Shit,*” He hisses, obviously taken back by his own words. “I mean...oh fuck it.” Levi leans back to look at me fully. “Yeah, you're eyes are undoubtedly my favorite color.”

Is it hot in here? I feel like I'm burning up. I must avert my admired eyes to the snow falling outside in the hopes that their frozen goodness will find a way to cool me off. *Change the subject, change the subject.*

“Why did you kiss me?” I blurt out just as his lips skim over the crook of my neck.

He snorts before nipping at my skin. “Which time?”

“The first time.” My ears are still red hot. “At my call back.”

He sits back up to ponder for a moment before answering, “Part of it was because I wanted to throw you a curveball.”

“And the other part?”

Levi hangs his head and lets out a breath of laughter. “You were all cute and flustered and your lips
looked really soft.” He looks at me with hooded eyes. “And they were.” My face heats up again. “Though, in hindsight, it wasn’t at all professional of me.” Then he scratches his head and his smile is gone. “I bet you hated it, didn't you?”

“I wanted to.”

The corner of his mouth twitches up. “But you didn’t?”

“No.”

“Eren,” He begins slyly. His cool fingers skim over the skin beneath my shirt and down my sides, leaving goosebumps in their wake. “When did you start falling for me?” I groan. Smug bastard. “You have to answer, it's my turn.”

“No, you asked me if I hated that first kiss, and I already answered that.”

“That doesn’t count.”

“Hey, it was a question, you got an answer, now it's my turn.”

“Fine,” He leans forward to nibble at my jaw. “Ask away.”

“When did you start falling for me?” Next thing I know there's a pillow in my face.

“Shitty fucking Brat.”

“Did I ‘have you at Hello’?”

“I don't recall ever getting a ‘Hello’.”

“So, was it my glare that did it?” I flutter my lashes. “My eyes?”

The bastard attacks my lips- hard, rough, and pulls away with a bite to my lower lip as hard as He could without drawing blood. “Don't get so smug, kid.”

“Don't be so hypocritical, old man.” I smirk deviously. “It's my turn.”

His expression is irked, but there’s a glimmer of amusement in his eyes. He rolls off of my lap to sit by my side. With a soft sigh, he leans his head on my shoulder. “When I saw you tearing my kitchen apart just for a jar of fucking peanut butter.”

I roll my eyes. “Are you serious?”

“What can I say, you really got my spidey senses tingling.”

“Oh my God,” I look to the heavens to grant me patience. “You really do have a boxer kink.”

“I can't help it if you look so damn good in them.”

“I'd think you'd prefer me naked.”

“Mm.” His hand creeps over my thigh. “I'm partial to both. Just depends on what I want from you.”

“What do you mean?”

Levi clicks his tongue and waves a disapproving finger in my face. “It's not your turn, Sparky.”
I lean down to bite at his ear. “Fine.”

His palm cups my face to pull me into a kiss. “Go on, you know the question.”

_When did you start falling for him?_ I smile. “I guess it honestly just happened little by little, ya know?”

“Explain it to me.”

“I don't know. I didn't really realize I was falling until you left and it _hurt_. ”

That's a lie, I was falling for a long time and I knew it- _felt_ it- and tried to resist it.

He sighs and looks forward. “I'm sorry I left.”

“Maybe if I hadn’t played all those mind games...” I sigh and think about all those times I messed with him, fucked around and lashed out because I was too busy trying to hate him with everything I could. “Man, I've been kind of an ass since I met you.”

He rolls his head on my shoulder to look up at me. “Kind of?”

I nudge him off. “You haven’t exactly been a saint either.”

“I never pretended to be.”

“I know.” My mouth twitches into a small smile. That's one of the things I ( _love_?) really like about him. When all's said and done, he is actually pretty upfront with how he feels about _somethings_. Like, in the moment, when that _something_ doesn't reveal anything he’s hidden deep away. At least with those he doesn't _have_ to be fake with. He’s a fucking puzzle, there is absolutely no question about that; and he is good at hiding behind a mask, but that's only when he’s not sure how to react to something, ya know? And I guess it just took something like this to make me realize it, to truly let some of his pieces click into place and see that I understand him more than I thought I did. This image of himself, the one he’s created, is a lot more honest than the one he’s trying to bury.

“Hm.” Levi is thoughtfully silent for a while before grabbing my hand and bringing it softly to his lips. “I'm sorry I can't hold your hand in public.”

“It’s fine, I understand why.”

“It’s not forever, just until we can figure publicity shit out.”

I nod absently as a cold hard ball of guilt settles into my stomach. “I'm sorry I was so scared of what other people- of what Mikasa- would think.”

“I didn’t mean to put you in that position.”

I shrug. “I put myself in that position.”

“You need to talk to her, you know.” Levi squeezes my hand. “We both do.”

“Yeah, well,” I stiffen. “I'm still kind of ticked off at her at the moment.”

“That's not fair, Eren.” He sighs quietly. “She only did what she thought would help you. You are the most important person in her life, and that’s-” Levi cuts himself off. “You're really lucky, kid. Don’t ever forget that.”
My arm slides around him to pull him close. I know he’s right, and I am lucky. Mikasa’s my number one always, but…

“I love her and would do anything for her.” I start. “But I also have enough faith in her abilities to do things for herself. To let her try and succeed or fail on her own, but be there nonetheless with all of my support. That’s all I want from her. Just a little bit of understanding and encouragement...a little bit of faith in me. Is that too much to ask?”

Levi doesn’t answer right away, just absently rubs his thumb over the back of my hand.

“No.” He finally answers. “I wouldn’t think so. But I also don’t think that she doesn’t have faith in you. Just, I think she might be scared to see you succeed just as much as she is to see you fail, and maybe that’s because of me.” He sighs heavily. “But what do I know? You need to talk to her about all of this, Eren.”

I gulp and nod once because, yeah, I hadn’t considered any of that. I do need to talk with her and really sit down and work through all this steaming shit that’s built up around us.

“What about you, Levi?” I start. “What do you need to talk to her about?”

He is silent again, tensing slightly under my touch, before speaking clearly. “About us, me and her, you and me, how everything will go from here.”

“Yeah...I don't really know how she feels about-” I move my free arm in a gesture. “This.”

“I'll convince her that this is good.” He looks up at me and strokes my cheek. “I want to ask for her approval while also making it clear that we don't necessarily need it.”

“Good luck with that, pal.” I pull him tighter. He hums and rests his head further into my chest.

We just sit there, silently enjoying the feeling of each other- of this new platform we have built in our relationship. It’s nice but, I admit, terrifying. I haven’t felt this way before and I don’t really know how to navigate. Especially not with someone as intense as Levi. Because, fuck, he is intense. Everything about him- the way he moves, speaks, works, makes love- everything is fervid. He does well in hiding it, extremely so, but once you break through his guise, you can't unsee the extreme focus, no, the passion he puts behind everything he does.

A lot like me and pizza. That is also a very passionate affair.

“I want food.” I declare after about another minute of silence.

He snorts. “Of course you do.” Then he sits up and looks longingly outside. “I wanna smoke.”

“Of course you do.” I mock him and roll my eyes before getting to my feet. “Well, while you go kill yourself, I’m going to put my contacts in then we’re getting something to eat. But first, I want a kiss before you taste like tobacco.”

I capture his face with both my hands and pull his mouth to mine, pushing my tongue inside for a passionate kiss. He licks his lips when I pull away, and when I turn my back to walk around him, he doesn't hesitate slapping my ass. It's just as I'm walking through the doorway into the restroom- from the corner of my eyes I see him watching me from the balcony door- he shakes his head and smiles. It's barely audible, in fact I might be imagining it, but I swear he says softly: “Toxic or not, huh?”
Chapter End Notes

You all are great and I love you! Seriously, I love hearing from you so never feel like you're bothering me with a question or comment or friendly conversation! All of which can be done here or through my tumblr which is below. I cannot thank you enough for sticking with me and this fic! Stay tuned, lots of fluff is on the way!
Chapter Summary

It's the Eve of a particularly special birthday and Levi's two early presents. One he's fully expecting, but the other will take him completely off guard.

Chapter Notes

... I'm sorry... I had a mad case of writers block in which literally everything I wrote- even things outside of this fic- was literally toxic waste. In any case, thank you for your patience, I hope that you'll find it all worth it.

It's an amazing experience to sit in the balcony of a giant Broadway theatre and watch an award winning show with award winning actors performing with an award winning orchestra. At least, I'm sure it would be if I were allowed to watch. But noo!

Okay, strictly speaking I'm not supposed to be here at all but since I'm technically Levi's assistant, they made an exception. Though, being his “assistant” doesn't come without tedious chores. So, I ended up spending most of my morning running around doing meaningless tasks. Including, but not limited to: coffee runs, water runs, sweat rag runs, having a phone meeting with Armin (who's taken over for Petra) regarding PR, another one with Mike about filming, and once I was done with all that I got to clean his extravagant dressing room. Now, I've been appointed the task of scrubbing down the already clean bathroom in said dressing room which of course probably won't be good enough for King Clorox. I can hear most everything going on on stage, but I've been forbidden from watching the live feed of their first run through on the flat screen in the corner. I shouldn't be that upset, I mean I'm lucky to even be here, but after months of being right in the middle of the action I admit I wish I were up there now. Wait a minute, now that I think about it, it's a little strange that Levi doesn't have me up there with him. I mean, he's always made sure I was next to him whenever possible on set, so what changed? I wonder if he's punishing me for something...

While I'm scrubbing the floor on my hands and knees, the hairs on the back of my neck stand on end. It seems to happen in the blink of an eye. One second, there's a hand on my ass and I flip around with my elbow ready to knock out the assailant- the next, I'm pinned on my back staring into steel eyes.

“Dammit, Levi!” I start defensively. “You can't just do that!”

He smirks. Holy Mother of Moly, he looks good with his fringe slicked back over his undercut and his black shirt buttoned halfway down his chest. “Do what?”

I narrow my eyes. “You know what.”

“Hmm.” Levi’s hand wanders slowly down my side, making the skin under my shirt red hot. “So, you don't like it when I come at you from behind?”
I roll my eyes. “Not when I'm not expecting it.”

“I'll keep that in mind.” He replies in a distant, uninterested voice before swooping down for a wet kiss. I allow him another sloppy one before pushing myself out from underneath him and onto my feet. I don’t even get the time to step out of bathroom before Levi has me by my hips, pushes me into the door, and begins attacking my mouth.

“Wait-” I start, he cuts me off. “Don’t you-” His tongue pushes back into my mouth. “Mmm-rehearsal?”

“Lunch.” And he's back at it, with one hand on my hip and the other cradling the back of my neck, he pulls me with him toward the couch. He twists me around and once the back of my knees hit the edge, Levi pushes me down until my back is flat on the cushions. His cold fingers slide beneath my shirt and begin running up my stomach, the other ones clamp around one of the wrists above my head.

“You know,” He starts with his lips against my ear. “I'm beginning to think you like being pinned.”

Can’t deny that. I try to roll my eyes but I end up closing them when he lightly rubs his thumb over my nipple and my breath catches. Damn this man!

“C’mon, Levi,” I start against his grip on my wrist. “Let me up.”

“No.”

“Excuse me?”

“No,” He sits up, now straddling my waist, and pins my other hand above my hand. “I want to hear you say it.”

I roll my eyes dramatically. Ever since I let those three deadly words slip out, his new favorite game has been doing anything to make me say it again.

You’re probably wondering; has he said it back?

Not in so many words, no. The hypocrite.

“I wish I never said anything.” I mumble, trying to maintain my resolve as his hands begin roaming down my sides again. But the widening smile on his face tells me he sees right through it.


“Levi- sshhiit!” He cuts my train of thought off when he reaches behind him and palms at the half hard bulge in my pants. Next thing I know, he’s pushing my shirt up enough for him to lean down and suckle on my hardened nipple. “Gah- Leeevviiii, you sadistic ass!”

“Just say it, Eren.” He slides my shirt over my head before sitting up on his knees and uses both hands to unbutton my jeans. I move my hands to roam up his chest, but he grabs my wrists and pins them back over my head. I growl and buck my hips playfully. If I tried, I could get him off, at least for a minute, but, as much as I want to hate this game, I honestly can't help playing along. “Down boy.”

“Woof.” I draw out slowly with an easy challenge gleaming in my eyes. He licks his lips before leaning down and licking mine.
“Is that canine for ‘I love you, Master’?”

“No,” I narrow my eyes. “It's canine for ‘get the fuck off me, asshole’!”

“You don't mean that.” He smirks before kissing a trail down my jawline.

“Yes, I do.” No you don't. “Shut up.”

“What?” Levi looks at me confused.

“I wasn’t talking to...” Stop speaking, he’ll think I'm crazy. He probably already knows that.

“Oh?” He smiles sardonically. “Then who were you talking to?”

“Ummmm... Myself?” Dammit, if I had the ability to move my hand I would be face palming so hard right now!

He chuckles. “Well, I guess your other self agrees with me.”

“No, there’s only one me and I do not- fuck!” Levi grinds his ass deliberately on top of my still restricted member.

“Stay, Sparky.” He draws out as he slowly releases his grip on my wrists. For some reason, I listen. I don't so much as twitch when he climbs off the couch to retrieve a small bottle from his bag.

“Were you planning this?”

“Not this per say,” He shrugs. “But I figured I'd want to jump you outside of my home sooner or later, so I came prepared.”

I smile. Why am I not surprised?

If you're not surprised, then why are you blushing?

Okay, seriously, shut the fuck up.

When Levi returns to me, he makes a show off stripping out of his costume. Next, he stares into my eyes while he slowly pulls off my pants. His hands caress my thighs as he spreads my legs apart and crawls between them.

“You know, Eren,” He starts seriously. “You really are fucking beautiful.”

I feel flush and embarrassed and can't bare looking into those eyes. “Stop saying things like that, it's embarrassing.”

“What's embarrassing about it? Nobody else is here.”

“But still it's- ahh!” I'm cut off by his hot wet tongue swirling around the tip of my hard cock.

“You're too self conscious, kid.” He ducks back down then sucks the top off with a slurp.

“Aahn- f-uck!” I would love argue with him, but I forget in the feeling if his heavy wet tongue running slowly around and down my hot dick- of him lapping up the precum already leaking from the slit. Levi bobs his head, slowly enveloping me in that hot wet mouth.

I try to muffle my moans when he massages his velvet tongue along the underside of my penis.
“Levi, you bast -AH!”

His mouth drops lower, taking in the rest of me, the tip hitting the back of his tight throat. And he moans, sending vibrations from tip to base. Too suddenly he eases off, leaving my hard cock rather cold out of his hot mouth.

“Say it, Eren.”

“Make me.” I growl because I'm a brat and I'm curious to see what he does.

“Oh,” Levi smiles wickedly, instantly crushing my collected bravado into tiny rubbles of aching need. “I plan to.”

Then, without warning, I'm back in his mouth and his head starts moving up and down at a quickening pace. My cock moves down the tightness of his throat each time his head drops down. His tongue is firm and soft as he slides me along it. I watch in pure awe as his cheeks hollow and his brow furrows in determination. The noises coming from his throat, vibrating around my cock, should not be as hot as they are. I throw my arm over my mouth before I cry out in pleasure, my hips buck up, and one of my hands wrap itself in Levi's silky black hair. He stops suddenly, his hand covers mine in his hair and he slowly pulls it away. Levi pulls off completely with a loud slurp and raises a dangerous eyebrow at me. He roughly pushes my hand back up and into the cushion over my head.


“And what do you want?”

“I want you to say you love me.”

You first. “And if I don't- aah!”

His free hand wraps around my cock. “I'll just have to fuck it out of you.”

Fine with me. I playfully growl again and buck up my hips, he lets go and angles himself away just enough to keep me from getting any friction. “I fucking hate you so much right now.”

He squeezes our hands together tight and takes my breath away with an open mouthed kiss. “No you don't.”

Levi sits up, grabs the small bottle of lube and begins pouring it into his hands. I lean up on my elbows to glare at him. “No, trust me, I do.”

He shoots me a look of annoyance before I feel his blunt finger probing at my entrance. Okay, witty banter is over. I am a creature of pleasure and I know what's coming next (or should I say who), and I want it more than feeding my ego. Levi must feel the same because his brow is furrowed in concentration and his pupils are blown wide with lust. He makes quick work of stretching me and after a few minutes of sweating and panting, I hold his eyes as he directs the tip of his cock to my entrance. At first he tries sliding in slowly, but when he's almost halfway I become impatient and thrust him to the hilt.

“Jesus Christ, kid!”

“Well hurry up, old man!”

