The Stag in the Dark

by shulkie

Summary

After a high school hazing prank goes awry, Eren is forced to work at local "witch" Levi's knitting shop.

Notes

Another knitting au because I know what I'm about. If you don't like knitting, don't worry, none of my knitting fics are really about knitting.

This fic was inspired by Practical Magic, The Craft, The Sorcerer's Apprentice, and The Witch of Blackbird Pond. This is not a universe where witches are accepted and believed in and it's not urban fantasy. It's more magical realism that later turns into fantasy.

My tumblr is perksofbeingawaifu.

If you like please leave kudos and/or comments! They mean a lot to me!

tw: homophobic slur
“What’re you, scared? Quit being a pussy, Jaeger.”

“I’m not, just…just give me a moment!” Eren said, whipping his head about anxiously trying to seek out Mikasa in the crowd.

“You know, I think I would be better as a lookout,” Jean said, trying to sneak around the corner. “The doctor says I have 20/20 vision and—“

“You too Kirstein,” a senior grabbed Jean’s collar.

“You two want to make varsity, don’t you?” Daz asked. “Then you gotta do this. It’s tradition.”

He gave them a shove and they tripped over to the door. Both gulped and then gave each other a silent nod.

Jean and Eren pushed into the small store, the bell tinkling behind them. The heavy whitewashed door swallowed up the marching band from the parade. Eren pulled his hat down over his eyes and tugged at the collar of his coat. Jean flipped his hoodie and pulled the strings tight. The shelves of the aisles aligned perfectly with the pattern on the tiles and the only sight of dust or dirt was the trail from Eren’s ratty jeans as he ducked his head down. The clinical white shelves seemed more at place in a hospital but their contents were like sunlight streaming through a prism. Walls towering with candy colored yarn that went on past Eren’s extended fingers, rolls of ribbons, some crinkly, some polka dotted, and slowly rotating pillars of buttons and beads surrounding the two of them like a clock. Eren felt he knew what Stonehenge must be like. He tapped two fingers against one and set it spinning without so much as a creak. The rhinestones on the beads caught and danced in the fall light streaming from the skylight and Eren grinned. Jean nudged him and nodded up at the picture over the brick fireplace. A pale woman with sleek black hair and a Madonna oval face she stared down at them with light eyes. And sitting on the mantle, below her picture was a wicker broom—their target.

“Kinda creepy, isn’t it?” Jean asked. “Her eyes kindof follow you wherever you go.”

“Spooky,” Eren agreed.

“Can I help you boys?”

Eren and Jean jumped and spun on the spot to face the man who had silently padded up behind them. He, in contrast with the bright store, was clad in a black, hand knit turtleneck with thick ropey cables that wrapped around his shoulders like armor. Staring at him was a great deal like looking into a void. He did not reflect the myriad of colors around him. Everything pulled toward him like a black hole, stretching and thinning before being consumed by his oppressive shadow. Indeed, his pale pointed chin appeared to float as if separated from his body by some ghastly end. However, his unimpressed face hovered at a measly 5’2” inches, for the shopkeeper was oddly petite for a man.

So this was Levi, the witch.

“We were just admiring your picture,” Jean said and Eren instantly closed his eyes in pain. Jean had a way of making even the most innocent of comments sound like a load of horseshit.

“My mother,” the man said by way of explanation, his lip curling at the holes in Jean’s hoodie he
was wiggling his thumbs through.

“She’s very beautiful,” Eren gulped and gave a nervous smile.

Though the man’s head didn’t move, his eyes snapped to Eren so fast, Eren nearly turned tail. But he didn’t. He stood there wilting under the man’s scrutinizing gaze and was thankfully saved by the tinkling of the bell as a few old biddies escaped from the parade.

“Dude, go!” Jean mouthed.

“You go!” Eren mouthed back, but he took a hesitant step forward and took the decorative broom from the mantle.

Running his fingers over it, he glanced behind him to see the shopkeeper distracted by the other customers. He discreetly shoved it in his coat and headed for the door.

“Hey!” he heard someone call out behind him and he bolted.

Jean blocked for him and Eren heard a yelp as the owner caught him by his hoodie. Eren hesitated for a moment, throwing a look over his shoulder.

“What’re you waiting for idiot? RUN!” Jean shouted.

Eren pushed over the display behind him to prevent being followed, shattering the contents, and rushing out of the shop.

“Hey!” Officer Sannes shouted.

Uh oh.

“RUN! RUN!” the crowd began shouting and Eren didn’t need any more encouragement.

He ran. His hat flew off and he tucked the broom under his arm. He pushed through the crowd and into the parade. The marching band split itself in two like Moses parting the Red Sea and he threaded the gaps between tubas and sousaphones with speedy precision.

“RUN!” he heard Armin and Mikasa on the sidelines waving him on.

He flashed a grin and then nearly ran straight into the arms of Officer Sannes who had raced up to cut him off. He dodged and Officer Sannes attempted to grab him around the waist but fell and Eren kicked his ankles out of his grip.

“He might just make it,” Mike, the hardware owner next door said to Levi.

“RUN EREN!” Jean shouted, still caught by his neck.

“He is really fast,” Levi agreed.

C’mon, put on a burst of speed! Eren thought as the bridge loomed in sight. He only had to get to the other side and—

There was a loud groan from the parade viewers as Officer Dawk tackled Eren hard around the middle.

“Not bad,” Levi nodded in approval.
“Ah well, should be an interesting season then,” Mike sighed.

<Gosh dangit boys. Dangit, dangit! I told you to cut with this gosh darn bullcrap!” Coach Hannes shouted, spittle flying off his mustache.

“Language, Coach!”

“Kirstein, I don’t want to hear bull hooky from you! Now I told you boys, enough is enough.”

“But it’s tradition, Coach!”

“It’s a bunch of superstitious mumbo jumbo. You are harassing this man and I won’t have it! Do you flipping understand? I am so sorry Mr. Ackerman. The older boys think it’s funny to put the younger ones up to it. I told ‘em to knock it off this year, but…”

No one quite knows when it started. All they knew was that one year, some members of the football team thought it would be a hilarious prank to steal the broom Levi kept above his hearth. They made it across the bridge and that year the team went all the way to states and won. Previous teams had not been as successful. Eld Jinn had made it halfway through the bridge before tripping over his laces and that year the team made it to state semifinals but lost. Gunter Schultz fell flat on the doormat to the store and the team went 1-24. Oluo Bozado, terrified by the wall of police officers, actually went backwards down the street and that year the season was cancelled because the majority of the team got mono.

“Do you want to press charges?” Officer Dawk asked Levi.

“Normally no, but…” Levi indicated the mess behind him.

“Wait! That’s not fair! I didn’t knock that over!” Jean protested.

“Goddamnit Jean!” Eren shouted, kicking out at him.

“I better call your folks, boys,” Coach Hannes shook his head.

The whole party was removed to the police station. Levi sat with his ankles crossed, hands in his lap, eyes bored and aloof. Finally, he stretched and pulled out a small bag and began knitting. Jean nudged Eren with his knee. Eren nudged him back.

Dude, Jean’s second nudge seemed to say.

Stop, Eren’s second nudge answered angrily.

“Gayyy,” Jean hissed loudly in Eren’s ear and Eren flung him off and rubbed at where Jean’s hot breath had touched him.

Levi fixed them both with a piercing glare and both boys slunk low in their seats. Jean’s mother came and collected him. Levi wasn’t interested in pursuing charges against Jean, which Eren thought was completely unfair. He glowered at Levi, who seemed content to ignore him, focusing on the yarn in his hands. When he reached the end of his project, he held the yarn taut before biting through the yarn with a sharp incisor, his grey eyes training on Eren. Eren felt an uncomfortable feeling as his stomach rolled.

Finally Eren’s father arrived at the station, a good three hours after being paged.

“I’m so sorry, I was in surgery,” Dr. Jaeger apologized, rushing forward.
Hannes stirred and yawned and rose up to shake Dr. Jaeger’s hand and inform him of the situation.

“What the hell were you thinking?” Dr. Jaeger asked Eren incredulously.

“I don’t think he was,” Levi drawled, weaving in the ends on his project.

“You’re blowing this way out of proportion! Everyone does it!” Eren complained.

“If everyone jumped off a bridge would you do that too?” Dr. Jaeger asked exasperatedly.

“Look, we’ve all been here for a long time and I need to clean up the mess your son made. Any way we could speed this along?” Levi interrupted the argument between father and son.

“Mr. Ackerman, I am so sorry about this,” Dr. Jaeger said extending a hand. “I fully intend to compensate you for the damage. How much?”

Eren rolled his eyes as his father took out a checkbook. Ah, money, the Dr. Jaeger standby. Here, sport, sorry I missed your birthday, here’s a Ben Franklin for you.

“Rough estimate?” Levi put his hand to his lips in thought. “Fourteen hundred.”

Dr. Jaeger’s jaw dropped open and he turned to glare at Eren.

“He knocked over a display of hand sculpted yarn bowls, each one priced at about $60,” Levi explained.

“There’s no way that ugly crap was worth that much!” Eren protested.

“Each bowl was molded on my wheel and then glazed and fired in my kiln. They take several hours of work and no two are alike. Your son managed to break twenty-five. I could write you a detailed inventory if you’d like.”

“That’s bullshit!” Eren said, trying to step around his father. “No one was gonna buy your ugly pots!”

“You are already in enough trouble as is. Do you realize that this man is the only thing keeping you from an arrest? Do you want to go to juvenile court?”

“Whatever,” Eren mumbled. “He’s a fag anyway.”