And hurry he does. With fire in his eyes he digs his fingers into my hips and begins pounding into
me furiously. The room echoes with the sounds of our loud breaths, the groan of the couch, and the consecutive slapping of balls against flesh. His rigid cock keeps pounding against that place inside sending white hot shocks throughout my body, and I am trying my best to keep quiet. Levi adjusts and places his arm beside my head to hold him up as he leans over me.


“Eren.” He whispers beside my ear.

I'm seeing stars and internally begging for release when Levi tightly grips my swollen cock. His movements don't slow, but his eyes become harsh- selfish.

“Levi…” I try to draw out warningly, but sure enough it comes out more desperate than anything else. His grip loosens a moment and he moves his hand down my length. “Aa- fuck- I need -” He tightens his hand at the base. I'm going to cum. I *need* to fucking cum, but I can't when he's holding me this way. “Please !”

“Say. it.” He's close too, I can tell- can feel the heat building in his cock as he continues to drill into me. “Now Eren !”

He hits my prostate again and again and the sensation almost hurts from over stimulation. I. Need. It.

“AH- FINE! *I love you* !” He lets go of me and I cum hard the same time Levi does. It seems to last forever, I see nothing but white as my body rides (drowns) in waves of pleasure. When my consciousness floats back to me, I realize all my appendages are tingling. Levi rolls off and lands on the floor with a soft thump. It takes a few minutes before either of us can catch our breath, but of course, when we do, he's the first to speak.

“Now,” He pants. “That wasn't so hard, was it?”

“What wasn't?”

“Saying you love me.”

Shit, I let it slip again. “I don't remember saying anything like that.”

“Ah-huh, don't try, kid, I *heard* it.”

How do I get out of this? “I have no idea what you mean.”

“Whatever.” He sighs heavily. “Remember what you want, you still said it.”

“Oh!” I got it! When in doubt, smart ass you're way out. “You mean when I said I love *yew* ?”

The roll of his eyes reverberate against the walls. He sits up and leans his arms on the edge of the couch. “Yes .”

“Well, I do.” I prop myself a bit on my elbows and smile. His eyes light up making me feel almost bad about what's coming next, but he gave me no choice the way he fucked me into a corner. “I mean, when you compare it to the rich tones of chestnut, the paleness becomes so *vibrant* it almost glows. Though, it's definitely a draw when compared to holly.”

He groans and flops back to the floor. “You're a brat.”

“Yeah, but you love me.” *Oops …*
There’s a heavy pause before, “Mhm.”

Wait, what?

Did he just say what I think he just said?

Well he didn’t really say anything, but…

Silence engulfs us to the point that even our breathing becomes shallow. After a few still minutes, he rolls to his feet and steps into the bathroom. Really? I hear the shower run a few minutes, but I just stay laying where I am. He quietly pads back into the room and starts to get dressed. I didn’t mean to say it, but obviously he meant to respond the way he did. Surely he’s not just going to pretend nothing happened? Right?

“Hey, Levi?” I start as I sit up. “Why is it okay for you to want to me to say ‘I love you’ but not for me to want you to say it back?”

He freezes before responding matter a factly. “Because you already said it.”

“So?”

“So,” He throws his hand up. “It’s easier for you to-”

I get to my feet. “You think that is easy for me to say?”

“Wasn’t it?” Wow, I don’t even know how to respond, but I guess the shock and offense on my face communicated it clearly. He drops his head and sighs. “I suppose not, then.”

“I get that it’s hard,” I step toward him. “And it’s okay if you’re not ready to say it yet,” My hands reach out to pull him closer. “But trying to make me say ‘I love you’ over and over without really saying anything to me is pretty sadistic.”

“You’re right, I guess it is.”

“Don’t get me wrong,” I begin teasingly. “It’s a hell of a lot of fun, but-”

“Mr. Ackerman to wardrobe.” The intercom comes to life because God hates me. “Mr. Ackerman to wardrobe, please.”

“Eren, let’s not talk about this right now.” I capture his face in my hands and hold him in place for a soft kiss.

“Fine. Tonight then.” I kiss him one more time before letting him go.

He opens the door then looks back at me. “You should probably put your clothes back on.”

Ah, right.

…

After a quick shower, I wrap a fluffy towel around my waist and step back into the comparatively bitter cold dressing room.

“Daaamn, boy!”

“Holy shit!” I jump ten feet when I see Hanji lounging on the couch we just had sex on. Awkward.
Should I tell them? Or would that just make it more awkward? I mean, it's not like we made a mess, but still…

“Is no wonder Levi's so hung up on you! Or why Jean is, for that matter,” Nevermind, no need to mention anything. “YOU'RE GORGEOUS, MON LOUP!”

“Ahhh,” I casually scan the room for alternate exits, but come up with nothing. “Thanks?”

“Oh, doi!” They shake their head. “I need to talk to you about Levi's birthday.” Oh shit, that's tomorrow, isn't it? “What are you doing for him?” Hanji stops and gives me a puzzled expression. “Wait, when did you get dressed?”

Told you they didn't notice. “Ummm…like three minutes ago.”

“Huh.”

I clear my throat awkwardly. “But about the birthday thing, I've been trying to figure that it all week.”

“You don't have anything?” They ask dumbfounded.

I sigh. “I can't think of anything!”

“Then it's a good thing you have me!” They smile brightly. “I have the perfect plan!”

I eye them skeptically. “What is this ‘perfect plan’?”

“A date night!” Hanji dramatically waves their hand in the air. “Picture this: a romantic dinner for two, a stroll through central park, maybe ice skating-”

“That all sounds great, Hanji,” I mean it really does. “But there’s one little problem.”

“What’s that?”

“We can't be seen together.”

“Why not?”

“Because.”

“Because why?”

“I don't know, just cause!”

“Levi is swept up in one scandal or another every other week whether it's true or not- which they haven't ever been- so why are you so concerned now?”
“All that other crap always blows over because they run out of ways to spin a fake story, but if anyone knew about us, they'd have great material to last them a long time. Not to mention that they'd do some major digging into my life which could drag Mikasa into everything and that whole situation is messy enough without tabloid attention.”

Hanji considers me carefully with their hand folded around their jaw. “I can see your point, m’dear.”

“Don't get me wrong,” I sigh and flop on the couch beside them. “I'd love to go on a proper date with him, but I don't know how to make that happen.”

“Hmmm…” Hanji ponders a few seconds before snapping their fingers in a ‘eureka!’ “Why not just go out in disguise?”

“Brilliant.” I deadpan. “Why didn't I think of that before?”

“Hey, I'm just trying to help.”

“I mean, it's not a bad idea, but there's just too much at risk.”


Oh God. “Please tell me you won’t have a party waiting.”

“What else would I have!?”

“Hanji, that is an awful idea.”

“What!?” They throw their hands up. “It’s going to be the party of the year!”

“If I do that,” I shake my head in exasperation. “He’ll kill you then maybe me for being an accomplice, and I’m too young to die and even if he keeps me around, I don't want your death on my conscience.”

“It’s a risk we must take.”

“Right, we.” I snort. “What am I supposed to do with him until then?”

“I don’t know, you didn’t like any of my ideas.” Hanji crosses their arms and looks at me. “Maybe cook him something? Dinner? OOh! A cake! Yes, dinner and a cake! Or... you could always occupy him with that sexy little booty of yours!”

“That’s actually not a bad idea.”

“See,” I get a hard pat on the back before they’re on their feet peering down at me. “When in doubt choose sex!”

My cheeks begin burning. “I-I mean the cooking thing!”

“Sure you do.” Hanji winks again.

“I’ll cook!”

“Well,” They check their watch. “Whatever you do just make sure he gets to Trost by-”

“Midnight, yea got it, but how the hell am I supposed to convince him to go?”
“He’ll do anything if you just bat your puppy princess eyes!” I reply by rolling those eyes. “Well, that was all and I’ve got to see a man about a wallaby, so…” They snap and shoot me a well aimed finger gun. “Hasta Lasagna!”

I flash a smile and send them a mock salute before they walk out the door. Levi will hate going to a party. The compromise for working Christmas Eve was that dress rehearsals began at 5 am, they run the show twice with notes, then they all get to go home at 6:30-7 instead of like 11. So he’ll be tired as fuck and maybe we won’t go to the party, but I’d still like to do something for him.

Okay, it's almost 3, so if I left now I could try making an early dinner. I mean, can cook a meal.

*Yeah, easy mac, how romantic!*

How hard could it be?

*Remember Easter?*

I gulp. I’d rather not.

“It’s hopeless.” I mumble to the empty space. I’m not worried about the cake. I’m good at desserts, it’s just the actual food that I’m scared of.

It usually takes almost forty-five minutes to get to the penthouse, so if I leave now I’ll have a little over 2 and a half hours at the least to come up with something edible. That is assuming he’s got the groceries. I know he’ll have baking supplies, but I don’t know about dinner stuff so I may have to stop. Except, fuck, I don’t even know what I’m making! Maybe I’ll just go back and see what he *does* have. *Or maybe you could just order something*. No, I need to make it. I’ve got nothing else to offer him right now.

Regardless, I need to leave like ten minutes ago.

Should I try to find Levi and let him know?

Nah, he’ll figure it out.

…

About forty-five minutes turn into more that fifty-five because it’s Christmas Eve and apparently nobody knows how to function normally on a holiday no matter where you go. But this puts me behind. I can only hope Levi has the same kind of (or worse) commute whenever he’s done. Tony nods at me, but as I speed across the lobby and straight into the elevator, all can offer back is a small smile. The first thing I do is throw open the pantry to gather all the baking supplies. Once I have them set out, I go to the fridge.

Well, he definitely has plenty of food, but now I’m too overwhelmed by my options that I can’t think straight. I take a deep breath, *just focus on what you can make*. Right. I grab the milk and eggs from inside the door, then I go back to the pantry for cocoa powder. If there’s one thing I know it’s that Levi has a small sweet tooth. I once found a bag of Dove’s dark chocolate in his desk, so I’m going to make him a bittersweet chocolate cake. I mix the ingredients together easily enough and before I know it, I have two small round layers in the oven and a small bowl of frosting in the fridge.

Welp, after meticulously cleaning up after myself, I am left with an hour and a half (hopefully more with traffic) to figure out the whole “dinner” thing.

“’Ullo”
“Blue, this is Emergency!”

“What’s going on? Are you okay?”

“Define okay.”

“Are you injured or incarcerated?”

“Not exactly, but it’s still urgent! I need to make dinner for Levi’s birthday—”

“Oh no.”

“- and I have no idea what I’m doing! Wait a minute, what do you mean ‘oh no’?”

“What do you mean ‘what do I mean’? Don’t you remember Easter?”

Too clearly. “Why do you think I’m calling you?”

“I honestly was about to ask you the same thing. If you want advice from a master chef, you should call Mikasa.”

I groan. “I had a feeling you’d say that.”

“So why don’t you call her?”

“Are you serious?” I snort. “You want me to ask for her help in making Levi a romantic birthday dinner? Yeah, cause that's not awkward at all.”

“Hmm, I guess you have a valid point. I hear Farlan’s a great-”

“Armin, if you’re not going to be helpful just hang up.”

“Fine, then just YouTube something!”

“Aarrmmiiinn!”

“I really don't know what you expect me to do, Eren.”

“Help me!”

There’s a long drawn out silence that end with a beep and a loud sigh. “Okay, what do you have?”

Yes! I begin frantically looking at everything in reach, pulling out different items for a better look. “Okay, I've got… gross raw chicken breasts, questionable meat that might actually be fish? Something cow? There are also these long thin green straw looking things, green beans, spinach, some other stuff, and like yogurt and crap.”

“Does he have, like, pasta?”

I run back to the pantry and hastily begin searching through it. “Pasta, pasta, Oh! Peennee and angel hair, and potatoes for some reason.”

“It's 'penne’, Eren.” A new voice drawls over the line causing me to lose my breath.

“M- Mikasa?” I stammer. “Armin, what the hell!? Why didn't you tell me you were with her!? Mikasa what are you doing here!?”
“Eren, calm down.” Armin starts carefully.

“I am calm.” I snap.

“Armin just called me, Eren,” Mikasa starts calmly. “I’m still at home.”

“Were you talking to her when I called?”

“Er- not exactly…”

“So you conference called her without telling me?” I’m fuming, I mean, what the hell? So that’s what he was doing in that silent pause. “Awesome. Fucking great.”

“Do you want my help or not?” Mikasa snaps.

Well, no, but I know I kind of need it. I sigh in defeat. “You do know that this is for Levi, right?”

She sighs. “Yes, I figured it would be.”

“And you’re okay with that?”

She’s quiet for a moment. “Well, it’s better than dealing with a lawsuit from you burning down the building.”

“That’s a bit dramatic, Mikasa.”

“I don’t know, Eren, remember Easter?”

“Why does everyone keep mentioning that?”

“Because you literally set our kitchen on fire.”

“I put it out…”

“No, Armin put it out.”

“What does it matter who put it out, it was put it out.”

“You were boiling water.”

“THERE WAS GREASE ON THE BURNER!”

“I don’t understand how you can be so good at baking but so so horrifyingly bad at cooking.”

“We weren’t all born into perfection.”

“Eren,” Armin begins. “Are you going to let her help you, or not?”

I take a moment to think. My pride says fuck this, but my desperation says she’s right. I’m hopeless. Maybe I really could just fake it and order take out somewhere, but the cake’s already done so I might as well do the whole thing. “Mikasa, if you are okay with it, would you please help me cook something better than just edible?”

“As long as we just don’t talk about who it’s for, I’ll do my best.”

“Great!” Armin pipes. “So… is there anyway you could just call each other and do this because I actually still have some work to do.”
“It’s Christmas Eve, what work could you possibly have?”

“I’m spending time rescheduling everything because someone just had to fly off to New York.”

“You didn’t have to come with me.” I say knowing full well that he knew I needed him.

“It’s fine. I was able to do most of it earlier, but... um, make sure you call me after you date thing, okay?”

“Could we not call it a ‘date’?” Mikasa grumbles.

“Well,” I start defensively. “That’s what it is, Mikasa.”

“I know, but I don’t want to have to think about it too much, Eren.”

I scoff. I get that it’s awkward for her, it is for all of us, but it is the way it is and I’m not just going to pretend that it’s not. “You know what? I think I can figure dinner out on my own, thanks.”

“Eren wait.” Mikasa sighs. “I’m sorry. I know that you’re together now, but it’s still really weird for me and I need time to get used to it.”

I take a deep breath. She’s right to feel that way, and honestly I’m just happy we’re talking again. You should apologize for freaking out on her. I will… later. “I understand.”

“But seriously guys, I need to get back to work.”

“Roger that, Blue! Red, Imma decorate the cake real quick, so I’ll call you in a minute.”

“Roger Green!” Armin replies routinely.

“You guys are such dorks.” Mikasa sighs in exasperation.

“And you are ever the party pooper, Red. Over and out!”

Now, a big part of me wants to decorate the cake with a graveyard and christmas lights, but I also don’t want to find myself on a cold street corner for the night. Instead, because annoying him is too fun to pass up, I come up with an alternative that won’t get me seriously injured. Once I’m done, I grab my phone. I feel like I’m swallowing a horse pill when I get down to her contact. Do I really want to do this? It’s going to be awkward, I know it will, but at the sametime, at least we’d be talking.

I take a deep breath when she answers. “Hey.”

“Hey.” With the tone of her voice, I get a vivid image of her clutching her scarf.

“How are you?”

“Fine, considering my baby brother has been giving me the cold shoulder for no apparent reason.”

Dammit! “Oh, I had plenty of reason, Mikasa.”

“Really? You got pissed because I tried to help you?”

“Yeah, it was a really shitty thing to do behind my back!”

“Oh, don’t even start talking about doing things behind your back!” She bites. “I think your offense
was a bit harsher than mine.”

She has a point and I hate it, but I’m still a stubborn ass who can’t immediately admit guilt when I’m in an argument. “Maybe we should just get straight to the cooking first? I mean, if you’re still willing to help me.”

I hear her take a deep breath. “I said I’d help so, yes, I think we should get that taken care of first.”

So, that’s exactly what we do. She directs me through the motions of what sounded like the easiest to make and soon I’m enveloped in the salivating aroma of chicken, a sauce of sorts, potatoes, and greenbeans.

The words we exchange get less and less strained as we go on which makes talking to her easier and before I know it, we’re cautiously making conversation. We ask about work, I ask about her beast and she asks about my plans for New Years (I.E how I’m going to make it up to Hannes for missing Christmas).

“Hey, Mikasa.” I start sheepishly. I guess ‘later’ has come. “I am sorry for freaking out on you, and for, you know, keeping the Levi thing a secret.”

She’s quiet for a moment. I know I’ve taken her off guard. “Thank you, Eren, that means a lot.”

We fall into silence again and I try to focus solely on searing peppered green beans with garlic in the pan. “I just don’t understand why you felt the need to keep it from me in the first place.”

Here we go. “Because I didn’t want you to freak out and disown me.”

“I would never do that, Eren, I thought you knew that.”

“Yeah, I know, it was stupid.” I fill a glass with the bottle of some fancy looking white wine I found for the sauce. I take a drink. “Also, if I’m being honest, I didn’t think it’d get this far and it would just be something we’d never talk about again. Like, ever.”

“I can’t believe you’d actually think it’d be that easy.”

I take another sip. “Well, we both know what an idiot I am.”

“We sure do.”

“Mhm.” I stir the sauce in the small saucepan. Right now I’m taking up three burners on the stove and my stomach keeps growling at all the smells coming together. Who knew I could make it this far without much incident. “So… how’s Farlan?”

Why did I ask that? I didn’t really think I’d want to hear the answer, but I guess I do. There’s a long pause before she replies. “He’s good.”

“And that whole thing is…?”

“Good, yeah.” She sighs, I can hear her smiling through the phone. Asshole Farlan for making her smile like that. “It’s pretty good.”

Now I can’t hate him. No, I still do, but at least he makes her happy, I guess. “Good.”

“And…” Her voice is tense. “Levi?”

Well, fuck. “Good, I guess.”
This whole conversation is awkward.

“You guess?” She repeats in a familiar ‘mom’ tone. Shit. “Eren, after everything you've got to have more than just ‘I guess’.”

“I thought you didn't want to think about it.” I bite.

“I don’t, but I am more concerned with you than I am about me feeling awkward.” She sighs. “Talk to me, Eren, how is everything?”

I alternate which shoulder I'm squishing my ear to as I switch stirring hands. The green beans are starting to become vibrant and garlic cloves are turning brownish gold which I have been told is a good thing. “It's fine, really. Things are good. We talked a lot of shit out, he’s been crazy busy with rehearsals, and I’ve been helping him with that.” I take a deep breath readying myself to rush out the next part that I don’t know why I feel the need to say anyway. “Um I might of told him I loved him ,and ah- yeah, everything’s good.”

“Wait, back up.” She snaps. Guess rushing through that fourth thing didn't stop her from catching it. “You told him what?”

“I...accidently dropped the ‘L’ bomb.”

She responds with a heavy pause. “And, do you?”

I take a deep breath and close my eyes even though nobody can see me. “I really think I do.”

“Damn.” She sighs. “Okay then, how does the chicken look?”

Nice change of topic. Very subtle. “Ummm, chickeny?”

“Is it cooked all the way through?”

“I don't have x-ray vision, Mikasa, how am I supposed to know?”

“Is there a thermometer anywhere?”

I half heartedly scan the kitchen. “Nope.”

“Okay then, put one on a plate and poke it with a fork.” I do as I'm instructed without question. “Is the juice coming out of it clear?”

“It's a little murky and pinkish.”

“Then put it back into the pan with the lid and leave it for another few minutes. What about the potatoes?”

I open the oven (we decided on keeping thing “simple” with baked instead of mashed because Mikasa didn’t trust me with a blender) and check inside the little potato pods of aluminum foil. “They seem soft.”

“When is Levi getting back?”

I look at the clock and feel a rush of panic. “Like 20 minutes maybe less.”

“Actually, that's about perfect timing. Otherwise you would be dealing with keeping everything warm.”
That calms me down a bit. “Okay… now, how do I set the table?”

“You’re kidding, right?” When I don’t answer because I don’t want to feel like an idiot, but yes, I am serious. She sighs. “Look for some kind of table cloth.”

“Right.” I begin my search by opening every closet I come across and end up finding a red one in the buffet. “Table cloth is a go.”

“Candles?”

“Ummm,” There’s one on a bookshelf in the living room that I claim for the center of the table. “I’ve got one.”

“That’s fine. What about flowers or something.”

“I don’t have any, but there’s a Poinsettia in the entry.”

“Put that in the middle, grab another wine glass.”

“What do you mean another?”

“As if you haven’t been drinking that wine this whole time.”

She knows me too well. “I can use the same wine, right? Or does it have to be red or-”

“Yes, just stick with the wine we already used. Go check on the chicken again.”

I do and it seems about perfect. So do the beans, potatoes, and sauce. I’m sure it’s only a matter of minutes before Levi gets home so I decide to plate everything. The table looks acceptable given my lack of preparation. The cake is covered on the counter. Now I just need the man of the hour.

“Everything looks great, thank you, Mikasa.”

“Well, who knew you would be able to pull this off over the phone. I guess I really am a miracle worker.”

“Hehe.” The elevator dings. “I gotta go, love you, Sis!”

I don’t have time for her reply. When I hang up my phone immediately begins to ring, but I ignore it and run to the hall to meet him. The doors slide open to Levi holding his phone to his ear and staring daggers at me. Oh no. I pull out my phone and look down at his face flashing on my screen.

“Oh,” He starts coldly. “So your phone is working.”

“Yes, why?” But as soon as I swipe to my home screen I see why. I have 5 missed calls. “Oh Shit.”

“‘Oh shit’ is right.” Levi crosses his arms and begins tapping his foot.

“I’m sorry, I was on the phone.”

“You couldn’t have let me know you were leaving?”

“I didn’t think it’d be that big of a deal.”

“Not that big of a deal?” He sounds angry but he looks worried more than anything. “You left without a trace and your phone kept going to voicemail. Jesus, Eren, I had no idea where you were!”
“Well, obviously I’m fine.” I say calmly. “You don’t trust me enough to be able to walk around alone?”

“It’s not you I don’t trust, it’s everyone else.”

“I can take care of myself.”

He sighs. “I know, I was just worried.” Then he sniffs the air and looks at me suspiciously. “What’s that smell?”

I smile, take his hand, and lead him to the dining room. There’s a look of surprise that I’ve never seen on another person before which makes me smile even wider. “Happy birthday, Levi!”
Chapter Summary

Date night

Chapter Notes

Hello and Happy New Year!
As some of you may know, this fic turned 2 yesterday! Thank you all for sticking with this, if it weren't for you I would never have made it this far!
Here's a chapter of fluff and dancing and decorating and more fluff.
Seriously 99% of this is just dialogue

“*You* made this?” Levi asks skeptically looking between me and the now empty fork in his hand.

“Don't sound so surprised.” Though, *I* sure as hell am! This turned out better than I expected.

“I just didn't know you cooked.” He shrugs before taking another bite. “In fact, I've heard horror stories about you trying.”

*Dammit Mikasa.*

“Yeah, well you can't always believe what you hear.” I stand quickly to get the wine I almost forgot about and, *fuck*, I ache! My back, ass, and thighs fucking *burn* . So, he was a little rough with me this afternoon, and we have also been at it nonstop, it's only natural that I'm a little stiff. This man has the libido of a beast and even I have to admit I'm having a hard time keeping up. Hey, I'm only human- you try being drilled up the ass 4-5 times a day for hours at a time in several different positions and try to walk straight. Not that I don't love it, but damn. And I thought *Horseface* had an incorrigible libido.

“I guess not.” He replies absently as he takes another small bite. After grabbing the little less than half full bottle, I go to fill Levi's glass. My heart picks up as he slides his hand over mine resting on the table, which is stupid because it's not like he hasn't touched me before- many many times and *many* different places. Then he gently tugs me toward him, his other hand cups my chin for a chaste kiss. “Thank you, Eren.”

*Calm down, it's just a kiss you've done that plenty of times as well.*

“Don't mention it.” I think I reply smoothly, at least I *mean* to. Levi smiles and, as soon I turn around to go back to my seat, he slaps my ass. *Ouch*. My hand trembles as I fill my own glass, but if Levi notices, he doesn’t say anything which I'm grateful for. Jesus, why am I so shaky? After *everything* that's happened between us, why do I feel like a virgin teen on his first date?

Oh, that's just it, isn't it? For all intents and purposes this *is* our first real date. And I'm nervous. I shouldn't be *at all* but I can’t help it.
“You okay, kid?” Levi calls me back to reality with a look of concern.

“Fine.” I smile. “I was just thinking about how this is kinda like our first date.” He abruptly stops any motion for a moment—wine glass at his lips and eyes wider than usual—and when he decides to move again, he regards me thoughtfully as he takes a long slow sip of wine. Now you’ve done it! You freaked him out, Jaeger! Shit. But wait, as he sets his glass back down, a smile spreads across his face.

“I guess it is.” He chuckles. “Ya know, after all the shit we’ve been through, you really choose a strange thing to get nervous about.” So he did notice me shaking. “I mean, how many times have I been inside of you?”

I choke on the small piece of chicken in my mouth. “Gross, Levi.”

“What?” He begins casually. “Are you saying you don’t like having me inside you?”

“Are you trying to make me uncomfortable?”

He laughs. “You get embarrassed too easily.”

“Just because I don’t like to be crass?”

“You think talking about sex makes you crass?”

“When it’s the way you do, yes.”

“Even when it’s just the two of us?”

He might be right on this one. What’s the point in getting so embarrassed? Maybe, but, fuck, my face is hot. “I g-guess—”

“Eren,” Levi interrupts me with a chuckle. “I’m just messing with you.”

With my ears on fire, I take another aggressive bite of my delicious food. He laughs. “You’re fucking adorable.” To that I open my mouth, revealing my half chewed food. He gags. “I take that back.”

We finish our meal in casual conversation and once we’re done, I begin clearing off the table.

“Stay.” I warn Levi when he tries to help. He raises a curious eyebrow but complies and settles back in his seat. Well now… he listened. I smile and swagger over. He licks his lips before I swoop down to lick them myself. “Who’s a good boy now?”

“God,” He starts, pinching my nose. “You’re lucky I like you.”

I rub my nose on my way to grab the cake I’m not so sure he deserves now, and grumble, “I don’t know if lucky’s the right word.”

“What are you doing back there anyway?” Levi calls over his shoulder.

Putting the final touches on a masterpiece. “You’ll see.” With the last candle lit, I turn back to the table. “TaDa!”

Levi looks at the beautiful cake set in front of him with a flicker of amusement in his eyes and a small smile playing at his lips. The cake is frosted in white frosting with blue and green sugar sprinkles, the candles have been formed into one giant flaming Christmas tree, and scrawled above it in red frosting: Merry Birthday Levi!
“Don’t you know never to put the full amount of candles on a person’s cake after, like, 21?” Levi says poking at one of the flames.

“I was always told to celebrate every year!” I beam. He turns in his chair and pokes me in the side with his fork. “Fine, next time I’ll go in multiples of 5 like we do for Hannes. But it’ll be an uneven amount, so maybe if we double it, you’ll feel better! That would be, what, sixty-”

“I dare you to try.” Levi cuts me off with a warning. “I guess you just don’t really realize how old you are until you see your life in candles.”

“Well,” I push his chair back enough to straddle his lap and throw my arms behind his neck. “When it’s my birthday, you can put as many candles as you want on my cake!”

“That’s a comfort, you’ll only be 21.” Levi cups my cheek to pull me into a soft kiss. “When is that anyway?”

“March 30th.” I smile widely.

“Hmm.” He leans forward for another quick peck. “I look forward to it.”

And suddenly my heart is racing so quickly I feel lightheaded. 3 months. He’s saying we’ll make it that long and, fuck, it hits me. The weight of everything that’s happening, really happening, finally happening between us. We are moving forward without being afraid to make future plans. True, at the moment those plans are limited to how many candles I will permit on my birthday cake, but it’s progress. The weightlessness in my chest has me pulling Levi’s mouth back to mine for a long passionate kiss. My tongue moving slowly, purposefully alongside his, curling and sucking lightly as his hands snake up back. This feels nice, it feels warm almost like…

“Kid,” Levi starts breathlessly. “Let me blow out these candles before the whole building burns down.” I nod while catching my breath. I move to slide off, but, pushing me aside but still in his lap, he leans forward, trapping me between him and the edge of the table, and blows out the candles.

“Asshole.” I flick his forehead. “Now I have to relight them.”

“Why?”

“I didn’t get to sing to you!”

“I didn’t want you to.”

“Well, did you at least make a wish?” He rolls his eyes in response. “Yup, we’re doing this again.”

I try to move off his lap, but Levi catches my hips. “Where do you think you’re going?”

“The lighter is in the kitchen”.

“Eren, it’s really not a big deal.”

“Yes it is, you didn't even make a wish.”

“I don't have anything to wish for.”

Awe. “Well you're gonna have to think of something.”

He groans, but lets me up. In a handful of seconds, I return with a lighter and some party favors.
“You’re kidding.” He deadpans when he sees the small pointed hat on my head.

“There’s one for you, too!”

“No.”

“But-”

“I’m not wearing one. It’s my birthday and you can’t make me.”

Wanna bet, Old Man. I narrow my eyes a moment before shrugging in mock defeat.

“You’re right, I can’t make you do what you don’t want to do.” He eyes me skeptically. “But,” I lean over him with one arm on the back of the chair behind his head and my other hand resting gingerly on his groin. “I can make you suffer.”

My palm presses down and he hisses. “That’s dirty even for you, fucking brat.”

And so, with a pointed party hat and crossed arms, Levi stares me down as I relight his tree before getting the lights. Now, this is a sight I’ll never forget: Levi sulking in his seat with an off centered hat in the soft glow of his Christmas Tree birthday cake. His scowl deepens when he hears the shutter go off on my phone.

“If you show that to anyone, I promise you won’t make it to March 30th.”

“But you look so cute!”

“Let’s just get this over with. There’s wax all over my cake now.”

I take a deep breath to restart my serenade, “Happ-” And there go the candles. “Levi!”

“What?” He starts picking out the stubs of wax. “I’m wearing your stupid hat, isn’t it enough?” I scowl and grab the lighter. “No, Sparky, I already made a wish, you’ll just undo it.”

“Hmph.” I fall in defeat into the chair beside him. “You win this round, Ackerman.”

“Stop whining.” He pulls off his hat and starts cutting the cake. “You want a scoop of ice cream?”

“What kind of question is that?”

“Right.” Levi rolls his eyes and puts two scoops on my plate. He does know me! Smiling widely, I humbly accept my plate and begin eating once I see him take the first bite. “So this is what a Jeagerbomtastic cake tastes like.” Dammit Mikasa. Or Ymir since she came up with the name, but I highly doubt she and Levi talk on a regular basis. “Not bad.”

“Thanks.”

He takes another bite before making an offhand comment, “We’re running twice as long in the morning.”

“But it’s Christmas!” I whine. Though, if I’m being honest, working out actually sounds nice? Don’t tell him I say so, but even I have to admit that my body feels 1000% better than it did pre-Levi.

“Don’t be such a baby.”

I grumble something along the lines of ‘you’re a baby’ to which the corner of his mouth curves.
“Speaking of ‘Baby’,” I start. “How did you get on Broadway?”

“I know people.”

“Who?”

“Erwin.”

“So what, he saw you and thought,” I wave my hands dramatically above my head. “‘Broadway’?”

“Pretty much.”

“Seriously, Levi, tell me how you were discovered? Did you audition like I did?”

He snorts. “Hell no. Iz talked me into sneaking on set for some cheesy zombie show.”

“And when you were caught,” I decide to finish for him. “They elected to keep you?”

“More or less,” Levi wipes his mouth and sits back in his seat. “Security kicked us out, and a couple days later, Erwin Smith showed up in the bar I worked at asking me if I was interested in stunting for a small part in a movie. I only went because Iz made me.” So he was pushed by someone he cares about, too? I know that feeling bro. “Turned out I was pretty damn good in front of a camera, and eventually Erwin moved me from stunt man to film to the stage for the show. He said it was just to see if I could do it, but it was mainly for publicity.”

“Hm, so did you know Petra before that?”

“No, actually that's where we met.”

“Then how did she become your PA?”

“When it was over, she…” Levi stiffens a little. “Decided she wanted to stay with me.”

Oh. She must have liked him an awful lot to give up the stage and cross the fucking country to become his personal assistant. Didn't see that one coming. “Wow.”

He awkwardly clears his throat. “Have you ever thought of being up on a stage?”

I sigh. “At first, that’s all I wanted to do.”

“What stopped you?”

“Life.” I scoff.

Levi hums thoughtfully as he takes another small bite. Once he’s done chewing, after a small sip of wine, he asks, “Did you do theatre in school?”

“Mhm,” I refill our glasses. “In junior high and most of high school.”

“Really?” Levi asks deviously eyeing me over the rim of his glass. “What did you do? What characters did you play?”

I slowly let out a sigh and look to the ceiling as if it’ll jog my memory any faster. “In 8th grade we did High School Musical- don’t start!”

“I wasn’t going to say anything.”
He was totally going to say something, I could see it in his eyes.”Right… anyway, I was Troy—”

“Pfft- you would be Troy.”