“What did you say?” Dr. Jaeger rounded on Eren, grabbing his arm. “Apologize!”

“No!” Eren stuck out his chin, doubling down. “Everyone knows he’s a weirdo! They call him a witch!”

Dr. Jaeger’s mouth hung open as if he couldn’t possibly believe his own spawn could be so stupid. He clicked the pen closed and shut his checkbook.

“Fine. Press charges, Mr. Ackerman. See if that’ll teach my ungrateful son a lesson.”

“What?!” Eren gasped.

“I’m not bailing you out this time,” Dr. Jaeger shrugged. “If I do, you’ll never learn.”

Learn what?
“No! Wait! Dad!”

“I am completely willing to drop charges as long as payment is made,” Levi said, now looking disappointed he wasn’t receiving a check.

“Mr. Ackerman, how would you like a shop assistant?” Dr. Jaeger proposed. “Eren here can work off his debt.”

“What?” Eren asked in shock. “No!”

“Hmm,” thought Levi. “I don’t know…”

“He can clean toilets, scrub floors, take out the trash, any disgusting or labor intensive chore you can think of, he’ll do,” Dr. Jaeger said, a glint in his eye behind his round frames.

“I suppose that would work,” Levi said. “He could come in after school…”

“I can’t! I have practice!” Eren protested.

“No, you don’t,” Hannes shook his head. “You’re off the team.”

“No! What? Please Coach! I’ll clean the shop every day, please don’t kick me off the team!” he begged.

This appeared to be the first time the seriousness of the situation hit him. He sank to his knees in front of Coach Hannes.

“I don’t think that’s necessary,” Levi said silkily. “He can come in after practice. We close at 9pm most nights so if he’s there by 5pm sharp, I can still use him.”

“Yeah! Yes! I’ll do that! Please Coach!”

“Fine,” Hannes said gruffly. “But you’re on the bench until you clean up your act Jaeger!”

“Thanks Coach! You won’t regret it Coach!”

“Don’t thank me, thank Mr. Ackerman here.”

While Dr. Jaeger and Coach Hannes talked things out with Officer Dawk Eren avoided looking at Levi the witch. He could feel Levi’s eyes boring into him but he continued pretending the ceiling was incredibly interesting, working his jaw in fierce defiance. He didn’t realize how close Levi was until he was suddenly standing in front of Eren’s chair. Eren flinched as Levi hands went out and Eren felt him tugging a knit hat over Eren’s ears.

“It’s nippy out,” Levi explained as Eren’s hand went to the wool.

Eren could only blink at him in confusion.

“See you Monday,” Levi said, his lips curling in a thin smile.

“Creep,” Eren muttered at Levi’s retreating form, pulling the hat off and tossing it in the trash.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Eren gets distracted on his way to Levi's shop after practice. Boys vs. Girls.

Chapter Notes

My tumblr is perksofbeingawaifu.

Tracking tag: #fic: darktag

"Cruel"/St. Vincent

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So I decided that the first part of this fic is set in 2002-2003ish. I'll tweak the timeline later. But if you hear them talking about using Motorola Rzrs, that's why. XD

After doing a great deal of outlining for my fic, I think the rating and tags may change a bit, but I'll make an announcement before any chapter that has it. The most worrying bit is going to be Petra's storyline, but I'll be delicate. This chapter is just fun teenage nonsense before we get into the witch-y aspects. ;D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I can’t believe your dad did that,” Jean said sympathetically. “Sucks man.”

Eren and a few other guys were leaning against their favorite brick wall outside the cafeteria before school.

“Eighteen, nineteen, twenty! You guys, twenty!” Connie shouted enthusiastically.

“But you’re still on the team, right?” Reiner asked.

“Yeah, but I’m benched until there’s ‘improvement in my behavior.’ Where the hell were you guys?”

Reiner was the JV quarterback, built like a brick and something of an older brother to the younger players. As captain of the JV team he took his responsibility seriously and never would have sent Eren and Jean into the shop to steal the broom.

“Christa needed help with the cheerleading float,” Reiner explained and they rolled their eyes.

“What am I going to do now?” Eren whined. “I’ll never make Varsity if I never get to play in a game!”

“Thirty!” Connie continued, bouncing his soccer ball on his head.
“How about next time you don’t give in to peer pressure?” Reiner suggested. “Especially over something so stupid.”

“You’ll make varsity, Eren,” Bert reassured him. “Just not as a junior like you hoped.”

Which was easy for him to say, Eren thought grumpily. Bert was a junior and he and Marco were already on the varsity team for basketball, but the football team was competitive. This season they had enough seniors to completely fill the varsity team, but next year they only had so many juniors to fill those slots and would have to pull from the sophomores, which meant the best players would move up. Jean and Eren hoped it would be the two of them—although in private Jean told everyone there was no way Eren would make it and Eren laughed at the prospect of lazy Jean ever making the cut.

“Where’s Arm’?” Marco asked. “I wanted to compare notes.”

“Model UN meeting, because he’s got cross training after school,” Eren explained.

“Forty-one! Forty-two!” Connie continued.

“Brr, it’s cold as shit,” Jean complained blowing into his hands.

“That makes no sense, shit is steaming, you dumbass,” Eren kicked gravel at him.

“Good for practice,” Reiner nodded at Jean. “I like it when it’s a little colder, better than 80 degrees practicing on the Astroturf with all that gear.”

“That was brutal,” Jean agreed, kicking gravel back at Eren.

“Coach is gonna destroy me,” Eren moaned.

“Show him you can take it,” Reiner advised. “Show him you’re sorry for the incident in the store and willing to work hard.”

“Football is stupid,” Connie laughed head-butting his ball. “You all are gonna get brain damage. Fifty! Fifty-one! Fifty—”

Jean swatted the ball down the handicap ramp, ruining Connie’s record.

<> The football field was a hub of activity. The varsity and JV teams practiced together, Coach Shadis barking orders to the offensive players as Hannes worked with defense. The band practiced on the lower field and the sound of the quad drums echoed off the bleachers behind which the cheerleaders where practicing because the cross kids were doing fartleks on the red track.

Reiner threw a pass and Eren took off after it, but it was too far out of range so Eren nearly collided with Sasha on the track.

“Sorry Sash’,” Eren apologized.

“Yo Eren!” She stopped, running in place, tossing her ponytail from side to side. “Is it true you stole the witch’s broom on Saturday?”

“Yeah,” he sighed, pulling out his mouth guard and spitting on the track.

“And you’re not worried about the curse?” she asked.
“What curse?” Eren asked nervously.

“Jaeger!” Coach Shadis barked and Sasha took off like a startled deer.

“Would you look at that,” Reiner nudged Jean in the direction of the cheerleaders.

“Mm,” Jean agreed. “I got spirit yes I do.”

Except his eyes went from the skirts of the cheerleaders to the stands as a few members of the girls’ basketball team got out early and watched their friends. Mikasa looked straight at him and he swore his heart stopped beating for a moment, but then realized the gesture was meant for Eren right behind him. Jean scowled and cleaned the grass from his cleats.

“Woo! Go Christa!” Ymir’s hoarse voice called from the bleachers, cheering on the cheerleaders.

“Little less noise from the peanut gallery,” Shadis barked. “Huddle up! Now congrats to our team for winning the homecoming game. But we need to focus on our upcoming games, because the season is uncertain—“

“Yeah because Jaeger couldn’t make it across the bridge!” someone shouted.

“Superstition doesn’t win games!” Shadis boomed and Hannes thumbed his nose in agreement.
“Hard work does!”

“Mhm,” Hannes agreed.

“Now we’re gonna work our tails off for the upcoming game.”

“Yup yup,” Hannes murmured.

“And I expect each of you to work your darndest,” Shadis continued. “JV and Varsity alike. All of you seniors think you’re hot shit—“

Hannes coughed politely.

“Sorry Coach. But if I hear about any more pranks or other unsportsmanlike conduct—“ he spat on the ground. “You’ll be benched so fast your asscheeks will burn.”

Hannes coughed again.

“Sorry Coach,” Shadis apologized. “Any questions?”

“Yeah! Yes!” Jean raised his hand. “So you’re saying if someone from the varsity team is benched that someone from the JV team could play?”

“After our alternates,” Shadis said. “Don’t get too hopeful Kirstein, you’re far down my list.”

“Could we see this list, Coach?” Eren asked, raising his hand.

“Jaeger, you’re even further down the list after that shit you pulled,” Shadis glowered and Eren put his head down dejectedly. “Any other questions?”

“One more Coach,” Jean asked. “When you say you’ll bench us so fast our asscheeks will burn—how exactly does the burning of said asscheeks occur? Like, we are forced to sit down so fast our asscheeks are stinging from sheer force of the bench or—“
Shadis looked at the roster and made a little note.

“Keep laughing, Kirstein,” Shadis said. “You just moved down a peg.”

Eren laughed and nudged Jean who sulked.

Shadis dismissed the varsity team, but Hannes kept the JV team back for a few minutes, despite how antsy everyone was to leave. Finally they broke and left for the locker room. Eren was still tittering at Jean’s expense.

“Shut up,” Jean shoved him against a locker.

“Hey—hello—guys?” Armin called from one of the bathroom stalls.

“Uhh, hey Arm’, what’s up?” Eren called through the door.

“Someone from the varsity team must have thought my clothes were theirs and taken them by accident…”

Eren doubted that very much. More likely a jerk took them and tossed them in the trash. He pushed open the door to inspect the garbage cans outside but instead Mikasa held Armin’s jeans and shirt out for him to take.

“Who was it?” Eren asked angrily.