Ignoring that I continue. “Then I was Kenickie in Grease, Truffaldino in Servant of Two Masters, Cornelius in Hello Dolly, Benedick in Much Ado About Nothing, and Tony in West Side. After that, I got a part time job senior year and stopped theatre all together.”

“Would you want to do it again?”

“Maybe someday.” I shrug. “Right now I think I just want to get through this damn program.”

“Oh yeah,” He stands to begin clearing the table. “How did you end the semester?”

That warrants another swig of wine while getting to my feet to help. “Good.”

My voice came out a touch higher than I meant it to and Levi eyes me skeptically. “You sure about that, Sparky?”

I make it to the counter carefully balancing the cake in one hand and our plates in the other, Levi’s gathered up the rest. “No, it was good. I mean, I didn’t fail anything.”

“That’s assuring.” He begins unloading the dishwasher while I put away the food. “Did you at least get credit for everything?”

“Yeah,” I start rinsing the dishes. “I got a couple C’s, but the rest were B’s!”

“Not bad.” Levi takes the dishes from my hands to load into the dishwasher. “Why do you sound so disappointed? That’s a hell of a lot better than most grades I’d ever had.”

“Me too, honestly, it’s just—” I sigh and lean my hip on the side of the sink to look at him. “I don’t think it’s good enough, you know?”

“Why?”

“Because I have to be a perfect student or else.”

“Or else, what?”

“You know...” I trail off with raised eyebrows.

Levi rolls his eyes. “You mean the whole ‘golden child’ thing?”

“Yes!”

“Hm,” He starts the load of dishes and looks back at me. “That’s total bullshit. To put so much pressure on you is fucking ridiculous.”

“Right!”

“Right. So why are you going along with it?”

“First of all, I promised Mikasa- and myself, I guess- that I would see it through. Also, Zackly scares the hell out of me!”

He huffs humorlessly. “He has that effect on people.”
“You mean he doesn’t intimidate you at least a little?”

Levi shrugs. “I’ve dealt with bigger, scarier fish.” I don’t doubt that. He steps closer until he’s threading his finger through my hair to pull me into a soft kiss. “In any case, I’m proud of you.”

I can tell I’m blushing and I can’t think of anything to say. The only thing I can focus on is the way my heart swells when he says that, because, damn, I didn’t realize how much I needed to hear that. “Thanks.”

“I mean it.” He grabs my chin to stop me from averting my eyes in embarrassment. “At times, you can be a lazy pain in the ass—”

“Gee, thanks.”

“But I’m thoroughly impressed by your dedication and work ethic every other time.”

“Can you ever give a straightforward compliment?”

“You’re the best sex I’ve ever had.”

Oh damn, how the hell am I supposed to respond to that? Luckily, I don’t have to worry much about it because Levi brings my mouth back to his for another small kiss.

“You taste like chocolate.” I smile as I settle my hands on his hips.

With his fingers playing in my hair, he snorts. “I wonder why.”

“Do you wanna dance?” He looks as surprised as I feel. I don’t know where that came from, but right now it’s all I want to do.

“Sure.” Levi’s face softens into a smile. Then he takes my hand and leads me to the living room. “Help me move this crap.”

We start with the couch, moving it back until it’s sandwiching the bar stools against the counter. That alone give us quite a bit of space, but we don’t stop there. The rest of the furniture gets cleared away til all that’s left is the simplistic area rug ordained with elegant swirls of blue, grey, black, and tan. Levi picks up a small remote and just like that, the room erupts with music.

“Do you wanna lead again or do you want me to lead?”

“...You can lead.” I answer shyly and take a deep breath. There are those nerves again. His hand slides around my side to hold me at the small of my back; he pulls me to him. My hand rests on his shoulder while the other bends to clasp his at our side. He steps forward and pushes me back with him. Our bodies are as close as possible as we sway with the rise and fall of the melody. His hips grind into mine slowly- sensually- as he guides me with him and I match it as best as I can. I find myself smiling into his hair as I nestle my head beside his so that my lips skim the top of his ear. My heart seems to beat in time at first, but it speeds up dramatically when I hear Levi’s low voice singing along.

*Leave this Blue Neighborhood-* The hand on my back moves to my hip and pushes me gently to spin out, miraculously under his arm - *Never knew lovin could hurt this good*

*Oh*- Then he uses my hand to pull me back into him. I’m at his side, caught in his arm and my other hand held firmly in his.
And it drives me- he leans to the side, taking me with him - wild

’Cause when you look like that- I can’t help but laugh airily when he spins me mostly free, my hand still tethered to his.

I’ve never ever wanted to be so bad

Oh- Levi smiles carelessly as he pulls me back to him, returning his hand to my lower back - It drives me wild

You’re driving me wild, wild, wild

His low voice is like velvet and chocolate

You’re driving me wild, wild, wild

And I’ve got a migration of butterflies swirling in my stomach with the sound of it.

You’re driving me wild

We continue to glide carelessly across our makeshift dance floor- spinning, swaying and shifting with his low singing which is slowly melting me from the inside out. No matter what, though, I always come back to his tight hold and warm body. He pushes me back with both our hand clasped together, we loop them over our heads and pull apart.

Running on the music

Levi immediately grabs my hips and I drape my arms around his neck.

And night highs

Our legs are off centered and we lightly grind against each other with the movement in our hips.

But when the light’s out

It’s me and you now, now

’Cause there’s still- He begins moving down my body with the melody- too long til the weekend

Too long til I come in your hand

Too long since I’ve been a fool

Oh- Levi’s hands caress my hips as he grinds himself back up- Leave this Blue Neighborhood

Never knew lovin could hurt this good, oh- He pulls me with him by my hips as he keeps stepping back- and it drives me wild

I spin out of his hand, behind his back and he catches me by my waist. One of his hands moves down my thigh to my knee as he leans me into a small dip. We’re both wearing blissful smiles while we dance closely. As cliche as it sounds, when we move across this living room floor, it’s like we’re floating on cloud 9, and I don’t want to come down. Looking at Levi’s relaxed features and soft smile, I don’t think he does either.

One of his hands slides up my chest until it’s hooked on my neck, and he pulls himself closer.
You make my heart shake—Levi’s warm low voice begins singing in my ear.

Bend and break

But I can't turn away

And it's driving me wild—A cool hand cups my cheek and he pushes himself back enough to look me dead in the eyes—You're driving me wild

You make my heart shake

My knees feel weak.

Bend and break

But I can't turn away

And it's driving me wild

I swing myself out and spin back into his arms, my back to his chest.

You're driving me wild

We sway into each other in time with the music.

Leave this blue neighborhood

Never knew loving could hurt this good, oh

And it drives me wild

Levi holds me close and before lifting both our arms up and we twist—hands still clasped—under them until he can pull me back to him.

‘Cause when you look like that

Both our hands are still together so that one is being held at the side normally while my other is twisted behind me to rest with his on my lower back.

I've never ever wanted to be so bad

Oh—He lets me free my hand to spin me half way before pulling my back to his torso once more—It drives me wild

We sway a bit before he finishes my rotation.

You're driving me wild, wild, wild

Levi holds me close as I slide my hand to rest in the crook of his neck

You're driving me wild, wild, wild

By this point my forehead is resting on his and we each have one hand hooked on the other’s neck.

You're driving me wild, wild, wild

I don’t remember when I close my eyes, but I'm so lost in the moment—in him—to give a damn. Our
hot breath mingles together as I continue to move with him.

You're driving me wild, wild, wild

On the last bar of the song, Levi guides me into a low dip- bending with me to keep his grip; and I’ve never felt more secure than this moment in his arms. When the song comes to an end, his hand goes back to my lower back as the other settles beneath my jaw. It takes a good minute for us both to catch our breaths. Not from the dancing per-say- I mean, we’re both in good shape, not to mention he’s been doing this 100x over every day for the last month- but from the shear affection put into it.

“Eren.” He says so lowly it comes out barely more than a whisper. The next song is shuffled through the speakers, but we don’t pay it any mind. His eyes are unfocused before they find mine, and when they do, I see a whirlpool of emotion. His mouth opens and closes as if he wants to say something, but can’t find the words (or can’t bring himself to say them). I'm reminded of this morning and my pulse picks up in anticipation. Is he actually going to say it? Instead, Levi moves his gaze to my lips and absently glides his thumb over my adam's apple before pulling me into a harder- than- expected kiss. His other hand grips my hip tightly, causing me to break apart with a wince. “What’s wrong? Are you okay?”

“Yeah,” I smile, trying to get over my disappointment. I mean, it's not like I could expect him to say it just like that. “Just a little bruised.”

But why can’t you expect it? Is it really so much of a request?

His puppy eyes look at me with genuine concern. “How?”

“Do you really have to ask?” Oh, I can’t bring myself to care about what he did or didn’t say while he’s looking at me like that.

Levi gives me an apologetic look before, to my surprise, dropping to his knees. He gingerly pulls the waistband of my jeans down enough to expose his yellowing fingerprints. He places kisses over them on each side. Levi looks back up at me. “I didn’t mean to be so rough.”

I smirk with hooded eyes. “I wasn’t complaining.”

“Oh really?” He arches an eyebrow and purposely runs his hands up my inner thighs.

Oh shit.

“B-b-but, I am still quite sore!” I stammer desperately because as much as I would love to have sex, if I don’t take a break he’s going to snap me in two. “G-give me a couple more hours.”

He chuckles as he gets to his feet. “I had a feeling that was why you seemed so stiff.”

“Stiff?” I frown.

“Not in a bad way, and if I didn’t already know how you move I probably wouldn’t have picked up on it.”

He begins to move to what remains of the song slowly. With his hands lightly pulling on my waist, I mold myself to him. Choosing to wrap his arms around my neck, he lets me take the lead. The way our bodies sway is simple as glide across the floor. The swirling hues in the carpet seem to be guiding us with the music.

“Hey, Levi?” I start into the top of his head which is resting below my chin.
“Hm?”

“How don’t you have a Christmas tree?”

“Too messy.”

“Why don’t you get a fake one?”

“I wasn’t expecting to spend Christmas here, and got too busy to decorate.” He shrugs. “Besides, it was only me so there wasn’t any point to it.”

“Touche.”

“Why?” He pauses our movements to look at me. “Did you want one?”

“I mean...” I swing him out and spin him back into my arms. With both arms wrapped around his waist, I tuck my head beside his. His raven hair feels like silk against my cheek. *God, he smells good.* “Where would we even get one on Christmas Eve?”

“In the middle of the city that never sleeps?” Levi holds me close. With his head resting again on my shoulder beneath my jawline, he begins absently running his fingers through my hair. “Your guess is as good as mine.”

“Hm.” I slide my hand from his waist, up his side until I am able to gently turn his gaze to me with my palm cupping his face. “Do you have any stockings?”

Not that I have anything to fill it with, but I’m sure I could fine *something*.

Levi snorts. “Kid, if you want to do Christmas so badly, just tell me and we’ll go out and buy stuff.”

“But, I don’t want to be *that* customer.”

“No,” He purrs, or maybe he doesn't but his voice is low and sultry. “But if we go now we could still make a few stores before they close.”

“What about garland?” He lets me spin him again.

“Eren,” Levi smiles and shakes his head as we come back together. “Do you want to de-”

“-ck these halls with boughs of holly?” I finish with a cheesy grin.

He barely suppresses a groan. “Shall I take that as a yes?”

*It would buy some more time before Hanji’s surprise party...* “Yes, but, do you have *anything* here?”

“I think I might have a box somewhere...” He scratches his head and looks around. “Though, if you really want a tree we should go out and get that first.”

“Okay!” I spring toward the coat closet.

...

When we step into the chilled winter air, Levi is bundled up in his thick pea coat and matching coal black hat, gloves, and scarf. Underneath it all, he seems less recognizable, but we’re still careful in case someone happens to recognize him.
“Well,” I shrug after about the fifth store we come out of. “Looks like the odds of finding a tree at the last minute getting slimmer and slimmer.”

I watch from the corner of my eye as the man beside me tries to suppress a snort. “I’m not surprised. Wanna call it quits? We did find a good deal of their things.” He reminds me by holding up a bag of decorations we were able to get.

“I guess.” I sigh.

“I’ve got that wine rack thing at home, we can use that!”

“Your attempts to console me are ineffective.”

“Oh c’mon.” Levi moves close enough to bump me with his shoulder to capture my attention. His eyes are filled with warmth and I spy a small smile creeping around the corner of his mouth. “Do you want something hot?”

_I mean, if he’s offering..._

“Hm?” I turn my dirty minded head to a tiny coffee shop with bright lights hanging in the window which reads: _Normal Hours Christmas Eve and Open Christmas Day_

I shrug because, yes, it's fucking cold. The place is pretty much empty, and doesn't give off the same charm as Sasha and Connie’s shop at home, but it's warm and it's open. We order our drinks to go and slowly make our way back. I still have a few hours until I have to convince Levi to go out, but he looks _so_ tired. Should I just let him sleep when we get back? Or should I keep my promise to Hanji and take him?

“I can hear those rusty gears turning.” Levi nudges me with his elbow as he walks. “What are you thinking about?”

“N-nothing, really.” I take a small sip of the alright hot chocolate. “Erm- what do you want to do after this?”

“Do you mean before or after my ‘surprise party’?”

I stop dead in my tracks. “What do you mean?”

“Don’t worry, you didn’t give anything away.” He shrugs and smirks. “They do this every year, kid.”

Damn. “So, you’re okay with going?”

“Hell no.”

“Oh-”

“But I’ll go as long as you’re going.”

Goddamn, I want to kiss this man. I watch carefully as he brings his steaming tea precariously to his lips before taking a small sip. I watch him flinch slightly from the heat. I wish I could make it better. I step closer and barely catch myself before reaching out for him, the movement does not go unnoticed. Next thing I know, Levi’s hand is clasped around my wrist and he’s yanking me down a dark alley.

“Levi-” But he cuts me off by pulling me by my chin into a rough kiss. What the shit!? I mean it’s not like it’s broad daylight in the middle of a crowd, but we are out in the relative open. Still, I can’t help but kiss him back. One hand clutches at his coat as I pull him closer, the other one is holding my
drink against his back. He’s going to kill me if it spills against him. He breaks the kiss to look me
dead in the eyes.
“Did you think I’d let you get away with giving me a look like that?” Levi strokes my cheekbone
and brings his own drink down with the arm he had hooked around my neck. “You damn brat.”
I step back and start looking around. “Y- you don’t think anyone saw us, do you?”
“So what if someone did?” He steps toward me until I’ve been backed to the wall.
It’s not like I don’t want to just devour this man here and now, but… “Levi, you’re the one that
said-”
“I know what I said.” He sighs. Levi drops his hand and straightens back up; his eyes turn cold as he
looks further down the alley. My heart sinks. I understand the struggle, the tightrope between his
personal and public life he’s careful to balance everyday. His reputation is on the line, but what takes
me aback is that he seems to care less about that and more about how I’d get tangled in a scandal. I
wish it were different; I know he does too and I need to do something to put a smile on his
face...well, I already know he won’t smile, but he’ll want to.
So, before he can step away, I swoop down to place a soft kiss on his cheek. I hear his breath catch,
see slightly less of a frown, and I walk past him back into the small trickle of people. Moments later
he appears by my side with his eyes fixed ahead of us in a cool glare. He looks like an
unapproachable ass, per the norm, except…
“You’re blushing.” I point out casually.
“Tch.” He pulls his scarf up in the same kind of way Mikasa does whenever she gets nervous. “Shut
up.”
I laugh so hard that I’m temporarily blinded as the wisps of my breath fog the cool air in front of me.
With a side glance, I watch as Levi tries to hide his amusement by rolling his eyes. We’re already so
close, but didn’t we just have our first real date?
“What’s with that face?” Levi asks suddenly.
Was I making a face? *Nah, just were smiling like an idiot as alway s… “Ah, nothing, just a funny
thought.”
“You’ve been having a lot of those, Sparky. Mind sharing with the class?”
“Well, you know how we talked about dinner being our first.. You know?”
“Yeah…”
“I was just thinking about how you have a lot of making up to do.”
“Wait a minute,” Levi turns his cold stare to me. “What do you mean *I* have a lot of making up to
do?”
“Well,” I shrug. “You’re the millionaire.”
Ah, another beautifully exaggerated eye roll. “Fine, then next time I’m choosing the food for date
night.”
“Oh, was my dinner not good enough for you?”
“That’s not what I said.”
“Because it actually took a lot of effort.”
“Eren,” He stops me with a tug on my sleeve. “Dinner was amazing! That is exactly why I want to
return the favor.”
I eye him for a moment and smirk. “As long as it’s not seafood…”
“What,” He pulls back his sleeve to look at his watch. “Not even smoked salmon?” I grimace, he
smirks. “Mmm with a good lemon pepper sauce and Pinot Noir…”
“Seriously, if you keep talking I’m going to puke.” He smiles (whoa, what? In public?) before
stepping to the edge of the curb and throwing up his hand. “What are you doing?”
“Hailing a cab.” Sure enough, not five seconds later, one swerves to answer his hail.
“What I meant was,” I drawl pointedly. “Can’t we walk?”
“Sure,” He opens the door and holds it for me. “I just figured since we’ve gone so far and it’s rather cold that we would just catch a ride, but if you want to...”
“Nope.” I shudder at the thought and he snorts as I slide in. What? Laziness will out.
Levi tells the driver his address. The man’s gaze lingers on Levi as he pulls away from the curb.
“Did you want to go straight for the club?” He asks when we step out of the cab.