“No one important,” Mikasa shrugged, her expression even.

“Seriously, who?”

“Doesn’t matter. I took care of it.”

Eren frowned but didn’t pursue the matter. When they finally left the locker room there was a group all waiting. Jean slapped Marco’s hand in greeting and Sasha jumped up on Connie’s back. Reiner and Bert were trying to push each other over and despite Reiner’s bulk, Bert was surprisingly steady. Christa was entertaining Ymir blowing bubbles with her gum and Mikasa pushed off the wall to walk next to Eren and Armin.

“How was practice?” Eren asked her.

“Ew, my shirt smells like banana peels,” Armin sniffed.

“Gotta wear stronger deodorant,” Jean advised.

“Good,” Mikasa answered.

“Shitty,” Ymir said. “We had to use the middle school gym because apparently the high school is for the boy’s team only.”

“What’s wrong with the middle school gym?” Eren asked, knowing he shouldn’t.

Eren and the other sophomore boys kept their distance from Ymir lest they draw her ire. But if they wanted to spend time with Christa the rule was you had to put up with her best friend.

“What’s wrong with the middle school gym?” Ymir exploded and Eren winced. “It still has water damage from last spring! The wood is all wobbly! It’s like trying to play in a funhouse!”
“Pssh,” Jean shook his head.

“It’s sexist!” Ymir continued. “Why can’t we have the good court? It’s bad enough you guys get to play during scouting season.”

“It’s not even basketball season,” Connie pointed out.

“Still gotta practice,” Marco said.

“Well it was hard to get much practice in,” Ymir said crossly.

“You should be lucky you have a court at all,” Jean rolled his eyes.

“What was that?” Ymir rounded on him and Marco stepped between them.

“He just means that we should be lucky that there’s enough funding for both a girls’ team and a boys’ team,” Marco tried to soothe her.

Ymir twirled the ball in her hand, a snarl on her face.

“Right because if there wasn’t a budget the first thing they would scrap is the girls team.”

“That’s not wha—“ Marco started.

“Then give us your court!” Ymir said, passing the ball at Marco with such vehemence they heard it slap into his palms.

He caught it and rubbed at his chest in annoyance. Marco didn’t anger easily, but he wouldn’t be bullied either.

“Well, when girls can dunk, then maybe you can play on the big boy’s court,” he said, passing it back just as hard.

“Ohhh,” everyone called as Ymir tongued at her cheek angrily.

A challenge had just been issued.

“Let’s go then!” Ymir asked smacking the ball. “Unless you’re afraid of lil’ ole me.”

She pouted.

“Let’s do it!” Marco said, waving his arms. “You show me you can dunk a ball and we’ll give up our court.”

Eren wasn’t sure Marco could make that promise, but now it was interesting.

“Pfft, easy,” Ymir bragged.

Except when she got to the court, they could see hesitation in her eyes.

“Go ahead—“ she said holding the ball out to Marco.

“Oh, no, ladies first,” Marco bowed.

“Gimme a Y!” Christa shouted and Connie and Sasha chorused back “Y!”

Ymir sized up the net.
“Reiner go!” she shouted suddenly and he crawled between her legs and hoisted her up on his shoulders.

“That’s cheating,” Marco pointed out as Ymir slam dunked the ball whooping, Reiner pumping his fists in the air.

“You said I had to dunk it, you didn’t say how,” Ymir sniffed.

“She’s got you there,” Eren nodded.

“Your turn!” Ymir said, still riding on Reiner’s shoulders.

“C’mon you got this!” Jean shouted, rubbing Marco’s shoulders. “Get it, son!”

Marco ran down the court, expertly dribbling the ball, then he leapt, and everyone watching held their breath…as he executed a perfect layup.

“Yeah, I can’t dunk,” Marco laughed as he landed.

Ymir laughed and Marco threw his arm around her, their fight forgiven.

There was a soft whoosh as another ball slipped through the net from far behind the three point line. Everyone turned to see Mikasa still in her follow-through and she shrugged.

“And that’s why we win more games than you boys,” Ymir said out of the corner of her mouth.

“Damn,” Marco agreed.

“Shit!” Eren shouted suddenly. “What time is it?”

“Like ten after five.”

“I’m dead,” Eren moaned. “I’ve got work. My dad is making me work at that weird craft shop until I pay off the damage I did.”

“You better go. You don’t want the witch to curse you,” Connie said.

“What curse?”

“You know the curse,” Sasha said, wiggling her fingers.

“From the bruja,” Marco imitated her, tugging on Ymir’s ponytail.

“How come everyone knows about the curse and I don’t?” Eren asked nervously.

“Billy Hues stole cash out of the register last year and was never seen again!” Connie said dramatically.

“Because he got sent to juvie,” Armin rolled his eyes. “There’s no curse.”

“Dunno ‘bout that,” Reiner said casually. “I saw a kid flip the bird at Levi once and he walked right into a pole and broke his nose.”

“Because he wasn’t watching where he was going!” Armin protested.

“How do you think Shadis lost all his hair?” Sasha asked raising her eyebrows.
“There is no curse!” Armin exclaimed, trying to appeal to their common sense. “Levi can’t curse you. But he can call your dad so I would get going.”

Yet Eren took his sweet time. He figured he was already late and if he was cursed well then he was really cursed. So he dragged his feet, walking his bike next to Armin’s, as his friends accompanied him.

“I am so sore from fartleks,” Armin complained.

“Yeah you like licking farts,” Jean messed with his hair.

“It’s Swedish,” Armin explained, fixing his bangs.

“Swedish for what? Licking farts?”

Eren snorted.

They ran into Annie, walking home from soccer practice and yelled at her waving their arms about. She took out her earbuds and waited for them to catch up. Connie excitedly explained to her Marco and Ymir’s face-off and she listened with a bored expression.

“Don’t you have work?” she asked Eren, her cool blue eyes looking at the bank clock as they passed.

“Yeah, but I’m late already so I figured to hell with it.”

“Aren’t you worried about the curse?” Annie asked, tugging at the strings of her hoodie.

“What curse!?” Eren cried out again.

Finally there were in front of the store, all piled across the street cast in shadow from the setting sun. Eren looked at the swinging sign reading “Stitchcraft” and gulped.

“Well go on,” Mikasa nudged Eren.

Eren’s feet felt glued to the sidewalk.

“Go on Eren!” Christa patted his arm. “You can do it!”

Eren crossed the street and then gave one last mournful look over his shoulder, before stepping in the door.

“And that’s the last they saw of him,” Jean narrated solemnly. “Who wants hot chocolate?”

<*> Eren opened the door, the bell tinkling behind him and stepped in the shop. Seeing no one behind the counter or by the hearth, he looked around.

“H-hello…Mr. Ackerman?” he called.

“You’re late,” Levi said stepping around a shelf and Eren jumped in the air.

“Yeah, I’m really sorry about that, practice got out late,” Eren lied, running his hands through his hair sheepishly.
“Your coach called me after practice to let me know you to expect you and to call him should you lose your way. You’re lucky. I almost dialed him,” Levi said, a wicker basket filled with product over his arm as he restocked the buttons.

“Sorry, I lost track of time, next time I’ll be here right at 5, I promise!”

“If you’re on time, you’re late, if you’re early, you’re on time,” Levi said in a bored voice.

“Right, again sorry,” Eren said in annoyance. “I’m here now.”

“First thing you can do is clean up the marks your friends are making on the glass,” Levi said slamming his basket on the counter.

Eren turned around to see Jean and Connie’s faces pressed up against the large front window. They froze when they saw Eren’s furious expression.

Levi handed him a bucket and some soap and pointed him to the hose outside.

“Done!” Eren said walking in proudly.

Levi stared at the streaky glass and then back at Eren unimpressed.

This time, Levi stood behind Eren.

“Don’t use so much product, that stuffs not cheap,” Levi barked. “And use the squeegee. Straight lines—*straight!*—lines. There. Then you use the rag to wipe off the squeegee. If you don’t do it right the first time it takes twice as long!”

Gritting his teeth to keep from saying anything, Eren continued working on the window. The florist next door tutted at him, her Scottie by her feet, and the hardware store owner came outside to observe the scene under the guise of sweeping.

“And put your bike by the back door,” Levi said. “It’ll get stolen out here. And I don’t want those rusty handles on my flowerboxes.”

Eren rolled his eyes and made to wheel his bike inside after Levi.

“What are you doing?” Levi asked, looking behind him and putting his hand out in alarm as if Eren were walking a particularly vicious dog. “No. No no. Go around. I don’t want tire tracks through my store.”

He shut the door in Eren’s face. The hardware store owner gave a snort and continued sweeping.

Eren walked his bike all the way around the block and into the back alley. The stores from the next block up also shared the alley with the hardware store, florist, and Levi’s shop. Eren counted the doors until he found what he thought was Levi’s and confirmed as much when he saw a beat-up (yet still very clean) black, Dodge Neon and several neatly arranged recyclable bins.

A door to his left burst open and a thuggish looking man with an ugly, lined face caught sight of Eren wheeling toward Levi’s car.

“Hey!” the man shouted, setting down the keg he was wheeling toward the bar.

Eren looked over his shoulder and ignored him.

“HEY KID!” he shouted again.
Eren walked faster.

The man grabbed a bat from inside the door and struck it against the door frame with a metal clang.

Eren dropped his bike and ran for the door and the man chased him, sprinting into the alley.

“Mr. Ackerman open up! Open up!” Eren shouted pulling on the locked door and beating it with his fists.