“Could we, maybe, decorate a little bit first?” I reply while throwing out our empty drinks.

“Whatever you want, Sparky.”

“Decorating it is!” I barely catch Levi’s smile when I skip through the lobby. “Merry Christmas, Tony!”

The large man bundled in a coat and scarf looks between me and Levi quizzically.

“Night, Tony.” Levi waves.

“You have a good holiday, Mr. Ackerman.” Tony responds before nodding to me and hesitantly adding. “And, uh, Mr. Thorn.”

I salute him from the elevators and watch as he walks into the bitter chill. “I think I’m growing on him.”

“Heh,” My companion starts to himself once the elevator opens up. “Like a fungus.”

“Whoa, buddy, didn’t anyone ever tell you words can sting?”

“Awe,” Levi turns to me in concern. Fake concern, genuine acting. Asshole. “Did my words sting you, sugar?” Aaand we’re somewhere in the south? “You know what my mama said would make anything feel better?”

I roll my eyes. Fine, I’ll play. “What?”

Levi pulls me in by my jacket and presses me against the wall. “A kiss.”

Smooth tactics just like his lips. Man, he really keeps up on balming these things.

“Feel better yet?” He asks against my mouth.

“Hm, that depends.” I smirk.

“On what?”

“Can I have another slice of cake?”

I feel his face and body slump in defeat. “You’re kidding, right?”

I shrug. “What? We just walked miles in the freezing cold, and I can’t help it if I’m a master baker!”

He just shakes his head. “Get me one while you’re at it.” Whaaaaa- “Here,” He begins pushing the sleeves of my jacket off my arms. “I’ll finish this up.”

_Double whaaaaattt?

I remove my shoes and put on fresh socks before, very, very skeptically, going to the kitchen to put
together our plates of second dessert. I watch as he finishes hanging our jackets and slowly makes his
way over.

“Thanks.” He kisses my cheek when he grabs his plate from my hand. *Triple whaaatt?*

“You’re welcome.” I reply absently. We eat our small cubes of chocolate decadence in silence.

“What do you want to start with?” Levi asks once we unload the dishwasher and reload it with our
two plates and forks.

“Hmmm.” I ponder, looking the area up and down and going through the small bag of decorations
we bought. We go with hanging the cheap ropes of garland and strings of lights in the windows.
Next, Levi places his giant wine holder in the shape of a long vine that must be 4 feet tall in the
center of the living room floor. We decorate it with store bought ornaments and string it with tinsel.
Then we hang the pair of tiny stocking on the mantle which nicely contrasts the huge fucking
fireplace they’re above. While we were out, Levi and I agreed that we would have a makeup
Christmas when he came home so that took some of the pressure off of not having a gift. I mean, I do
still feel like a total POS for not having something, because it’s not like Christmas is something that
comes out of nowhere! In any case, big presents when he gets home, but we did buy each other
small trinkets for the stockings which is better than nothing at all. The transformation is complete
within the hour and we celebrate by collapsing on the couch and turning on A Christmas Story.

“When do you think we should head out?” He asks when I swoop over him with a giant blanket.

“Let’s at least make it til the scene with the lamp.” I compromise while curling up to his side, the
blanket now thrown over us both. The movie plays on, and I stay next to his warm body as it does.
The rhythm of his breathing and the drone of voices on the television seem to hypnotize me, and
before I know it, I’m being gently lifted. Instinctively, I curl into Levi’s body as he carries me into his
room.

“Do you want me to change your clothes or do you think you’re awake enough to manage?” He
asks lowly once he’s set me on the bed. I yawn but slide to my feet.

“I’ll manage.” Levi leaves me to it and goes to the bathroom. By the time he comes back, I’m laying
comfortably between the sheets. I hear him chuckle before climbing in with me, and I immediately
mold myself to him with my head resting on his chest. I can feel his heart pick up the pace as I
nuzzle myself closer.

“Eren.” Levi says softly into my hair before kissing the top of my head. “I love you.”

A smile spreads across my face as warmth does my body and I hold him tighter. I would jump up
and exclaim if not for the weight of my eyelids. “I love you too, Levi.”

I feel like I’m forgetting something big, but I let his steadying heart lull me away from that thought
and into a blissful rest.
**Merry Birthday!! (pt.1)**

**Chapter Summary**

Oh my goodness, guys, I reread this and it is much longer than I had ever anticipated it would be. Yay? For all who have stuck with me all this long while, especially in the early stages of my writing talents (or lack there of), I thank you all from the very bottom of my heart. You are the goodness that keeps this fragile world together.

**Chapter Notes**

See the end of the chapter for notes

I wake to the uncomfortable feeling of being watched- my heavy eyes flicker open and I see a dark figure hovering over me.

“Jesus Christ, Hanji!” I jolt up, accidentally knocking Eren's head from my chest. He turns around unfazed and continues his blissful rest while I'm sitting here with my hand over my stilled heart.

“**Well,** don't you two look cozy .” They drawl spitefully. I groan and run my hand down my face. “Apparently, too cozy to even-”

“**Shhh!**” I hold a finger to my lips and look over as the sleeping prince bundled beneath my covers begins to stir. Slowly I remove myself from the bed and motion for Hanji to silently follow me. Once we’re in the hall, I gingerly close the door and turn to them. “I want my key back, Hanji.”

“Well, I wanted my guest of honor to show up to his own surprise birthday party, but we don't always get what we want, do we?”

I give them an exasperated sigh and lead the way to the kitchen where I immediately put a kettle on.

“It wasn't much of a surprise party, though, seeing as I knew about it.”

“It's the principle of the thing, Levi.” They hop on one of the bar stools and lean on the counter. “Don't tell me you were too busy screwing each other that you forgot how to operate a phone.”

“It wasn't like that, the kid fell asleep while we were watching a movie.”

“Was the movie after the sex?” They asked wiggling their eyebrows.

I roll my eyes. “None of your business, Shitty Glasses.”

“Ohhh I see,” They smirk deviously. “It was playing during sexy fun times.”

“We didn't have sex.” I shrug. *Last night anyway, yesterday morning though...*

“Oh,” Hanji eyes me curiously. “So you guys were just watching a movie together?”

“Yes.”

“And...” Their hand was cupping their chin as if trying to solve a puzzle. “He fell asleep with you on the couch?”
“Yes…” A high pitched whistle interrupts us and I curse, moving as quick as possible to remove it from the heat and stop the whistling. I look to the hall which still seems quiet. Phew. I grab two mugs and loose leaf filters of chamomile tea. As I place one in front of Hanji, I notice that they’re still studying me intently.

“What, Glasses?”

“You’re really crazy about him, huh?” They sit back on their stool.

“I don’t know if I’d say I’m crazy -”

“Sorry, crazier.”

I take a deep breath, lean against the counter, and take a long sip of soothing liquid. “I told him I love him.”

“You what!? ” They squeal. “And I'm just hearing about this now!? ”

“Hanji, ” I start in a hurried whisper. “Will you shut the fuck up!”

“Sorry.” They whisper. “But that’s kinda a big deal.”

I take a deep breath. “I know.”

“And you do, right? ” They take a sip. “You didn't just tell him that to make him happy?”

“Of course not!” I snap. “I wouldn't do that to him.”

Hanji widens their grin. “So you really do love him.”

“Yeah.”

“I mean, I guess I knew you did, but I didn't know you knew you did, too.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Nothing really, just,” They take a sip then quietly set it down on the counter. “You're a very closed off person, Levi, and I'm pleasantly surprised to see you opening up to someone so much.”

“Heh,” I smile into my mug. “Me too, actually.”

“Hell, it’s like warp speed for you!”

“I don’t know if you need to be that dramatic.”

“But it is!” Hanji starts excitedly. “I mean, it took years for you to even begin opening up to me, and other than Isabel and Farlan, I haven’t ever seen you get that close with anyone.”

They’re right, of course. I have never been one to hold anyone past arms length (and even they are a select few), but with Eren? Fuck, the kid drove a bulldozer through my walls and refused to be pushed away. “I know.”

“What makes him so special?” They ask with genuine curiosity.

“He makes me feel... safe? I guess?” When everyone else treats me like a stray cat- slowly earning my trust, expecting that I’d come to them at my own leisure-  He lures me in with warm arms, gives
me a home, and keeps me from wanting to run back to the cold alley. “And, I don’t know, just wanted, like, genuinely, wholly wanted in a way I’ve never been before.”

The only other person I’ve confided these feelings to is Farlan. He and Hanji are probably the only two friends that I feel completely comfortable sharing this with because they’ve always been there to lend a judgement free ear. That’s why they’re also the two people who know me best. Don’t get me wrong, Iz has always been there for me, too, but I will always feel the need to shelter her to an extent. Erwin and Petra are my next closest confidants, but when it comes down to it, Erwin is still my boss of sorts and Petra and I have an unusual history. I would like to be this close with Mikasa, but I’ve wounded her deeply and it is going to take a long time for us to heal completely. Eren is quickly rising through the ranks, but he can’t exactly give an unbiased opinion when it comes to our relationship. So, Hanji and Farlan it is.

“T’m glad, Levi,” They smile brightly. “T’m really happy for you. You deserve to be loved by someone as wonderful as Eren.”

“Anyway,” I rub my neck as if it’ll slow my heart rate and look to the ceiling. “Sorry we missed your party.”

“It’s okay,” Hanji shrugs. “It was in the name of love!”

“Shut up.” I grumble.

“So,” They draw out after an enjoyable moment of silence. I sigh. “What are you going to do when he has to go back and you have stay here?”

I pull my lips into my mouth and shrug. “Honestly, I have no fucking clue.”

“Well, when are you done with the show?”

“I promised I’d at least stay through January.”

They let out a low whistle. “When does filming start?”

“Last week of January.”

“Fuck, Levi, what does Mike think about you being stuck out here?”

“I’m not stuck.” I shrug. “And it’s only the first week, so they’ll start filming all the shit they don’t need me for.”

“Still.”

“I’ve had worse turn arounds.”

“Very true.” Hanji finishes off their tea. “And what about the Globes?”

“What about them?”

“Well, are you gonna be there?”

“Of course I’m going to be there, I’m a fucking nominee.”

“What about the show here?”

“There’s always an understudy, Hanji.”
“Ha!” They point at me. “I knew it! So why don’t they just take over for you completely? Then you could go back home with your lover boy and help him when classes start again.”

“It’s not that simple, Glasses, and you know it.” I roll my eyes. “Besides, I thought the kid was doing okay in his classes.”

“He...is.” They start cautiously.

“What the fuck is that supposed to mean?”

“It means this semester’s gonna kick his ass and then some.” They set their empty mug on the counter and lean on their elbows. “He’s got filming with you, finishing up his project with Kirstein-”

I curl my lip. He currently holds the honor of being at the top of my hit list. “His acting classes are taken care of but he still has everything else, and Zackly wants him to actively look for more parts and opportunities to explore his talents “outside” of the Scouts.”

“The fuck does that mean?”

“Basically, Eren needs to be a rock-superstar with an outstanding portfolio by the end of the term.”

“That’s gonna kill him.” I start as I refill their mug. “Mike already demands a lot from his actors, and he’s still new at all this shit.”

“Well, at least he has an advantage for his acting credits, I mean,” They wiggle their eyebrows. “He is sleeping with the teacher.”

“And if I were aloud to grade him on that, he’d get triple A’s.”

“Triple what?” They cock their head at me. “Why A’s?”

“Because,” I smirk. “X isn’t on the grading scale.” Hanji throws their head back and laughs. “Shhh!”

“Your sense of humor never ceases to throw me for a loop.”

“Why?”

“Because I always forget you have one.”

“Ha. ha.” I drawl then take a sip. “Bitch.”

“Back at you, baby.” They tip their cup to me. “So...” They lean over the counter. “Whadja get him for Christmas??”

I don’t even try to conceal a smile, because, fuck, I’m pretty excited to see the kid’s reaction. “I pulled some strings and got him an invitation with a plus 1 for the Oscars.”

“Wow, he’s gonna love that!”

“Yeah, well that wasn’t the hard part.”

“What was the hard part.”

“Getting him a slot to have a Hugo tuxedo tailored.”

Hanji let out a low whistle. “Dare I ask what that cost?”
“You daren’t.”

“How does he feel about you spending so much money on him?”

“See, that’s the thing,” I start rubbing the back of my neck. “He really hates it, but I can’t let him go in anything less than the best.”

“Levi, Levi, Levi,” They began shaking their head. “That’s very sweet, but if he hates the thought of you spending so much on him, how’s he gonna react? What if he decides not to go?”

“He won’t, it’s the fucking Oscars, Hanji, and he’s a fucking actor. He’ll get over being pampered. Besides,” I continue before taking a large sip. “It was that or a car.”

“Ah, in that case, good choice.”

“Though, if you think a car is better, I can still get him one.”

“No-no, I think the invite is a really great gift.”

“But,” I counter. “It’s not like he doesn’t need a car!”

“Well, if he hates you spending so much money on him, how would buying him a car make him feel?”

“Yeah, okay,” I sigh. “Petra said the same thing.”

“Wise woman.” Hanji cocks their head to me. “Who’s gonna be his plus 1?”

“I figured it’d just be Isabel since the media still thinks they’re in wedding planning mode, but, really, I guess that’s his choice.”

“Oh,” They shrug. “Isabel makes sense, and she already has a closet fit for a princess, but then, who are you bringing?”

“I haven’t figured that out yet.”

“What about Mikasa?”

“Are you serious?” They shrug. “Why not? You’ve taken one sister to these things hundreds of times, don’t you think it’s only fair?”

“There are a million reasons why not, but mainly, I’m gonna be in the spotlight most of the night and there’s no way in hell I’m letting those paparazzi demons see her with me.”

“Fair enough.” They sigh. “If I didn’t already have a hot date, I would offer.”

“Thanks, but I’m sure I’ll find someone before I tell him about it.”

“Aren’t you going to tell him today?”

“Nah,” I shrug. “I don’t want to make him feel bad, I know he didn’t have a chance to get me anything anyway, so we’ve agreed to wait until I fly out for the Globes.”

“Awwe, but that’s so far away.”
I frown. “I know.”

“My poor babies!” They squeal loudly.

“Seriously, Hanji, shut the fuck up!”

“Levi?” A drowsy voice calls from the shadows of the hall.

“Way to go.” I glare at Hanji who physically winces and mouths an apology.

“Who are you talking to?” Eren sounds annoyed, and I don’t blame him, I get the same way when someone wakes me up.

“Just lil’ ol’ me, mon loupe!”

“Hanji?” He squints at them from the end of the hall. Poor kid probably can’t see shit right now.

“Don’t worry about it, Sparky.” I start on my way over to him. When he’s in front of me I brush the hair from his face. “Go back to bed.”


“I don’t think Hanji will ever be ‘okay’, but they’re here, it seems, to ruin my night.”

“Ruin your night?” Hanji dramatically waves their hands and gets to their feet. “I had a 5 tiered cake made, Levi! 5. Tiers.”

“Shit.” Eren smacks his own forehead. “Hanji, I’m so sorry, I completely forgot!”

“Don’t apologize, brat. It wasn’t your fault.”

“It kinda was, though.” They unnecessarily insert. “You only had one job.”

“I’m really s-”

“Eren,” I cut him off. “It’s fine. I’ll make it up to them.”

“Oh?” Hanji cups their chin and looks at us mischievously. “You will, hmmm?”

Shit. “Yeah whatever, Glasses,”

“And Eren?”

“Eren doesn’t have to do shit.”

“No,” He gulps but nods. “I need to make it up to them, too.”

“Really, kid, you don’t have to.” I rub his arm. “Shitty Glasses, tell him he doesn’t have to do a damn thing.”

They shrug. “Whether or not he does anything is up to his own conscious.”

Bastard. I glare and decide to turn the guilt trip around. “Hanji, where’s Moblit?”

They shrug. “Sleeping.”

“Oh? Like we were?”
“You asked for this visit, Levi.”

Eren yawns loudly, and, fuck he’s adorable with his heavy eyes and bed hair. If he wasn’t so tired, I’d be tempted to fuck his brains out right now. He casually lifts his shirt when he scratches at his chest, and, scratch that, I’m officially tempted.

“Hanji,” I start dangerously. “You can go now.”

They sigh loudly but begin showing themself the way out. “We’ll be in touch, my lovelies.”

“Goodnight, Hanji.” I say through clenched teeth.

“Happy birthday, you old bastard!” They blow me an exaggerated kiss. “And Merry Christmas, Eren!”

“'Ou too, 'anji.” He replies through another long yawn. They send me one last wink then (finally) closes the door behind them. “Couldn’t they have berated us in the morning?”

A small smile slides across my face and my hands go directly for his hips. “What, and actually have consideration for other people?” I pull him to place a small kiss on the corner of his lips. “Nope.”

He smiles and turns his face to intercept another kiss. “I do feel bad about depriving you of your birthday party.”

“I don’t.” I say against his lips before pushing my way inside.

“Mm - Levi.” He protests between kisses, but doesn’t draw back. “I’m tired.”

“Mhm.” My mouth latches onto his neck. “Me too.”

Eren cups my face in his hands and takes control of the kiss as my fingers dip beneath his waistband. God, his body is so fucking hot to my trailing touch which moves slowly from his hipbones to his tight ass. I’m already half hard and I can tell he can feel it from the way his lips curve against mine. Brat. I growl as I push him back into a wall.

“Eren,” I begin lowly onto his neck. “Unless you plan on having sex, I suggest you stop right now and go back to sleep.”

“And if I don’t?” He challenges and pulls on my chin to look him in the eye.

“Then I'm not gonna be able to stop myself from devouring every last bit of you.”

“I think that's a lot of talk coming from a man with bigger bags under his eyes than I do.”

“Eren?”

He sighs, “How are you even up right now?”

I deflate against him and groan. “You’re killing me, kid.”

“I’m sorry ,” He kisses the top of my head. “I just happen to function like a normal person and actually need my sleep.”

“You’re really gonna make me jack off?” He groans as he tucks his head into my neck. After a moment, his hands move back down my back and I can feel him smile into my hair before pulling the lobe of my ear between his teeth. “That’s just cruel.” Eren chuckles darkly before moving to my
“No marks, Eren.”

“Don’t worry, nobody will be able to see the marks I’ll make.” His hands slide beneath my shirt and his knee presses firmly on the bulge between my legs.

“You’re really sending me mixed messages here, Sparky.” He smiles and pulls my shirt over my head. Eren continues planting kisses from my neck to my collarbone to the center of my chest where he hesitates a moment before deciding to latch onto my left nipple. “Fuck.”

His hands grip my hips as he slides down the wall, tracing his tongue over each of my abdomens as he goes. I moan as he gets down low enough to tease me through the fabric of my pjs. He’s always been good at the build up, and it’s even better knowing that he can most definitely deliver when he gets to the main event. Eren moves on to sucking and nipping at my hip bones while his hands wiggle my pants down my thighs. My cock springs back up once my boxers are pulled off and ends up lightly slapping against Eren’s chin and he smiles again. Fuck, he enjoys making me come undone way too much. His hand firmly wraps around my hardened flesh and angles it away so the Eren can move that talented tongue even further down and bring my balls into his mouth. I moan loudly and lean my weight on the forearm against the wall. His hand begins to pick up a rhythm on my cock as he keeps working beneath it. Then he runs his slippery tongue from the very base of my length to the very tip which he quickly pops into his mouth then pulls back to look up at me panting above him.

“Fuck, Eren,” I start in a scratchy wanton voice. “Why the hell are you stopping!?”

“I wanted to see the look on your face.” He purrs. “You’re making such delicious sounds, I’m actually hard.”

See, he enjoys giving head way too much, not that I’m complaining. “So,” I smirk. “Now are you awake enough to want me to fuck you?”

He pulls the tip of my erection back into his mouth, sucks while he pierces me with lust filled eyes, and nods.

“Shit!”

“But I don’t want to take a shower tonight, so you’re wearing a condom.”

“Fine by me.” I pull him up by his hair and shove my tongue into his hot mouth until he’s rutting against my bent knee. He shoves me away to practically run to the bedroom. I chuckle and follow. When I catch up, his shirt is off and his pants are already halfway down his thighs. “God, you’re beautiful.”

“Shut up and grab the lube.”

“Impatient much?”

“Yes,” He starts climbing onto the bed. “I was perfectly fine sleeping the night away, and now you’ve gotten me all hot and bothered.”

“Oh,” after grabbing lube and a condom I meet him at the edge of the bed. He’s standing on his knees and I yank him against me by his hips. He hisses as I sadistically grind into him. “How inconsiderate of me.”

“Where do you want me?”
“Right here’s perfect. Lay down.” Eren licks my lips before he listens and settles back onto the mattress. “Such a good boy.”

He doesn’t make his usual snarky reply which tells me to move things along. And, honestly, I’m alright with that. After rolling on the condom, I slather my fingers in lube and bend one of Eren’s legs over my shoulder. The first finger slides into him- is sucked in by his heat- and, fuck, I can’t wait to be back in there. I’ve gotten to know his body so well that it barely takes anytime before I find the spot inside of him that makes his back arch high off the bed and scream my name as I work it over and over again. Once he’s stretched enough, I drape his other leg over my shoulder and line my cock up with his entrance.

“Jesus- fuck , Levi!” He moans when I’m completely sheathed inside him.

“ Took the words right out of my mouth, Sparky.” My voice is like gravel as I pull almost completely out. He whimpers when I start off a slow rhythm. He’s so hot and wet and making the most sinful noises that it’s not long before I can’t help quickening into a hard, ball slapping pace. I have him practically bent in half as I plow into him, adjusting my angle to hit his prostate with every thrust. Eren’s always a very enthusiastic partner, and meets me halfway by twisting his hips off rhythm. I don’t think I could ever get tired of his body, of the way it responds to my touches, my voice, my thrusts. He’s fucking breathtaking with his flushed cheeks, the sweat glistening on his skin, the rise and fall of his chest. In the furrow of his brow, the twisting expressions on his face, and the swollen red tinge of his wet lips, he’s a fix I’ll never get enough of.

My hand slides from a hold on his thigh to grip the base of his dripping cock. The kid’s endowed and skilled, and, as my hand begins moving up and down his length, I remember just how it felt sliding in and out of me. It’s a sensation I’m definitely going to enjoy again, but for now I’m more than happy fulfilling Eren’s pleasure as bottom. He’s sizzling and always hungry for my cock, which is wonderful because my cock is always hungry for him. Eren’s hips jut up suddenly as my thumb twists over his slit. His face is kneaded in pure pleasure, and I would love nothing more than to get a taste of those lips. Curse his long torso.

As if he could read my mind, which he’s been better at doing lately, he crunches his abdomens and curls his body up to capture my face in his hands. My movements still as he pulls me over him, his legs drop from my shoulders and wrap themselves around my waist. Then, with a firm dig of his heel into my lower back, I twist to sit on the bed and bring Eren around with me to settle on my lap. He re-slots our mouths together and adjusts himself so than his knees are bent on either side of my thighs. Eren grips my cock and realigns it with his entrance. My fingers dig into his hips as he slams himself down. He sets a steady pace and my mouth falls from his mouth, to his jawline, to the pulse point of his long neck, to his collarbone, and all the way back up on the other side. His fingers weave themselves into my hair and dig into my shoulder as I continue my work.

“I love you, Eren.” I pant into his neck. His body stiffens a moment before he slows down and pulses his sphincter around my dick. “Fuck, do that again.”

I feel his open mouthed smile in the side of my face as he whispers in my ear. “Say it again.”

I moan loudly before grasping his cock between our hot bodies. He gasps. I begin moving my hand. “I love you.”

He moans and I’m rewarded with the same movements. “A-again!”

My teeth graze his adam's apple before I run my tongue over it. “I love you, Eren.”

“Levi, I-ha-I love- Mnm…” His back arches which pulls at my cock in a way that makes my vision
“Ah-Fuck, Eren!” His legs are trembling and cock is stiffening in my hand.

“Sa-hf-say-haah!”

I moan because his walls are tightening around me and his movements are becoming stuttered, and, fuck, I’m right there with him. “I LOVE YOU!”

He cums with my name on his lips and drags me under with a well timed jerk of his hips. I collapse back on the mattress and he follows on top of me. We lay there, desperately trying to catch our breath as my cock limply twitches underneath him. After a few minutes, I feel strength returning to my body. I get ready to get up, get out, and clean off only to discover that my sex god of a boyfriend is fast asleep on my chest. I groan. Disgusting.

I can feel the stickiness of his cum smooshed between our bodies, and my own rapidly losing its heat and getting thicker in the condom. Fuck, I agreed to not making him take a shower, but this is unacceptable.

“Eren.” I start lowly. “Eren, get up.” He groans and buries his face deeper in my sweat stricken chest. “You don’t want me to make you move, do you?”

“Fine.” He grumbles and rolls off me and onto his back. “That's what you get when you fuck someone way past their bedtime.”

I chuckle as I get to my wobbly feet. After tying off the condom and cleaning myself off in the bathroom, I return with a hot and soapy washcloth. Eren’s mouth curves into a half smile under closed eyes as I begin to wipe off his stomach. “Pampered little brat.”

“Hey,” He opens one eye and to look at me. “You're the one doing the pampering, I'm just enjoying what's being offered.”

Can’t argue there. I finish him and go back to the bathroom for a short shower. When I come back I'm far from surprised to discover Eren curled up in my blankets, seemingly dead to the world. I smile to myself at the sight before sliding up beside him. As soon as my body sinks into the mattress, Eren rolls over and settles his head beneath my chin. My fingers absently brush through his hair and after a few silent minutes I kiss the top of his head. “I guess I really am crazy about you, kid.”

“Love you too, old man.” He mumbles into my chest.

…

I wake up to an empty bed and the smell of bacon which could only mean that, for the first time in the history of ever, Eren beat me to functional consciousness. After pulling on one of his shirts, I swagger my way to the kitchen. The strings of Christmas lights hanging from the ceiling are flashing alternating colors above our impromptu decorations ordaining the space, and just beyond the windows, snow is falling lightly, adding to the unusual tranquility of the scene. I smile as the thought occurs, it’s like something out of a movie. The best image to complete the perfection is in the kitchen where I can see Eren standing over the stove with his back to me and his phone tucked between his ear and his shoulder.

“But does it have to be tomorrow?...- I get that, but--... Armin, can’t you, like, tell them I’m sick or something?” What is he talking about? He’s not leaving, is he? He sighs and switches ears. “I know,
but that’s fucking bullshit.—- Gah, I hate him so much! Why is he doing this to me?—-Fine, but he doesn’t have to be such an ass about it!” I soundlessly creep up beside him and pour myself a cup of coffee; he doesn’t seem to notice. Man, he’s an easy mark, we’ll have to work on that. “-I’m just waiting for him to wake up—-I know, and he calls me lazy…”

“Well, good morning to you too.”

Eren jumps back and spins around holding the spatula like some kind of a cleaver, incidentally dropping his phone on the floor. “Christ, Levi!” He pushes my chest. “What the fuck!?”

I smile shamelessly into my hot mug. “Not my fault you’re completely oblivious to your surroundings.”

“You didn’t have to come out of nowhere like that! Fuck, I could’ve seriously hurt you!”

“With a spatula?”

“If you were an intruder, fuck yeah.” I smile and shrug before taking a sip of coffee. “Great,” He starts after picking up his phone. “I’m gonna have to call Armin back.”

“It’s not broken, is it?”

“No, battery just came out.”

“Your phone still has a battery that comes out?”

“Hey, Mr. Fancypants,” He points at my chest with the spatula. “I’ve had this phone for two years and the screen is still intact.”

“That’s surprising considering how often I’ve seen you drop it.”

He shrugs and turns back to the sizzling pan on the stove. “It’s an Active.”

I wrap my arms around his waist and look around his arm. “What are you making?” In the pan I see oil soaked eggs and soggy brown strips of pork. “Seriously, Eren, what the fuck is that?”

“Breakfast?”

I sigh and lightly push him out of the way. Oh goodness, I take the strange mix and determine it is beyond salvageable. It smells good, but bacon grease makes just about anything smell good. “You dork.” I chuckle. “You make one good meal and think you’re Gordon fucking Ramsay.”

“I was just trying to surprise you when you woke up.”

“Well,” I turn back around and hook my hand around the back of his neck. “That’s very sweet.”

He frowns. “Don’t patronize me.”

“I’m not patronizing you,” I pull him into a chaste kiss. “It really was a sweet gesture.” He rolls his eyes. “Mmm, you smell good.”

“Thanks? It’s your body wash.”

“But it smells especially nice on you.”

He snorts. “If this is what you’re like when you get a good night’s sleep, I’ll have to wake you up to
“fuck me at 3 in the morning more often.”

“What time is it?”
“A little after one.”

“What!” I whip my head around to stare at the large clock over the bar. “In the afternoon?”

“Oh, yeah…”

I run my hand down my face and groan. “You should’ve woken me up sooner.”

“Why? It’s your birthday and you obviously needed it.”

“God,” I sigh. “I haven’t slept past noon in a very long time.”

“And I ask you,” He cocks his head. “Has the world ended?”

I roll my eyes and go to the fridge. “No, but we’re behind schedule.”

“Oh no,” I hear him mumble at my back. “Levi, w-what are you doing?”

“Power smoothies.”

“Hey, um,” He starts quickly. “I was thinking, since I did you an early morning favor, could we not-”

“Nope.” I cut him off with a quick peck to his lips. “We're still working out. Get your shit on and do some kicks to stretch.”

“Uuuggghhh!” Eren throws his head back and groans. “But I just showered!”

“You can shower again.”

“But I’m sore!”

“Suck it up, you big baby.”

He narrows his eyes a moment before turning on his heel to go change. I sigh and continue making our pre-workout sustenance.

After getting my own clothes on, I meet him in the small gym upstairs. He’s finished his smoothie and is working on his kicks. I start on the elliptical as he runs on the treadmill, then we move to weights. After last night, I’ve decided to switch today’s leg day with tomorrow’s arms.

“So,” I start as we begin our cool down. “Just what were you and Mini-Erwin talking about?”

“Hm?” Eren’s eyes widen. “Oh, um, just some work stuff.”

“Like?”

“Well,” He averts his eyes. “I have an appointment to be booked as a model for some Calvin Klein ad.”

“Wow, that’s great!” I beam. “That is great, right?”

“Yeah,” Eren shrugs. “But the meeting’s tomorrow afternoon.”
“Oh.” My heart drops. “What time are you leaving?”

“I’m not.”

“What?”

“I don’t want to miss opening night for you.”

“Eren,” I sigh. “It’s really nothing special, but this opportunity is huge for you!”

“Yeah, but-”

“It’s what Zackly wants to see in your portfolio.”

“I know, he’s the one who requested it.”

“Look,” I stretch to the side. “I don’t like the bastard either, but you know what they say about staring a gift horse in the mouth.”

“So you think I should go?”

I take a deep breath and let it out slowly. “Yes, as your mentor, I insist.”

His shoulders slump. “You’re probably right, but-”

“But what?” Next thing I know, I’m being pulled into a bone breaking hug.

“I don’t want to leave you.”

_I don’t want you to either!_ “C’mon, you’ll be so busy, it won’t feel so long.”

“ Aren’t you going to miss me?”

I pull back to look at him fully. “I never said I wouldn’t.”

“This last week has been amazing, I-I don’t want it to end.”

“I brush his hair back. “Nothing’s ending. Life moves on and we’ve got to move with it, but that doesn’t mean anything changes with us, okay?” I kiss his cheek. “It’s literally only, what, 10 days til I fly out for the Globes? _10 days_, Eren, that is practically nothing.”

“Yeah, but then you’ll be gone for another three and a half weeks.”

“And you’ll be finishing stuff up with..._Kirst_- on second thought, maybe you shouldn’t go back at all.”

To that he chuckles. “Seriously, Levi, you don’t need to worry about him.”

An uncomfortable knot twists in my stomach as my mind conjures up the images that appeared on my phone a handful of days ago. “Heh, yeah, I’m still going to kill him.”

Eren rolls his eyes. “At least give me a heads up and I’ll grab a shovel.”

“God, I love you.” He laughs before I shut him up with a kiss.

“By the way,” He starts on our way back downstairs. “I invited Armin over since he’s away from home for Christmas, I hope that’s okay.”
“Sure,” I shrug. “He’s always welcome.”

“Sweet!” He starts skipping across the floor. Dammit, he really needs to tone down his adorableness because it is going to be the death of me. “He’ll be here in about an hour!”


“Yeah,” Eren’s voice echoes over the sound of water. “I told him 3ish.”

I go into the bathroom. “Why didn’t you tell me sooner?”