The man caught up and Eren knocked over every bin to escape from the madman with a bat but he launched himself at Eren. Eren fell back with his hands over his face and the man towered over him, raising the bat over his head.

Eren screamed.

Chapter End Notes

Oh nooo...cliffhanger! Save him Levi!
“Ha! Yeah! Not so tough now are yah, you little punk?” the man laughed, waving the bat around.
The door to Stitchcraft burst open and Levi stepped out.
“Levi! I caught one!”
“Oluo, what are you doing?” Levi asked, folding his arms across his chest.
“I caught the punk who has been knocking over your recyclable bins! Not on my watch!”
“That’s not him. That’s my new assistant,” Levi said flatly.
“Oh,” said Oluo looking from Levi to Eren and scratching the back of his head awkwardly.
“Wait! Were you that kid who booked it down Main with the broom? You were fast!”
Oluo offered the end of the bat to Eren who eyed it suspiciously before allowing himself to be pulled up.
“So what’re you…a wide receiver?” Oluo asked, sizing him up.
“Yeah,” Eren nodded.
“What the—” Levi said looking around at the state of his recycling bins.
“Oh,” said Oluo looking from Levi to Eren and scratching the back of his head with the bat awkwardly. “Wait! Were you that kid who booked it down Main with the broom? You were fast!”
Eren set about cleaning up his mess, stacking the cardboard boxes into a pile, albeit not nearly as neat a one as the previous. Oluo helped him because he felt bad for getting Eren in trouble. Despite
Oluo’s scary appearance, he was an animated talker with a slight lisp who said “seen” instead of “saw” and “I been” instead of “I have been.” They moved slowly, mostly due to Oluo’s chatter and Eren’s reluctance to be alone with Levi. Eren enjoyed his company for the most part.

“Yeah I was on the football team, but I wasn’t any good at it. I went all-state in baseball, but you know, not enough to get a scholarship.”

He swung his baseball bat in a practiced manner and then grinned. Oluo tended bar at the Sports Pub up a block and they shared an alley with Levi’s store.

“Not that I’m one to pry,” Oluo said, eyeing Eren curiously. “But Levi don’t seem like the kind to hire an assistant. It’s always been him. An’ before it were him it were him and his mom.”

“Yeah, well, I’m not being paid,” Eren said rolling his eyes. “I’m just here until I pay off what I broke.”

“Ah,” said Oluo nodding.

“Can I ask you a question?” Eren asked, tilting his head to the side. “Is he really a witch?”


“Yeah, but like he can’t curse anyone can he?” Eren asked nervously. Oluo was hesitant.

“Can he?” Eren asked because Oluo was taking far too long to answer.

“If you’re asking me if I believe in all that mumbo-jumbo…then no.”

Eren let out a sigh of relief.

“But there have been coincidences…”

Oluo then listed them in order:

-December 1994, Levi is spotted out on the pier. The school pipes freeze and burst right before Christmas break.
-July 3rd, 1995, Levi is spotted by the lighthouse at the end of the pier. That year the fireworks for the Fourth of July explode. Over two dozen injured, three people are maimed, one dies.

“I remember that,” Eren nodded. “Dad operated on Mrs. Hannes. She lost her foot.”

“Your dad Dr. Jaeger? Yeah, my moms worked as a nurse in the hospital, said your pops was a goddamn hero.”

Eren tried not to look pleased by this information, allowing a small amount of pride into his smile.

-September 1996, Kuchel Ackerman is summoned to the high school. Words are exchanged between her and Coach Shadis. Shadis loses all of his hair seemingly overnight.
-August 1998, Levi is seen out on the pier again, smoking a cigarette. That night a truck driver, drunk behind the wheel jackknifes in the middle of the Old Crossroads for no reason, slamming into a sedan and killing the woman behind the wheel and simultaneously flipping another vehicle resulting in the deaths of two others. The trucker survives.

“I remember that one too,” Eren said quietly.
-November 1998, Levi is—you guessed it—on the pier. Winds pick up and sink a freighter. Three crewmembers die, their bodies are never recovered.
-June, 1999. Two students are killed taking their graduation photos out on the pier.

“What does that have to do with Mr. Ackerman?” Eren asked, wrinkling his nose.

“He was watching them from the bridge when it happened,” Oluo said seriously.

-October 16th 2001, Oluo Brozado himself sees Levi out on the pier.

“That night,” Oluo explained, pulling down his turtleneck. “Two thugs come at me with a broken bottle when I cut them off.”

Eren examined the ugly purple marks on his neck and then his eyes turned to the lines on Oluo’s face which he had previously thought were premature wrinkles, but he could now see were jagged scars.

“Why did Mr. Ackerman curse you?” Eren asked as Oluo fixed his turtleneck.

“Ah,” said Oluo tapping Eren’s nose with the bat and Eren swatted it away. “Well I wasn’t the nicest to him in high school. But here’s the thing: I would have died if Levi hadn’t been there. He saved my life. Kicked their asses and threw them out.”

“So why would Mr. Ackerman curse you and then…save you?” Eren asked in confusion.

“Well, kid, you see, to unsuperstitious man like myself—“

“Right,” Eren nodded, thinking that the whole list Oluo had just read to him sounded quite the opposite of ‘unsuperstitious.’

“And a casual observer of the supernatural—“

“Sure,” said Eren, suppressing an eyeroll.

“I’d say that while these events can’t be explained away as pure coincidence, there is another explanation!”

Oluo paused dramatically and Eren blinked at him.

“Which is?” Eren prodded.

“Oh, I don’t know. It’s mysterious.”

Eren scowled.

“Still,” Oluo said hastily. “I try to stay on his good side.”

“He has a good side?” Eren asked incredulously.

“Oh yeah. Levi is a really cool dude.”

As if on cue, Levi opened the door.

“Are you done yet?” he snapped at Eren. “Oluo quit distracting him.”

Oluo left for his abandoned keg and waved at them.
“While you’re out here, I might as well show you what you’ll be doing,” Levi said.

He opened the cellar doors on the side of the building and stepped down into the black. Eren peered after him. He didn’t know the store had a basement.

“Well come on,” Levi urged.

The only visible part of him was his steel grey eyes, like pieces of flint on a black quilt.

“I’m good,” Eren said, gulping.

He had absolutely no desire to be sacrificed in some Black Sabbath. He had a brief nightmarish thought of body parts hanging from meat hooks and strange creatures pickled in jars.

“It’s just a Michigan basement,” Levi explained, tugging on a light. “All of the older buildings are like this and I can’t afford to pay someone to renovate it.”

Eren cautiously stepped down into the room. The basement was uninsulated, with dirt walls and a large rectangle of tile that failed to extend to the edge of the room. Sachets of cedar and dried herbs and flowers hung from the ceiling. There were several shelves stacked neatly on the tile, all of them full of sealed tubs.

“You are going to sweep and dust out this entire room. Now it’s a large project so you need to do it in sections. Start with this quarter. Pull all of the tubs off the shelf and bring them upstairs and stack them neatly—neatly!—and then pull the shelves out and sweep and dust them as well.”

It seemed relatively easy Eren thought. Except he had to carry every single box up the stairs in the cold and then step into the sweltering store with its crackling fireplace. Soon he had broken out into a sweat from his exertion that caused a chill to go up his spine whenever he descended the stairs into the creepy basement.

And that’s how it went for three hours. He’d ascend the side stairs and walk into the store, and stack the tubs neatly in a pile under the spiral staircase. Each time he reentered, rolling up the sleeves of his hoodie, he would catch glimpses of the mechanics of the store. Eren had never had a job before, so he wasn’t exactly sure what went on. When he had a customer, Levi was surprisingly helpful. Not nice, per se, he was too indifferent and his questions came a little too quick in his brusque manner for him to be “nice.” Yet, he was direct and spoke slowly and clearly for the older ladies. Eren came in to find Levi cutting fabric, winding yarn, pulling out swatches or carefully placing change into their hands, coins first then the bills so the quarters wouldn’t roll off into the space between the register and the counter. When it was empty, Levi would restock the buttons or organize the contents of the shelves. The large shelf that Eren had knocked over was sitting upright with a sign reading: “Fresh paint, do not touch! New Yarn Bowls coming soon!” If there was nothing to stock, Levi would climb the spiral staircase, grab the electric kettle, come down and fill it up with tap water from the bathroom, then climb back up to the loft to start on his tea.

Past eight, the store was practically dead. The “Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald” filtered eerily through the speakers and Eren could catch snippets of it through the gaps in the wooden floors above him. Levi left his tea sitting by the register and propped open the back door. He lit up a clove cigarette and as Levi organized the boxes under the stairs, he caught sight of Levi making chirping noises and kneeling down to pet a large tomcat with a torn ear. When he caught Eren looking at him, Levi nudged the large brick holding open the door and it shut.

“Well that took longer than I expected,” Levi said as Eren finally brought up the last box from the first quarter of the basement. “I would have gotten through at least a quarter of it if I had done it
myself.”

Then you freakin’ do it, Eren thought exasperatedly.

“That’s all for today, I suppose.”

Levi flipped the sign on the door and turned off all the lights. Eren stood next to him as they locked up and then Levi let him out the back door.

“Where is your dad picking you up?” Levi asked.

Eren snorted.

“He’s not. I’m biking.”

Levi paused. “I can’t let you bike home in the dark. You don’t even have a helmet.”

“It’s fine, I do it a lot.”

Levi started up his Dodge Neon, but he waited for Eren to leave and then watched him from a distance before heading for home.

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“How was it?” Armin asked the next day and everyone leaned in.

“Kindof boring?” Eren said.

And really it had been. Aside from nearly being crushed by Oluo wielding a bat, it was relatively uneventful.

His friends looked disappointed.

“But I mean, I’m really sore from moving boxes.”

He could see their eyes glazing over and Jean continued explaining an episode of South Park to Marco.

“I mean, he has a creepy dirt basement.”

“Oh yeah?” Sasha asked, leaning in and other chatter stopped.

“Y-yeah,” Eren said, leaning away from their eager faces. “And like, he has lots of like…special herbs and things hanging from the ceiling.”

“Like…stuff for potions?” Christa asked, wide-eyed.

“I don’t know, but he’s always drinking tea,” Eren said very seriously and they all exchanged looks.

He realized that Levi was a source of great curiosity for them and as long as he gave them details, he commanded their attention.

“Yeah, he had me moving all of these bins but they were all sealed up so I have no idea what’s in them,” Eren said, shrugging. “Could be a dead body for all I know.”

“It’s not a dead body, it’s just back stock,” Armin said rolling his eyes.
“Whatever. I can’t be late again today or else he definitely will kill me. If you don’t see me tomorrow it’s because I’m still in that creepy basement of his.”

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“So now that you have pulled out all of the boxes, you’re going to sweep out behind here and dust and then get the mop and mop this section of the tile. Got it?”

“Uh…sure.”

“You do know how to sweep and mop, right?” Levi asked, looking up at Eren, his eyes narrowing a little.

“Not really? But I mean, I’ll figure it out.”

“Grab that broom. Show me how you sweep.”

Eren dragged it behind him, creating little lines in the dirt, but failed to actually pick up anything. Levi snorted.

“Put one hand here and the other here,” he said, putting his hands on top of Eren’s and standing behind him. “And sweep like this, then gather the dirt into a little pile.”

Eren shrugged him off uncomfortably and Levi released his grip and stepped back.

“You think you got it?” Levi asked.

“Yeah, I got it,” Eren said.

“Do you know why you’re doing this?” Levi asked, craning his neck to look up at Eren.

“Because I broke your ug—er—your weird bowl things,” Eren said dejectedly.

“No. Well yes, but do you know what’s in these buckets?”

Eren definitely didn’t want to know what was in the buckets. Levi pulled the lid off of one and Eren leaned over to look.

“Yarn,” Levi said in a very serious voice. “And do you know what the number one enemy of yarn is?”

“Oh…no?”

“Moths,” Levi said in a low growl and Eren took a step back because his expression was terrifying, his head knocked against the lightbulb and it began swinging wildly making the shadows under Levi’s eyes darker and more sinister. “I hate moths. And do you know why? Because those little fluttery freaks come in and they go ‘oh here is a bountiful feast’ and then they lay their buggy eggs in the dust and that just hatches into more moths and before you know it you have a full on infestation. They’re chewing up all of the wool products and you can’t sell moth-infested alpaca wool, Eren!”

Oh my god, thought Eren. He’s crazy.

“So dusting is the first line of defense. You’re going to dust this ceiling spotless. I don’t want any cobwebs either. Spiders may be good for eating moths but they’re creepy. I don’t like the legs. After you’ve successfully cleared it of debris—and I will be checking your work—you will get the
mop and scrub the tile floor.”

It was Eren’s first time dusting, but he thought he did a passable job. His arms were still sore from practice and caring boxes yesterday so reaching up to dust off the ceiling hurt more than it should have, but he went fast.

Levi of course made him do it all again.

His first trip with the mop bucket ended with water all over his front as Levi watched with an aloof expression. Soaked through, he scrubbed at the floor in the freezing basement and when he surfaced, tired, wet, and hungry, he really hoped Levi wouldn’t make him do it all again. He was miserable and shivering and trying very hard not to let it show. He just wanted to go home and finish up all of his trig homework and crawl into bed.

“Here,” Levi said, tapping a button that opened the cash register with a chime. “It needs to dry before you can move everything back, do me a favor and go down to the Reeve’s Bakery and get me a hot cocoa and…I don’t know…some kind of pastry. And bring a receipt and change. I will be counting it all.”

Eren pulled on his coat over his wet clothes and walked in squishy shoes against the blustery wind down the block. The Reeves bakery was out of most of their stock as it was late in the day and so there weren’t many options. Eren went back and forth between a cherry cruller and an almond croissant anxiously. He spent so much time focusing on it, he almost forgot to ask for a receipt.

“Here is your change. $1.45,” Eren said, carefully counting it out back to Levi. “I got you a cherry cruller because I didn’t know what you liked and they didn’t really have many options so I hope that’s okay. I didn’t know if you wanted marshmallows in your cocoa so I didn’t get any but I can go back and get some if you wanted!”

“Sit,” Levi pointed at a chair on the long wooden table by the fireplace.

He set down the cocoa and cruller in front of Eren.

“Eat,” he insisted.

“What about your drink?”

“I’ve got my tea. Sit. Warm up.”

Eren nibbled at his pastry happily, letting the heat soak through his coat and wet hoodie.

“And don’t get any crumbs on the floor!” Levi insisted and Eren pulled a face. “Last thing we need is cockroaches.”

Sitting in the store, Eren could observe all of the happenings. He was just starting to feel better when something unusual happened. A woman in her late 20’s burst into the store with what looked like her sisters, mother, and grandmother in tow.

“Hello!” she said excitedly, all of her family behind her.

Levi uttered a low greeting.

“I just recently found out I’m expecting and I wondered how hard it would be to knit baby booties?” she asked and her mother started whispering something and the woman shushed her.
“Congratulations. We do have several kits for knitting baby booties,” Levi said.

“Great, I’ll take one!” she said and her sister clasped her hands.

They looked a great deal to Eren like contestants on a game show waiting to find out if they were going on a cruise to the Bahamas.

Levi turned his back to the group and looked at the wall of kits behind him. He leaned over towards one and the group swayed to the left, then he reached for another and they swayed to the right. He finally plucked one from the shelf and set it on the counter. The women squealed, stamping their feet a little.

“Sorry, what do I owe you?” the mother-to-be asked excitedly.

“$10.95 for the kit. Needles sold separately.”

“I have needles at home,” she waved off his concerns digging in her wallet.

“What is it? What is it?” her mother hissed.

“Ma! Hold on!”

They paid and then left the store quickly. Eren watched them through the window as the woman ripped open the kit. Inside was a great deal of pink yarn.

“It’s a girl!” they cried all jumping happily, save grandma, who seemed to be hard of hearing but smiled widely nonetheless.

What on earth was that?

They were not the first to come in asking for booties, looking very agitated and excited. As Eren continued his sweep out of the basement over the course of the week, he observed several more odd events. One girl came in sobbing and could barely get words out and Levi directed her to a “voodoo doll” kit. An older woman came in looking for materials to make a wedding quilt for her son and Levi sent her home with a kit to make a baby blanket instead. One customer stumbled in asking where the nearest pharmacy was so he could fight off a cold and Levi somehow sold him a handknit balaclava. Often what people said they wanted wasn’t actually what they wanted, Eren discovered. They would say one thing and then rock back and forth on their heels until Levi deduced the real object they sought.

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“So how goes work? You discover what he’s hiding in the basement yet?” Marco joked.

“Yes. It’s just yarn.”

Eren didn’t really know how to explain to his friends at work that far from being a terrifying spellcasting fiend from Satan’s lair, Levi was…

How to even explain him?

He was terrifying, that was true. Once sharp glance from him knocked Eren’s heart up into his throat and made him break out into a cold sweat. He was methodical, a creature of habit. He took his smoke break at the same time every night. He made the same bitter tea in the same mug. The CD played the exact same songs at the exact same time and Eren didn’t know how many more
times he could listen to “Raindrops Keep Fallin’ On My Head” before going crazy. Levi wasn’t all that used to Eren’s presence and actually turned off all the lights and locked the doors before remembering Eren existed. He didn’t make small talk. He let his customers do most of the talking and they opened up to him, telling him about their sister’s divorce and so-and-so’s addiction to painkillers and about poor Mrs. Weiss who can’t even leave her home anymore because her arthritis is so bad. Levi accepted these facts as he rung them up, rarely letting out more than a commiserating grunt. He talked to his neighbors, albeit rarely. Sometimes Oluo’s smokebreak coincided with Levi’s and they’d sit out on the back step as Oluo prattled excitedly to him. In fact it seemed like the only one whose company Levi enjoyed was the mangy tomcat who begged for treats.

Friday rolled around and instead of heading to the movies with his friends like he very much wanted to, Eren was stuck inside preparing to mop the last section of the floor.

“Eren!” Levi called down, opening the trap door to the basement that was next to the table and Eren blinked against the bright light from the store above.

“Yes?” Eren asked.

“It’s packed up here and I forgot to make my deposit with the bank, I need you to do it.”

“Yeah, sure, just let me finish up here and—”

“No, now!” Levi said and there was a note of agitation in his usually calm voice. “They close in… fuck… in ten minutes.”

Eren quickly bundled up as Levi wedged a large zippered bank purse into his hoodie pocket.

“Don’t let anyone see you with it. And run! Go! Faster than you did down Main. Go!”

Eren sprinted to the bank, pounding on the door just as the clerk made to lock it.

“Did you make it?” Levi asked as Eren breezed in.

“Yeah,” Eren grinned and Levi looked relieved.

“Here, quick, I need you to get me three skeins of the Lion Brand in “Cranberry” and make sure they’re the same dyelot.”

“The same what?” Eren asked, wrinkling his nose.

“…Nevermind, just bring up the whole bin. Do you know where—“

“I got it!” Eren waved him off. Levi was very particular in how Eren restocked the bins downstairs so he knew exactly where everything was located.