I can clearly see him shrug through the steam streaked glass. “I didn’t think about it.”

Typical.

Whatever, if that’s the case I need to start cleaning this place up.

“Levi,” He wipes the glass of droplets to see me clearer. “The place looks fine.”

“What?”

“You were just thinking about having to clean up, and, really, everything is spotless like always.”

I roll my eyes. “The kitchen at least-”

“Is fine.”

“And the bathroom-”

“Levi,” Eren opens the door to the walk in shower and peaks his head out. “The only thing that needs to be cleaned is you.”

I raise a precarious eyebrow. “Are you suggesting I join you?”

He bites his lip and shamelessly rakes his eyes up and down my body. “Only if you can control yourself.”

I shrug and start stripping. “We only have an hour before having a guest come over, I can keep control if you can.”

“Fine, but hurry up you’re letting in a draft.”

Man, I am so glad I invested in that large rainfall shower head. It definitely makes showering with another person 1000x easier. I’m sure it’ll make shower sex much easier, too, but there truly was no time for any fun stuff before we were out and toweling dry. Despite Eren’s best efforts at keeping me from my cleaning supplies, I still find a way to start tidying up the living room. Armin arrives almost exactly an hour later and Eren runs down to the lobby to greet him enthusiastically. “Wow,” I hear once the elevator doors slide open. “This place is amazing.”

“Thank you, Armin.” I smile as I get up from the couch. “How are you?”

“Can’t complain, sir.”

“Of course you could,” Eren hangs up his coat. “You’re just too nice to.”

“No, you’re right,” Armin starts with a bright smile. “I could be like someone who always finds
something to complain about.”

I smirk. *I knew I liked this kid.* “By the way, Armin, please just call me Levi.”

“O-oh, okay.”

“Hey, wait a minute,” Eren starts defensively. “That was directed at me, wasn’t it?”

Armin bursts out in laughter and I just shake my head. “Took you long enough, Sparky.”

“Whatever.”

“Um,” Armin starts nervously and holds out a bottle of wine. “Merry, I mean happy birthday Levi!”


“I’m sorry I wasn’t able to bring more.” Armin says with a regretful smile.

“You didn’t have to bring anything.”

“I know, but it’s Christmas a-and your birthday.”

“Thank you, Armin, this is great!” He smiles as I go to the bar to put it in the wine rack. “Did you want anything? Food? Anything to drink?”

“Water sounds great.”

“No problem.” I turn to Eren. “Hey, Sparky, why don’t you get your friend some water?”

“I will,” he glares at me, “but only because he is my friend and I don’t want to let him get dehydrated.”

“Sure, sure.”

“Oh, of course,” Armin draws sarcastically. “We all recognize that you’re an strong independent man who don’t need no direction.”

“You know,” Eren starts as he fills a glass with ice. “I’m beginning to think bringing you two together was a bad idea.”

We look at each other and shrug. “Probably.”

He sighs and hands Armin the cool glass of water. “Drink up, traitor.”

He takes a long sip. “Wow, who knew the water of the dark side was so much more refreshing?”

“Hey! If anything I’m a Dark Jedi!”

Armin smirks. “Well, you said it.”

He deflates with a look of surprise on his face. “You sneaky little bastard!” And I’m clearly missing something, but I’ll leave them to it and start up the stairs. “Wait, Levi, where are you going?”

“The studio.”

“You don’t have to leave, ya know.”
“I know, but I have a ton of shit I needed to go through this morning.”

“Oh.” He frowns.

“Fine,” I sigh. “I’ll be right back.” I run up the stairs and into my studio/office where lies a manila envelope filled with a script for a new project I’m working on. When I go back down, the boys are sitting across from each other. Armin is sitting in the stool at the breakfast bar like a good boy, and Eren has his ass on the fucking counter! “Oi!”

“Oh,” He slides onto the floor and wipes off the surface with his hand.

“How many times, Eren?” I ask while pinching the bridge of my nose. “How many times?”

“Uh…”

“I’m genuinely curious because I, personally, have lost count.”

“Sorry.” He shrugs.

“Why do I even bother?” I shake my head before sinking into the couch. They chat idly as I read through. My mouth silently moves over the words as I make notes in the margin. Then I’ll go back do it all again through a different emotional lens. I’m halfway through the sixth scene when the I hear the familiar and very much unwelcomed ding of the elevators. “Oh shit.”

There’s only one person who has access to this penthouse in the city right now, and I curse my past self for not confiscating their key.

Chapter End Notes

THIS WAS ONLY SUPPOSED TO BE ONE CHAPTER!!!! But nooooooooooooooooooooooo, they just HAD to have the sex!!! Apparently they also share a sort of kink regarding the big ‘L’. Also, I wasn’t really planning on having the gang come over for dinner, but Hanji had their own fuckinng plans, and, my GOD, I swear these characters are have minds of their own!
Merry Birthday!! (pt.2)

Chapter Notes

*shamefully slides chapter across the table* I am SO sorry! I was going to have this up by the 31st at the latest, but my friends surprised me with a trip to BlackHawk for my birthday and I fell far behind (but I did win some money!). I'm sorry please don't hate me too much

This is also the last chapter of pure unadulterated fluff for a bit as we go back into actual plot. Not that this whole bonding experience doesn't have value in the plot, but, like Eren, we're just going back to the grindstone that is Hollywood. There will still be plenty of fluff, just interlaced with the progression. I don't have a whole lot left, but I definitely have another big arch that we'll have to go through so just hang tight :)

“Meeerrrryyyy Ccchhhrrriiisssttmaaaaaassss!!!!”

“H-Hanji?” I can’t help but yip in surprise to see them clad in an ugly oversized sweater and santa hat.

Levi groans loudly and turns to face their loud, wide mouthed grin. “What do you want now, Glasses?”

“Why,” they start enthusiastically, “I’m here to spend Christmas with my favorite people!”


“Where’s Erwin?” He ask.

“He and Moblit are bringing up groceries.”

“Groceries?”

“Yeah,” she starts, hanging up her coat. “You never got back to us about dinner, so we decided to bring it to you!”

“I see,” Levi drones, “how thoughtful of you.”

“Oh lighten up, Mr. Grinch.” She folds her arms. “Everyone’s here, so it’s perfect!”

I look at Levi panicked, and poor Armin just looks totally uncomfortable. “Oh my,” Petra starts as she steps into the living room, “I like what you’ve done with the place.”

“Don’t look at me,” Levi holds up his hands and glances in my direction “I didn't do it.”

“In that case,” she looks at me with a bright smile, “You have a very decorative touch, Eren.”

“Thanks.” I reply awkwardly. The shock on Armin's face has worn off, but it was a comfort because I hate being the only one who has no idea what's happening. I mean, yeah, I've gathered that they all invited themselves over for Christmas dinner, but that doesn't mean I really know how to respond to it. I like them as much as the next guy, but, as I see Moblit struggling with two large bags full of
decorative wrapping, I can't help but feel incredibly guilty and uncomfortable.

I didn't get anyone anything. At least, nothing here; however, I do have things for Armin at home (and I'll have something for Levi I swear). Sorry everyone else.

Armin rushes to help Moblit carry the things spilling out of his arms over to the nice spot on floor beside the tiny wine rack tree. Aw, Levi and I never looked in our stockings. *Maybe if you weren't too busy failing at making breakfast...*

“Eren!” A giant hand claps my shoulder making me jump. *Shit!* I turn my head to see Erwin smiling down at me. “Merry Christmas!”

“Er-” I start, still trying to calm the terror in my heart, “you too.”

He pats my shoulder again as he looks around the room. “I don't think I've ever seen Levi with Christmas decorations.”

“Well, um,” I start awkwardly, “the decorations were more for me.”

“Yes,” Erwin smiles, “that’s my point. You’ve had quite an effect on him.”

Thanks? I don't really know what to say so I just end up looking uncomfortable.

“Oi,” Levi calls on his way over to us. *Oh thank God.* “Stop harassing my boyfriend, Eyebrows.”

The room freezes. At least I feel like the room freezes. *Boyfriend?* Yeah, I guess that's exactly what we are, it just hasn't really been said out loud before.

I like it. It rolls nicely off the tongue.

*Hi, I'm Mr. Ackerman's boyfriend.*

*Why, yes, Levi is my boyfriend.*

*I do indeed love my boyfriend.*

A smile spreads across my face and I step closer to slide my fingers between his. He gives me a side glance, but curls them together as he continues talking with Erwin. I don't know what they're saying, I'm just focusing on the feeling of Levi’s hand and the way his hair is hanging around his face, framing it like the work of art it is. I want to kiss him, but it would be- oh, wait, there is a pause in the conversation, I'm going for it! One hand cups his cheek to turn him into my sweeping lips.

“What was that for?” He asks without moving back.

“Nothing,” I smile, “I just wanted to kiss you.”

He gives me a small laugh as he shakes his head. “You're cute.”

“Awwwe!” Hanji exclaims from the living room. My cheeks get hot at the audience I forgot we had. “I thought I was going to have to break out the mistletoe.”

Levi ignored them and walked into the kitchen to help Erwin unpack. They get started on dinner while Petra and Hanji fall into sweet conversation. Armin sits across from me on the couch, mirroring my position sitting with my legs crossed. He and I (and Moblit about halfway through) get into a discussion about Sith Lords and Jedis and how fucking awful Kylo Ren is *in comparison* to Darth Vader. At least, that's what I'm arguing.
“Look,” I start seriously. “I feel for they guy, I do, but he seems more like he just needs to be pitied than feared.”

Moblit scoffs. “And Vader doesn’t?”

“Taking into account that the prequels never happened,” I lift my wine glass to the light before taking a sip. “No. Especially in Rogue, DUDE, he was such a badass!!!”

“True, but that doesn’t necessarily mean he’s actually better than Kylo.”

“Okay, my poor uneducated friend, allow me to explain,” I set down my glass and lean toward them. “When Darth Vader is mad, you just know it. He radiates his hatred; he isn’t afraid of using it, but he controls it. Kylo Ren just kind of … rages. He has no self control.”

“I see your point, Eren,” Armin meets me with the same seriousness. “But I think what makes Kylo that much more dangerous is that he is so emotionally unstable. I mean, look at what he did to that village on Jakku. It was pretty ruthless.”

“Okay,” I shrug, “I’m not saying I don’t like Kylo Ren, he’s an interesting character, even if he sets up the stage for his redemption in a way similar to VI, but all I’m saying is that when Darth Vader kills people, they’re only people who get in his way, not innocent passerbys. Like, I’m not saying he wouldn’t kill the guy Poe was talking to, or anyone who didn’t cooperate, but just rounding everyone up and shooting them like they’re dogs without even questioning them? Yeah, no, he has a little more class than that.”

Moblit rolls his eyes. “Vader slaughtered children—”

I stick my finger up and wave it in front of his face to cut him off. “Ah-btbtbt, we don’t talk prequels.”

“I’m just saying.”

“I mean, if anything, he’d round them up and kill them each himself instead of making the troopers do it.” I’ve spent so much time analyzing this series and its characters for moments like these. This is what I’ve trained for. “And as far as the force goes, dude, Vader can force choke someone, even if they are in an entirely different part of his HUGE dreadnought, but when Kylo Ren wants to threaten someone with the Force, he has to pull them over so he can choke them with his physical hand, and that also goes to show just how personally he takes everything. If Kylo Ren wants to use the Force to defend against a blaster bolt, he freezes it in midair, but if Darth Vader wants to use the Force to defend against a blaster bolt, he doesn’t, he just lets it hit him. So, as far as badassness goes, Darth Vader has my heart.”

“Are you guys still talking about Star Wars?” Petra interrupts in a half annoyed half amused tone.

“This is important stuff, Petra.”

“Ohhh, sorry I didn't mean to interrupt,” she mocks by putting her hands up defensively, “but dinner’s close to on the table if you boys can afford to take a break.”

“I have to admit, Eren,” Moblit laughs as he gets to his feet, “you make some great points.”

Hanji meets him by the bar with a kiss and mumbling something about being cute. I like him, after this conversation he could become a bro in my eyes. Not like a bro bro, but a cool bro- an addition to my nerdy brocle. Armin looks at me like he also approves of this mental choice. Okay, Moblit, you're officially a bro. Welcome!
Levi and Erwin are talking excitedly in the dining room just out of eavesdropping range, so I get up to see if there's an opportunity for me to join their conversation; but, just as I hear Erwin say “Eren?” and try connecting it with Levi saying something that sounds like “February”, Hanji intercepts me.

“Hey, Eren ,” They say my name a little louder and halfway looks behind them toward the dining room; the chatter dies. Damnit Hanji, I was so close! But Feburary?? What’s in Feb- oh, duh, Valentine's day. Wait, is he already making Valentine’s day plans? We haven’t even gone through Christmas plans. Fuck, I have to catch up. “What's your favorite Christmas carol? Joy to the World, Santa Baby, Rudolph.”

“Er-” As if I don’t see what you're doing. “I guess the one with Bill Murray…” They look at me as if they're stunned before breaking out into wall shaking laughter.

Moblit’s studying them with his eyes full of concern as Levi comes up to my side. “Did you break them?”

“I-” I cock my head and watch as they crumble to the floor, still laughing. “I honest to God do not know how, but I think yes?”

“This kid,” Hanji starts between breaths, “has a direct line to my funny bone!”

“Babe,” Moblit starts with his hand on their back, “what are you talking about?”

“I- whoo” They take a large breath. “He- HAHAHa!”

Aaaannnndd they’re gone again with the laughing.

“What did you say to them?”

“Um,” I shrug, “they asked me what my favorite Christmas Carol was and I said-” Hanji interrupts me with a barking laugh.

“He said,” they start wheezing, “the one with- ahem- Bill Murray !”

Armin is the first to start chuckling, then it’s Petra, and before I know it the whole room is echoing with laughter, which, I guess, isn’t a bad thing except that it’s at my expense and I seem to be the only one not getting the joke. Even Levi has to lean on me to bury his head in my shoulder trying to stifle his shortling. _Levi fucking Ackerman is laughing , literally laughing, like, with other people!?_ And that alone has me joining along.

“Alright, Folks,” Erwin starts on his way back into the main room, “dinner is- why is everybody laughing?” We all pause for a moment to take in the look of shock and confusion on his face before erupting back into fits of giggles. “Okay… so I’ll go ahead and put the wine away .”

“No!” Petra jolts maybe a bit too desperately and straightens back up, Erwin looks at her skeptically. “It’s fine, hon, Eren’s just…” she trails off.

“Eren’s just,” I start defensively, “what?”

“Well, dear, you’re-” She starts sweetly before Levi rudely cuts her off.

“An idiot.”

“_Levi!_” She scorns.
“Wow,” I pull away, “tell me what you really think, Asshole.”

“He’s not wrong.” Moblit kindly adds under his breath. Brohood retracted, man.

“Technically,” Armin steps in, “he did answer the question.” Yeah mushroom boy! This is why I love you! “It was just misinterpreted.”


Levi snorts and shakes his head. “You're positively adorkable, Sparky.”

Whatever, I admit that I was only half listening when they started talking to me. It was an honest mistake, and, really, I for one do not believe it was something that warranted that much laughter. While everyone else begins wandering into the other room (Hanji is still wiping their eyes), I turn with crossed arms and pout at Levi. “And you're just mean.”

His hand slides from my sides back to my ass. “Am I?”

“Yes.” I mumble as I lean down for a chaste kiss.

“I’d think you’d be used to it by now, love.”

I try not to smile because I’m pouting, but love? I’ll take that over Sparky! Not that I haven’t grown to like that pet name, but love is…“I really like you.”

“Just like?” He looks at me with raises eyebrows.

“Well,” I shrug. “You're being mean.”

He playfully rolls his eyes. “Whatever, Sparky, I still love you.”

I smile widely; he lets me go and pulls me by my hand into the dining room.

He’s been so… different since the hotel. I've never seen, never expected to see him so carefree, didn't think I'd ever know the ringing of his laughter or the warmth of his unabashed smile, or just the feeling of belonging like I've never felt before. I'm long gone with all my pent up anger against him.

I just, fuck, I'm so scared because I'm so in love and I really shouldn't be this far down the rabbit hole considering how many months we’ve been acting as though we hated each other. And how fucking awful we've been to each other (more I to him, I admit), makes me wary of how easily I'm forgiving him- of how fast I'm letting myself get swept away as though none of that really happened. But it did, and, even if these feelings have been working their way to the surface for a long time, this is still so new and I'm trying to wrap my head around it and imagine where the fuck we go from here.

Yeah, I know the logistics of it- I'll go back and do my shit, and he’ll stay here and do his shit- but what’s going to happen in the time we’re apart from each other? Will any of our feelings change once we’re outside this holiday dream bubble? How can we face the real world and how much will having to keep everything in the dark effect us? What’s going to happen when we’re filming together? Will I continue being his PA and mentee, or will I be reassigned like Petra was as a ‘conflict of interest’?