The crowd upstairs didn’t let up. Levi was busy cutting fabric and the cash register was always chiming and Eren kept running to grab various items for customers. One woman asked his opinion on what size needles would work best for a project and he froze.

“Don’t talk to the customers,” Levi snapped, waving him off.

He sent Eren upstairs to set his kettle on and then Eren ran back down with tea.
Finally at 8 the crowd emptied. Eren turned on the tap in the bathroom to fill up his mop bucket but Levi interrupted him.

“Eren!” he called.

“Yeah?” Eren stuck his head out.

“You can go home, kid,” Levi said, sighing and rubbing his temples.

“…You sure?” Eren asked.

“Yeah, you did good today. It’s Friday, go be with your friends.”

Eren practically skipped out of the store. He texted Jean and they snuck him into the film through the side exit door and threw popcorn at the screen making a general ruckus.

Armin’s grandfather picked him up so Eren scored a ride, putting his bike in the bed of the truck. Despite the late hour, he was still in bed early for a Friday, only 10pm. He figured he’d play some video games until Dad got home, but his eyelids were already drooping. He lay back on his pillow, listening to some music, feeling drowsy, when a horrible thought made him shoot out of bed.

Had he turned the water off in the sink before he left?

>Eren had never pedaled faster in his life. He bounced over sidewalks and through flowerbeds, squealing to a halt in front of the store and throwing his bike aside. He looked in the windows but couldn’t see anything. He knocked furiously, but of course Levi didn’t answer, it was almost 11. He went to the backdoor and pounded on it furiously. He didn’t see Levi’s car. Eren tried to open the cellar doors, but they were locked as well.

Eren thought about going home. But what if he had left the water on? Levi would know exactly who was responsible and he’d be stuck doing another three months of unpaid labor. Levi would call his dad. Or the police!

Panic hit Eren so hard every breath tasted like bile as he paced on the spot. Then he looked up and realized…the skylight! He scaled a drainpipe and made it up to the roof. Using the tips of his fingers, and breaking several nails in the process, he managed to lift up the skylight and gently stepped down onto the desk, careful not to break Levi’s ancient computer and closed the skylight quietly. He really hoped Levi didn’t have a security system or else he was screwed. Padding down the spiral staircase, he kept quiet, lest the police receive a call about an intruder.

He heard it before he pulled open the door to the bathroom. The bucket in the sink and the sink had both overflowed and splashed all over the wooden floor. The boards were swollen shut, but there was a great deal of water that had still slipped through the cracks. The bathroom was soaked and so was the rug on the floor outside the door. He turned them off, his chin wobbling a little as he eyed the mess.

“Please, please,” Eren prayed as he opened the trap door to the basement.

He hopped down and landed with a light splash.

“No!” he practically sobbed.

The basement had flooded with a good inch of water. He had really screwed up this time. Just when
things were starting to go well and he had to go and muck it up! Eren fought the urge to break down sobbing out of frustration and grabbed the mop and the giant fans and set to work. He mopped up as much water as he could and wrung it out into the bucket upstairs before moving downstairs. He pushed the water to the drain overflowing drains and cranked the fans at full blast.

Then he heard something moving outside the cellar doors.

*Oh no, oh please no,* Eren thought.

It sounded a great deal like Levi’s Dodge Neon. He heard a car door slam and moved quickly, closing the trap door and turning off the fans, holding his breath in the cold and damp.

Levi waltzed in, setting his keys on the little hook he kept behind the register. He set about rearranging the furniture and placed a large chest over the door.

Eren was trapped.

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**Chapter End Notes**

Did any of you notice the sorcerer's apprentice ref? ;D

If you like this fic, please leave comments or kudos or come bug me on my tumblr! Ch-ch-check out my other fics!
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Trapped in the basement, Eren learns what kind of services Levi offers as the world's most patient witch.

Chapter Notes

My tumblr is perksofbeingawaifu.

If you like please leave kudos and/or comments! They mean a lot to me!

"Black Magic Woman"//Santana

Idk if this is a trigger warning or how to tag it, but there's a character in this chapter who calls anti-depressants "magic pills" and shows disdain for them. He's a dick. He's gonna get cursed.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Eren was so busy panicking about being trapped in the basement it took him several moments to notice what Levi was doing upstairs. Through the cracks in the boards, Eren could see Levi’s small form as he pulled shut the black curtains and then opened the chest on top of the trap door pulling out several items. He threw around his shoulders a large black beaded shawl as he fussed with the fire. It didn’t look like it belonged to him. In fact, Eren thought it looked a great deal like the shawl the woman in the picture over the mantel wore. The gas fireplace roared to life. Levi put in a new CD. Eren didn’t think Levi had any different CDs and the fact that he did and chose to use the same Celion Dion crap every single day irked him. Levi also pulled out a bottle of wine and as the music started up he poured a glass, humming along.

“Oye como va,” Levi sang in his low voice.

Clearly a mix he’d listened to many times before. Levi did not have a particularly good singing voice. He hummed into his wine glass, swiveling his hips and dancing to the music. He clacked the candle lighter a few times before the wick caught.

“Oye como va. Mi ritmo. Bueno pa gozar—“ Levi swallowed the last word with a heavy gulp of wine.

Oh Levi, thought Eren. Don’t quit your day job.

Then as a finishing move, Levi set one of the candles out in the front window display, closing the shades over it. He sat with his back to the fireplace and crossed his legs and continued sipping his wine seemingly waiting.

Eren hoped Levi wasn’t expecting a date.
Then he heard it. A light but distinct tap on the door. Levi quickly hid his wine and fusssed with his shawl before answering the door.

“I saw your candle in the window...I hope I’m not bothering you!” a middle aged woman apologized.

Levi said nothing, he simply padded around in his silk slippers—which by the way, he never would have worn during work hours.

“It’s my daughter you see. I was out of town last weekend visiting my sister and my husband!” she tutted loudly. “My husband gave the kids pizza! Pizza!”

To his credit, Levi didn’t bat an eye. Or at least Eren didn’t think he did. Levi had a face like a mirror and people loved chatting at him. Not talking to him, but at him. In that way he was a good listener.

“And he knew full well that the Miss Autumn Pageant is next week. Now her skin is breaking out all over! She’s already going to lose points because of her braces I don’t want the judges knocking off any more! So can you help me?”

“What is it you want?” Levi asked after several long seconds.

“I want Jessica’s skin to clear up so she can win the pageant!”

Wait...Jessica...as in Jessica Bollinger? Now that he thought of it, Eren was sure he recognized the woman’s voice above as Jessica’s overbearing mother. They had been in the same grade and class since kindergarten. Eren never knew she was in pageants. He had just seen her earlier at the movie theatre and her skin didn’t look out of the ordinary.

Levi dug around in the chest and pulled out a small bottle. The woman reached for it eagerly but Levi held back.

“Fifty dollars,” he said.

She dug out her purse and handed him the cash. Eren’s mouth dropped open. She actually paid it! Fifty dollars? For a zit? What a ripoff!

“And please let the next person waiting inside,” Levi called at her retreating back, surreptitiously taking a sip of wine then hiding it away again.

“Hiya Levi,” said a nasally voice as a thin man strode in purposefully.


“Oh I’m in a bad way again Levi,” Eugene said, flipping the chair around and sitting in reverse style, his arms on the back of the chair in a way Eren knew irked Levi. “The plant is laying off people again.”

“The plant is always laying off people.”

“I just need some good luck, you know? Just a little something for me to retire and take Bethany and the kids down to Les Cheneaux for the weekend.”

“What do you need, Eugene?” Levi asked tapping his fingers in irritation.

“The boss ain’t too happy with me because I skipped a couple of days to go over to the casino and
so I need to win the lottery so I can wave that ticket in front of his stupid face. I really need a winner, Levi,” Eugene said leaning over the table.

“Take this candle,” Levi said, slapping a yellow beeswax candle on the table. “Wait until Thursday —”

“Wait? But the Powerball is up by $6 million! I can’t wait!”

“Then you should have come last week,” Levi dismissed him. “Take this candle, wait until Thursday and carve your numbers into the candle with a quarter or with a piece of gold jewelry—not your wedding ring—and while you burn it, think about what you want.”

“Great! Super! Thanks Levi!”

“That’ll be $35.”

Eren thought the man could just as easily buy more tickets and increase his chances with that kind of money, but he paid it without complaint.

“Oh and Eugene,” Levi said as Eugene stood up to go. “Try to remember to actually buy a ticket this time?”

Eugene let the next person in but it turned out to be a group of tipsy women from the bar, some of them still carrying their beer bottles.

“I got engaged!” one of the shouted and they all started shrieking as Levi ushered them out the door.

“One at a time,” he insisted.

“Bride first!” they insisted shoving her through the door.

“So like, do you like, do like, you know…” the Bride, Charlotte, slurred her words. “Palm readings and that kind of stuff?”

Levi sighed.

“Yes. $35 for an initial reading. $50 for more in-depth. Same for tarot.”

“Oh my god tarot! Tarot!” Charlotte clapped her hands. “Let’s do that! I want to do that! No wait… palms! Palm reading!”

Levi nodded and she paid him.

He grabbed a bottle and pumped a small amount of something into her hands and she wiped them on and around.

“What is this? This smells fantastic! What is it, like verbena? Oh man, is it like a special psychic oil?” she asked, sniffing her hands.

“It’s Purell,” Levi said flatly.

“Oh.”

Levi traced her hands now that they were sanitized and Eren was growing a little sleepy so he missed a great part of this, plus Levi was speaking in a hushed whisper to restore the calm energy
before the hectic group’s arrival. He explained each line and its meaning, giving vague explanations for what each could mean for her life.

“I just think like, you know, like that Chad and I are meant to be together. Like, I believe in the power of love. Like he always came back to me after he went to that skank Tiffany, like we are so much better together, you know? And I know like the divorce rate is insanely high or whatever right now, but I just want to know how long we’ve got you know?”

Levi said nothing.

“Or like, if we’ll have kids—will we have kids?”

“Yes…it looks like, you will have one together,” Levi said.

“And how many years again?” she asked.

Levi still said nothing.

“Oh my god. Is he like, gonna die or something? Am I like going to be a young widow?”

“Our palms don’t answer all questions,” Levi answered evasively.

“But we’re going to have a kid at some point right? So that’s good,” she sighed happily. “This wedding is going to be just like one giant rager. Like even bigger than tonight. Oh my god, I forgot about my bachelorette party! Okay, so what does it say about my wedding?”

Levi gave another vague answer. All in all, Eren thought, for $35 he didn’t seem to say much of anything.

“He says Chad and I are gonna have a baby!” the bride screamed once outside the door. “Shannon you go next!”

Shannon, the Maid of Honor was a mess of tears and snot.

“It’s just like, Chad said he loved me and that we’d be together forever. And then he proposes to her, on my birthday!”

Levi pushed a box of tissues towards her and she blew her nose loudly and then held out her hand for him to read. He squirted a small amount of Purell into her hand only for her to wipe her nose off on her wrist.

“You have a very grounded sense of self according to your palms. You’ll do well in your career. What are you…a nurse?”

“Yeah,” she sobbed. “He’s just a liar, you know? He lied about loving me, he lied about going to visit his sick aunt!”

“And uh, I’m seeing your family life will be very fulfilling in fact you may be looking forward to —“

“Oh my god. Do you think he lied about being allergic to latex?”

“—children in the next year,” Levi finished.

There was an awkward silence.
“You can send in whoever is next girl,” Levi said.

“It’s not fair! I’m so much hotter than she is! D cups! Look!” the next woman, Stephanie, wailed. “And she gets engaged? Chad likes me better than her, he said as much! The only reason he proposed was because he’s afraid of her. She went like psycho on her last ex. Keyed his car and everything! It’s not fair! After I gave him head in the movie theater! And let him do it without a rubber!”

Uh oh.

“Did…you want a palm reading? Or tarot—“

“When am I gonna find a guy who isn’t a complete asshole!” Stephanie cried.

“I don’t know, but I can find out for you,” Levi said, trying to direct her attention away from sobbing on the fringe of his shawl. “Here, close your eyes.”

She obeyed, wiping at her smeared mascara and then closing them. He lit a stick of incense and set it in its holder.

“Keep your eyes closed and focus on your breathing,” he instructed. “In for four seconds and out for four. Fill up your lungs. Breathe deep.”

“Woo! Everything is a little swirly,” she giggled.

“Try to clear your mind,” Levi spoke lowly, taking a long sip of his wine before getting up and sitting at the antique spinning wheel.

Eren had assumed the delicate looking instrument was just for show, but Levi sat at it and began treadling. The delicate fiber slipped between his fingers and the wheel began spinning faster and faster.

“Now, I’m going to count down from ten. When you open your eyes, look through the wheel. Not into it, but past it into the fire. Ten. Nine.”

Eren found himself growing a little sleepy as Levi counted down.

“Three. Two. One. Open your eyes.”

It took her a while to focus as she stared through the spinning wheel.

“I see like a…I think it’s like a…four leaf clover? What does that mean?”

“Keep looking,” Levi said softly, the fiber turning from fluffy clouds behind him to strong thread in front.

“Yeah, it’s definitely a four leaf clover. Does that mean like…I’ll be successful?”

“Who can say?” Levi said, slowing his wheel and finally halting. “It is something meant only for you. A sign to help you.”

“Well I hope I’m not waiting long,” she scowled, plopping cash on the table.

Levi sighed and stared at the ceiling as the back door opened and yet another bridesmaid walked in.
“Hey Levi,” said the new woman in a sardonic drawl.

“Rico, hey,” Levi said sitting upright.

“My little sister got engaged so I was dragged out on a bar crawl,” Rico complained, folding her arms across her chest.

“Oh I see.”

“Yeah, the guy is a complete dick too. You know once we had a party at our place and I was crashing in the guest bedroom and he came in and was all ‘I need you, baby. It’s always been you, baby.’”

Eren let out a small groan.

“But I told him to buzz off. Then he comes back in and he’s like got it out.”

Levi didn’t say anything but Rico gave a barking laugh so he must have pulled a face.

“Yeah, and so I took a picture of it.”

“What you just keep a camera next to the bed?” Levi asked in confusion.

“No, phones have cameras now,” she said, waving her phone about. “Wanna see?”

Curiosity appeared to win Levi over.

“Wow, that is…wow. That is quite big.”

“I know,” Rico agreed.

“And it kindof curves to the side,” Levi continued.

“It looks like it’s confused by a question on a test, it’s adorable. But he’s still an asshole so I said no.”

“For the best,” Levi agreed, leaning back in his chair. “How’s Coast Guard?”

“Good! They have me go to all of these job fairs now and getting people to sign up. It’s fun.”

“So what can I do for you? Palm reading? Tarot? Do you need a spell?”

“No, I don’t really believe in all of that stuff, my sister just forced me in here. She wants me to figure out when it’s my turn to walk down the aisle. Also…I spent most of my cash at the bar. What does $5 get me?”

Levi took the cash.

“I see several baby showers in your future,” Levi said mysteriously.

“Oh god,” Rico said. “Right. Okay. Nice to see you again Levi. Can you believe it’s been six years since high school? Well I guess it’s only been four for you. Man, time flies. See ya!”

“Bye!” Levi said waving her off.

The second the door closed, Levi hit the remote and sang along to his mix, stretch out in a chair and working on his glass of wine.
How long was he planning on being up there? Eren thought. Eren was cold and shivering and falling asleep fast. He couldn’t feel his toes.

“I’m so excited,” Levi mumbled into his wine glass along with the Pointer Sisters in his flat baritone. “And I just can’t hide it. I’m about to lose control and I—“

There was another tap at the door and he turned off the music and stowed away his wine.

“Hello,” said a woman’s quiet voice. “Are you the witch?”

“I am,” Levi nodded.

“Oh…I thought you’d be…never mind, sorry. I don’t even know if you can help me.”

“Sit,” Levi indicated.

“My husband and I have been trying to have a baby for some time and have been unsuccessful. He says what goes on between a man and a woman in the bedroom is not the business of doctors and refuses to see a fertility specialist. Can…can you help me?”

“Tell me about yourself and your husband, how did you meet?”

Eren started nodding off during this story, but the gist was this: He was older and fresh out of a divorce and she was an employee with his company. He worked as a white collar manager for one of those large food distributors like GFS or Sysco but it was some name Eren didn’t recognize. She had been a secretary on the front desk. When they met it was love at first sight. They waited to date until his divorce was officially over and year later they were married. His mother is cold, but his father is welcoming. Her husband was a reserved man, the reason for his divorce was his previous wife’s tendency to rack up credit card debt and when they cut up their credit cards she started shoplifting. He was quiet, he liked golf and hunting. He didn’t approve of “magic pills” and thought her sister’s dependency on anti-depressants was a weakness. Personally, she didn’t care, but again she didn’t know as much about these things as he did. She had always wanted children and he agreed with the stipulation that if they succeeded she would be the one responsible to care for the child. She loved children. She agreed.

It was at least a half hour discussion and Eren wondered how much Levi’s time cost, but Levi didn’t interrupt her to discuss a price. Instead he got out a small pipe and fiddled with it. He didn’t smoke (Eren knew that Levi wouldn’t let smoke anywhere near his yarn and fabric), but he held it between his teeth and tapped it against his chin in thought. Eren was so tired. He had quietly overturned the mop bucket and was sitting on it. His jeans were wet up to his knees and his toes were blocks of ice, he might have frostbite

“Here’s what you’re going to do,” Levi said, the pipe pulling on his bottom lip. “When you get home, I want you to go through every room and wherever there is a knot untie it. On your curtains, shoelaces, drawcords, fishing line, any piece of string or cross stitch, anything, you untie it. Do not cut it. If it is knotted too tightly, leave it, but tell me about it. You do this. Every day, look for more knots. If in a months’ time, you are not yet pregnant, come see me.”

“How much do I owe you?” she asked, uncertain.

“$30,” he said, pointing the pipe at her purse.

There was a break in between her and the next customer. Levi sang lowly to his music.

“My girl’s name is Señora, I tell you friends I adore her—”
Eren just wanted to go home and crawl into bed. This was the worst.

“And when dances oh brother, she’s a hurricane in all kinds of weather, jump in the line—“

There was a loud pounding knock at the door and Levi turned off the music.

“Yo dude, dude,” the guy sagged on the door frame. “I just—where’s the witch?”

“I’m the witch,” Levi said, blocking his entry into the place.

“I just, I need to know if there’s a girl out there for me, you know? I’m tired. Like, all the hot girls just go for the assholes, but I’m a nice guy! I’m a good guy, right? So is it going to happen for me or no?”

“We can find out,” Levi said. “Come in. What is your name?”

“Lucky. That’s what my friends call me because I’m so lucky.”

Who would have thought? Eren thought grumpily.

“And they got me this belt.”

“I see. Four leaf clover, very nice. How about a Tarot reading, Lucky?”