That’s why you're keeping it on the DL. Stop overthinking everything and just enjoy the night.

I take a deep breath. Okay, conscious, you're right.
“Eren,” Levi starts quietly while the others are loading up their plates, “are you okay?”

“Yeah,” I smile. “I’m great.”

Dinner is delicious and dessert promises to be just as wonderful after we decide to open presents. Much to Armin and Levi’s surprise, I agree to wait that long. I don’t want a repeat of Thanksgiving.

I feel a bit better about not having a gift when they reveal it as a white elephant exchange; Hanji brought extra just in case we didn’t have anything, which, of course we don’t have anything because we didn’t know any of this was happening.

I’m helping Levi clean up from dinner when Hanji secures the Santa hat on top of their head and begins unloading packages. They make a spread under the ‘tree’ and another stack by their side. These, they explain, are for Levi’s birthday. I still feel bad that I don’t really have anything for either event, and Levi must sense as much because he pulls me to him from behind and places a kiss on my back.

“You know you don’t have to get me anything, right?” He says quietly.

“Yeah, I know, but—” I sigh and he turns me around.

“Seriously, I do not care.” His thumb grazes my cheek. “You could just give me an amazing blow job.”

I snort. “But I do that anyway.”

Levi smiles and pulls me down for a kiss. “Then give me one in lingerie.” Wow, is it hot in here? Because it suddenly feels incredibly hot in here. I look over my shoulder, frantically hoping nobody overheard any part of this conversation, and it seems like we’re in the clear. Also, why does it sound like he’s thought about this before? He hums and starts slowly grinding his hips into mine. “Red would look good on you.”

“Heh. Um, Levi,” I push him away, “if you’ll turn your attention just slightly to the left, you can see the room full of other people.”

He smirks. “I’m just throwing it out there.”

“Do you two need sometime alone?” Erwin asks beneath his eyebrows. Dammit, Levi! I look pointedly down at him with red cheeks. Now they think things and it’s embarrassing.

“Calm your oversized tits, Erwin,” Levi turns from me to pour two cups of coffee, “we were just cleaning up.”

“Mhm.” Hanji responds for the group who exchange looks among one another. “Well, speaking of ‘just cleaning up’, Eren, your presents from me are in Levi’s bedroom, and, Levi,” they wiggle their eyebrows, “do feel free to thank me later.”

Oh my GOD! I bury my face in my hands and wish that I could disappear as I hear the room grimace.

“Hanji,” Moblit hisses, “I told you not to do that.”

“Why? It was a matching set.” They take a small sip of their wine. “Besides, he’s not allowed to open it until he gets back to L.A.”
“Then what was the point of bringing it up?”

“Gives him something to fantasize about while Eren’s gone.”

“Christ, Hanji,” Levi groans pinching the bridge of his nose, “you couldn’t have told us that later?”

“What’s the fun in that?” They wink.

“Anyway,” Petra tries moving the topic along, “the numbers are in the hat, so get your asses over here and draw.”

Levi hands me a mug of coffee made up the way I like it and I follow him over, then he plops down in one of the plush chairs and pulls me into his lap. Pain shoots from my very bruised ass through my entire body making me slosh some of the boiling liquid directly onto my crotch.

“Oh, well. I cut her off and try to get to my feet but am pulled back by a sadistic little devil who places a small kiss on the back of my head.

“Let them go,” he whispers in my ear, “I wanna see what Hanji got for you.”

“Levi!” I hiss.

He groans and loosens his grasp on my body. “Fine.”

I remove myself from his lap to sit on the ground in front of the chair as the santa hat is passed over. After I draw my little slip of paper, I hold it up for Levi to grab the last one. Armin goes first and ends up unwrapping a pretty sweet Polaroid camera which, I think, fits nicely with him. Second to go is Moblit, who opens a classy unisex watch, which looks pretty good. I may have to steal that one. Erwin’s next, and he goes straight for the largest present in the pile. Hanji can’t contain their laughter as he starts at the paper, and he tries to casually put it back.

“No, Erwin!” Hanji wiggles their finger, “finish what you start.” He sighs but picks it back up nonetheless. “I hope he’s not like that in bed.”

“Hanji.” Petra snaps.

“I’m just voicing my concerns,” they shrug, “my Moblit never-”

“Okay,” Moblit cuts them off by taking their glass of wine, “we probably should leave soon.”

“Aw, but baby, I just wanted to commend you on your talents!”

“Oh, c’mon, Moblit,” Levi starts behind me, “they’re harmless and we’re all used to it by now.”

I don’t know about that, I mean, just look at Armin! It’s as if he’s sitting on a bed of hair thin needles.

“Yeah, listen to the man, darling.” They wrap their arms around his neck and he rolls his eyes.
“Fine, we’ll stay until dessert.”

“Deal.” Hanji gives him a sloppy kiss on the cheek. “Have I told you lately that I love you?”

“Yes,” he pushes them back, “now be quiet so Erwin can finish unwrapping the monstrosity.”

“If it’s a ‘monstrosity’ I don’t think I want to finish unwrapping it.” Erwin drones. But he does, and it is... “a toaster?”

“Not just any toaster!” Hanji exclaims with their hands in the air. “It’s a 4 slice double turbo deluxe toaster with touch screen commands and,” they point to the bright orange and red flames ordaining the sides, “it brands each slice of bread with one of these babies!”

Erwin lets out a low whistle. “Who doesn’t need a toaster?”

Petra laughs, but as soon as Hanji isn’t paying attention, she leans closer to him and says quietly. “We’re not keeping that.”

Levi snorts and runs his hand through my hair like I’m some kind of dog. I’m about to say something about it when my phone burst into life.

‘With the lights out, it’s less dangerous, here we are now, entertain us!’ I spring to my feet to run and grab my phone off the counter. ‘-my libido-’

“Hey.” I answer breathlessly. “Um, just a second, I need to get somewhere quiet.”

Levi looks at me with raised eyebrows, I mouth Mikasa, and he replies with a nod. “Tell her hi.”

“I won’t.” I reply like a little shit and exit the room before I can get a reply.

“Eren?” I hear her voice even with my phone facing the floor.

“Okay,” I start once I close the door to one of the guest bedrooms, “sorry about that.”

“Merry Christmas, little brother!”

“Only technically littler, Red, and barely at that.” I roll my eyes. “But Merry Christmas to you, too.”

“So, I hear you’re coming back tomorrow?”

“Dammit, Svamp! Does he have to tell her everything? “I suppose so.”

“Well, that’s good. You have work to do here, don't you?”

“Don't remind me;” I groan.

“Oh, I'm reminding you. You have responsibilities-“

“Mikasa, I love you but can we not talk about this right now?”

“Of course. How has your Christmas been?”

“Good, I guess, you?”

“It's kind of weird not having you here.”

“Yeah, I don't think we’ve ever been apart on Christmas.”
I was forced to watch *The Santa Clause* with Hannes, and, Eren, You know he doesn't appreciate it like we do!

I laugh. “I was thinking about that, too. I haven't watched it. I don't think I could since it's kinda our thing, but, whatever, it's cool that you watched it without me.”

Her laughter rings through the tiny speaker. “Sorry, but I couldn't not watch it on Christmas Eve!”

“Sure, sure, as long as you didn't watch it with Farlan.”

“...”

“Oh my God, you watched it with Farlon!? ”

“No, I just wanted to see if you’d freak out. Why do you hate him so much? It's not like he's done anything to you... he hasn't, right?”

“No.” I grumble. “I just don't think he's good enough for you.”

“And I don't really think Levi's good enough for you.”

I'm silent for a moment before replying in defeat, “Touché.”

“Hannes wants to know when you're coming over for dinner.”

“Ummm, I don't know when everything's happening- with the photoshoot or whatever- so I can't say for sure, but... hey, I thought we were doing New Year's Eve.”

“We did say that, Hannes.” Her voice is a little muffled and there's an annoyed reply somewhere in the background.

“I'm not on speaker, am I?”

“Oh hell no. I'm not that mean.”

“Well, tell him I say hello and Merry Christmas!”

“I will, and tell Levi Happy Birthday.”

“He also says hi, I just didn't tell you earlier.”

“That's sweet of him. Oh, no, Hannes! You can't plug the tv in the strip or we’ll- ” She sighs heavily.

“Did he blow a fuse again?”

“Yep.”

“Typical.”

“Yep.”

“I'll let you go deal with that.”

“Yeah, I guess I better.” She groans. “Well, I just wanted to call and wish you a Merry Christmas, Green!”
“You too, Rouge. I’ll call you before take off. Actually, let’s be real, I’ll probably just text you.”

“I’m holding you to that, Eren.”

“Okay, Love ya!”

“Love you too, loser.”

Click. I’m glad we seem to have moved past everything because I do miss her terribly. And, fuck, that reminds me that I don’t have anything for Hannes! God, I’m awful at holidays! Though… that toaster might be something crazy enough to give to him. Sure, secondhand gifting may seem cheap, but I know nobody here really wants it, so why not send it to a good home? Looks like I’m using my turn to steal the monstrosity of all kitchen appliances.

When I come back, everyone is talking amongst themselves. I guess they’ve been waiting on me because Levi wouldn’t go until I did. Why? They didn’t have to?

I stick to the plan and steal the toaster from Erwin who was all too willing to part with it.

“That thing is not going in my house.” Levi deadpans.

“Looks like it is.” I stick my tongue out at him and he flicks it. Ouch. He’s next, and decides to open the smallest present that was left. It’s a little box with two all inclusive spa getaways.

“We can finally get those calluses of yours taken care of, Sparky.” I narrow my eyes. My feet are perfectly fine, thank you very much.

“I don’t think so!” Petra wastes no time plucking the passes out of Levi’s fingers. “Hanji, when was the last time we had a weekend to ourselves?”

“Too long ago, dear, too long.”

Levi narrowed his eyes and looked around the room, settling on Moblit who sighed and surrendered the watch without a word. “Thank you.”

“Yeah, you’re welcome.” That just leaves the one present in the pile, which turns out to be a pair of thick Christmas socks that light up and play a jingle. Poor guy.

“Oh yay!” Hanji claps their hands together. “I was hoping you’d get those!”

“I know you were.”

We all laugh, then there’s a bright flash. When I look up, Armin is standing with his new Polaroid resting below his chin. I knew that was a good fit. I get to my feet and run over, grabbing the camera and turning it around. The light flashes, leaving us temporarily blind, and then we wait for the picture to print.

Our cheeks are pressed together, I’m wearing an ear to ear grin and Armin is caught laughing with his eyes closed. The string of Christmas lights casts a green and red glow over everything and you can just make out the top of my obnoxious Christmas sweater. I decide then and there that I’ll totally fight him for it.

“Hey, BB Blue,” I start with my hands on his shoulders, “can you take another picture in about 10 seconds?”

“Er- I guess?”
“Cool, ready, and go!” I turn on my heel and rush over to Levi. I grab him by the front of his button down shirt and pull him into a kiss. The flash goes off and Levi smiles up at me when I back away.

“Shitty brat.”

I lean back down for a softer kiss. There’s another flash and an absurd amount of giggling. The pictures print, and I see that in the first one, his eyes were very much open in surprise, it’s also a bit blurry, but I still like it. In the second one, everything is a lot more serene. Levi’s hand is cradling the back of my head while his eyes are lightly closed. Though, I see that somehow Hanji got in there holding a mistletoe over our heads and Petra’s in the bottom corner with her palms on her cheeks. I beam, looking between it and Levi who’s walking toward the kitchen. We cute.

Petra peeks over my shoulder, making me jump a bit because I swear she was just in front of me. She and Erwin really are perfect for each other. “Awe, you guys are so adorable.”

“Thank you?” I reply awkwardly because, is adorable really the image of our relationship? It sounds a bit kiddish, like we’re young lovers. Then again, I guess I could be considered young, but he sure as hell can’t be.

“Oi, idiots,” Levi eloquently calls the room’s attention. “Dessert’s up if you want it.”

Oh hell yes I want it! Tonight is the only night Hanji is actually allowing me to eat sweets and I am not letting this opportunity go to waste. I speed past everyone else into the kitchen, grab my plate, and hold it up patiently in front of Levi. He regards me wearing a scowl that’s trying (and failing) to cover up the amusement in his eyes. He dishes out a small sliver of warm apple pie and tops it off with a dollop of vanilla bean ice cream.

“Enjoy it, Eren,” Hanji starts as they join me at the table, “I'll have a new meal plan starting New Years.”

“Hanji,” I start with full cheeks, “don't ruin this for me.”

Hard nails flick against the shell of my ear and I wince. “Don't talk with your mouth full, Sparky.”

“I bet you hear that a lot, eh Eren?” Hanji wiggles their eyebrows and tips their glass.

“Okay, Hanji,” Moblit pushes himself out of his chair, “who gave you more wine?”

Armin’s face turns pink and he averts his eyes. Something tells me he’s been bamboozled, manipulated, exploited for his innocence and general good heartedness. Poor sap.

“Moblit,” they start with a slight slur in their speech, “honey, don’t worry about it.”

“Well, guys, I think we ought to go now.”

“You’re no fun.” They pout with crossed arms.

“And you’re too much.”

They groan, but comply and get to their feet. “Sorry party peoples, my jailer has spoken.”

“We might head out, too.” Erwin announces. “After all, we’ve-” he nods at me “-got an early flight.”

We? So it's going to be me, Mr. Bossman, and the smaller less muscular version of said bossman. I smile cordially, but internally I'm whimpering. I don't wanna go.
“I guess that's my queue.” Armin says after placing his dish in the sink.

“Do you need a ride, Armin?” Petra asks sweetly.

Armin nods. “That would be great, thank you.”

“Okay then, fellas,” she comes over to give us each a hug, “Merry Christmas and Happy Birthday!”

“You too, Petra.” I reply in her embrace.

“See you bright and early, Eren.” Erwin claps me on the shoulder one more time before putting on his coat.

“Er-” I offer up a strained chuckle. “Y-yeah, can't wait.”

Next comes Hanji who sobs their goodbyes before being pulled away by Moblit who smiles apologetically and bids us farewell.

Armin comes over and I give him a big hug. “Merry Christmas, Armin.”

“Merry Christmas, Eren.” He lets me go. “Do you want me to come get you in the morning?”

“Don't worry, kid,” Levi starts, “I'll drop him off.”

“But,” I look at him in confusion, “don't you have to go to the theatre?”

“It's called opening night for a reason.”

“Heh.” I scratch at the back of my head. “Right.”

“I guess that settles that.” Armin shrugs and the elevator door slides open behind him. “Well, see you later!”

“Night!” I wave at everyone as the doors close again, then immediately let out a long sigh of relief. It's not that I didn't have fun or that I don't like being around them, but it was all unexpected and quite exhausting.

As if he could read my thoughts, Levi gently pulls my hand and leads me to the couch. He lays back and, without hesitation, I lay on top of him. My eyes slide closed as he begins tracing circles on my back. There’s a kiss in my hair and I smile.

“Well that was an experience.”

I open my eyes again and chuckle; as I do I can feel his stomach contracting against me. “You could say that again.”

“Shitty Glasses.”

“It wasn't just them.”

“I know, but I'm almost certain they roped the others into it.”

“Still,” I sigh, “it wasn't too bad. It felt like a family gathering of sorts which is always nice on Christmas.”

“If you say so.”
I take a deep breath and let my eyes flutter closed.

“So,” He starts, his voice vibrates into my chest. “Why did you want that toaster?”

I chuckle. “I thought Hannes would get a kick out of it.”

“I bet he would.” A few minutes pass in silence, but it's broken by a heavy sigh. His arms tighten around me. “I don't want you to leave.”

I tilt my chin up to look at his face so full of unease. My fingers find his and interweave themselves. “Neither do I.”

“Zackly's an asshole.”

“Pfft,” I snort, “that's what I was saying earlier!”

“I know.” He pulls our clasped hands up to his lips. “You're so beautiful.”

I know he says that a lot, but my heart still skips a beat whenever he does. I smile and lean up to trap him between my arms. Our fingers are still intertwined so I bend his arm over his head. I swoop down to kiss him, long and hard until he's gasping for air.

“I love you.” I say looking deep into his eyes with only the tips of our noses touching. He tilts his head and gently slots our lips together.

“I love you, too.”

End Notes

This is a [link](#) to a cover of It Must Be Love and I imagine it to be the way he and his mom would play the duet.

Again please feel free to comment. I would love to know what you liked or didn't like.

I also started tagging this fic on tumblr as [fic: No Business Like Show Business](#) and my blog is [sgt-jaeger-meister](#) so please come follow me!

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!