“What’s that?”

“Fortune telling cards.”

“Cards? Like poker? I’m good at poker. Sure man.”

Another boring card reading. Eren couldn’t see the cards so he couldn’t really figure out what meaning there was to them.

“Queen of Cups and Queen of Wands, I’m seeing very good signs here.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, I think you’ll meet someone soon.”

“How soon?” Lucky asked, leaning over eagerly.

“You know what, I would go right across to the bar over there and I bet you might even find someone tonight.”

“Really? Thanks man!”

He practically ran out, and Levi chuckled lowly, leaning back in his chair. The next person through the door was the lunch lady at Eren’s school.

“I think my mother-in-law’s ghost is haunting me,” she said in her gravelly smoker’s voice.

“Let’s see what can do about that, hm? I have some sage—“

“No. I wanna talk to the old bat. Make her see reason.”

Both Levi and Eren sighed.
“We are calling on the spirit of Beverly McNamara,” Levi said in his soft voice several minutes of haggling over price later. “Will you visit with us Beverly?”

The lunch lady scraped her feet as she leaned toward, kicking up dust that fell into Eren’s face. He tried to brush it out of his eyes, but he felt the particles tickle his nose.

“Do you call her by a particular name?” Levi asked.

“Old Bat,” the lunch lady grunted. “You there?”

Eren couldn’t help it, he sneezed.

“That’s her!” the lunch lady exclaimed. “That’s her! I’d know that snotty cough anywhere!”

“I see,” Levi said.

Eren froze and clapped his hand over his mouth and nose.

“We’re repainting the kitchen you harpy!” the lunch lady growled. “And there’s nothing you can do about it!”

That wrapped up their session.

Levi took the candle out of the window and snuffed it out. Then he set about cleaning up his wine glass and candles. Setting everything in the chest, he closed it and locked it and stowed it away.

Eren perked up when he realized his escape path was finally clear. Then there was the sound of jiggling keys and Eren heard the door open and close.

Sighing, Eren cautiously opened the trap door and poked his head out. Out of the pitch black came a pale hand that gripped his hair by the root.

“Gotchya!” Levi snarled.

Chapter End Notes

Lololol, can you tell that Levi’s witching hour playlist was clearly compiled by Hanji? It’s supposed to be dance-y and bounce-y to build up energy. More on that later.

Songs on the playlist are:
"Oye Como Va"//Santana
"I’m So Excited"//The Pointer Sisters
"Jump in the Line"//Harry Belafonte

Oh Chad. You might be my new favorite never-to-be-mentioned-again OC. He is based on a guy I went to work with who looked like a human Ken doll (...I forgot his name I just call him Ken) except he apparently had a monster dong. I only know this because a coworker snapped a picture of him when he whipped it out. I hate guys like that.

Yikes that one woman's husband is a prick. Please don't think that I agree with his views on anti-depressants because he's clearly being set up as a bad guy. The author =/= her characters. This guy is based on an amalgamation of horrible husbands I've
read about in advice columns (I am in love with Dear Prudie) and a short story by Ruth Rendell "The Man Who Was The God of Love" which is a favorite of mine. Don't worry he's an OC.

If you like please leave kudos and/or comments! They mean a lot to me! Or come bug me at my tumblr: perksofbeingawaifu.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Eren reflects on the previous nights events. Is Levi really a witch? Do his spells actually work?

Chapter Notes

My tumblr is perksofbeingawaifu.

If you like please leave kudos and/or comments! They mean a lot to me!

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Okay so I kindof goofed. I had an "Officer Woerman" in the first chapter because I needed a canon character and Woerman seems like a douche police officer, but then I realized I had also planned on him being Eren's teacher! WHOOPS. So the Officer Woerman is now Sannes which is perf because he is probably never going to be mentioned again. FIXED IT. I AM A SERIOUS WRITER.

Also Carla's death is referenced here, so trigger warning for that?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Gotchya!" Levi snarled, pulling Eren out of the trap door. “Sneaking about like a little mouse!”

“Sorry sorry sorry!” Eren apologized, yelping in pain.

“Eren?” Levi asked in disbelief, releasing him.

Eren fell to his knees, hands pressed together as if in prayer as he begged for forgiveness.

“I’m sorry, I’m so sorry—“

“What are you doing here, kid?” Levi asked sighing and rubbing at the tired circles under his eyes.

Eren’s bottom lip wobbled and his eyes flitted to the hole left by the trap door. Levi looked down to see what he was looking at.

“Please don’t call my dad!” Eren said, sniffling, not more than a minute later as Levi stood in the wet mess.

“How?!” Levi asked looking around, his boots sloshing through the wet mess.

“Please don’t call the police!” Eren cried harder.
“How is it possible for one person to cause this much destruction?!”

“I’m sorry!” Eren sniffed. “I’ll fix it!”

“I’m not sure I want you to fix it,” Levi said, throwing up his hands. “So far you’ve cost me more money than helped me!”

“I’m really sorry,” Eren said, wiping at his nose.

“Sorry doesn’t do shit for me, kid,” Levi said running his hands through his hair. “Okay, well there’s nothing we can really do tonight. We’ll keep the fans going. At least none of the product was damaged.”

He gave an exaggerated sigh.

“I’ll have to call someone in to look at the damage.” Levi pulled at his face exhaustedly. “C’mon let’s get you home.”

“You don’t have to do that,” Eren sniffed.

“Look at you, you’re soaking wet and freezing. At this rate, I’m going to get in more trouble than you.”

They exited out the basement doors and locked it up tight. Levi paused to scratch the chin of the black tom with the torn ear. Eren fit his bicycle into the trunk of Levi’s tiny car. Out in the alley a man was pissing against the wall behind the bar.

“Oh, hey,” he slurred and nodded at them.

Eren immediately stared at the stars in the dark autumn sky. Levi did not.

“You must be Chad,” Levi said, a catlike grin spreading over his face.

Chad smiled drunkenly.

“That’s me!” he agreed, zipping up his fly.

“Yes, yes it is,” Levi said and Eren had to pull at his sleeve to get his attention.

Levi drove Eren out to his house by Reiss Lake. Levi’s old car took forever to warm up despite cranking the knob at full blast. Eren held his hands over the heater and avoided looking at Levi. They didn’t talk and Levi didn’t turn on the radio, which Eren would have been thankful for.

“Wait we’re taking Jennings?” Eren asked, eyes suddenly alert as Levi turned on the road.

“Yeah, it’s faster,” Levi said. “Don’t you take it to get home?”

“No, I take a shortcut through the woods,” Eren said, shifting anxiously.

As they passed over the Crossroads Bridge Eren held his breath and closed his eyes. If Levi noticed, he didn’t say anything.

<*> Eren showed up an hour earlier for his shift that Saturday, still rubbing sleep out of his eyes. Levi, it seemed, was not nearly as exhausted as he was. He had already purchased a better fan to help dry
out the basement flood. The next day was bright and sunny but with the promise of rain on the forecast. They opened the side doors and left them open. Eren spent much of the morning mopping up the mess or pushing it to the drains. Oluo stopped by before his shift and stood in the doorway eating jerky and watching him work.

“I’m actually surprised Levi didn’t kill you and bury you somewhere,” Oluo observed.

“Me too,” Eren nodded in agreement. “Hey, can I ask you something?”

Oluo shrugged, mouth too full to answer.

“You know about Levi’s…you know about his…after hour activities, right?” Eren asked, wincing at his phrasing.

“Oh yeah, Levi and I have what you could call a symbiotic relationship,” Oluo said, puffing up.

Eren thought that was probably how Levi phrased it.

“I send over people from the bar,” Oluo clarified.

“And what do you get in return?” Eren asked.

“He casts a strong luck spell for me,” Oluo said, looking very proud of his cunning.

Talk about trading a cow for magic beans, thought Eren.

He walked up the stairs and inside the shop to change the mop head when the front door opened.

“Hello Levi!” called a bright voice. “I was wondering if you had those swatches for me to look at—oh, you’re not Levi.”

Standing there was a vision. A petite woman in a bright yellow dress with red flowers and a white cardigan.

“No,” Eren said stupidly and continued to stare at her beautiful strawberry blonde hair.

“…Is he here?” she asked kindly.

“Yeah.” Eren nodded

An awkward silence stretched between them.

“Oh right!” Eren jumped. “LEVI!”

Levi jumped up from his desk upstairs and hurried down the spiral ladder.

“Eren, don’t shout in the store,” he chastised, kicking out at him. “Back to work. Go on.”

“Hi Levi!” she chorused brightly. “Do you have those swatches I ordered in?”

“Hey Petra, yes I do, I was just about to call you…”

Eren slowly backed out of the shop to the back alley where Oluo was still eating his lunch.

“I—there—she…” Eren trailed off. “That woman—“

“Hah?” Oluo asked, mouth full of food.
“Petra—“ Eren pointed, his face burning a little.

“Petra’s here?” Oluo’s lined face brightened.

Oluo leaned around Eren and looked into the store.

“Hey Petra!” he called, waving awkwardly.

Petra paused mid-conversation with Levi and her pleasant face flattened out in annoyance.

“Hi Oluo,” she said with a curt wave of her own.

Levi kicked out the doorstopper and the back door swung shut on Oluo’s face.

“Okay nice seeing you!” Oluo said as the door clicked. He sighed happily and leaned on the door. “Petra Ral. Prom Queen and teenage dream of my high school years.”

“She is the most gorgeous woman I’ve ever seen,” Eren said wide-eyed. “Outside of a magazine.”

“Eh, she’s okay.” Oluo shrugged, tugging on his work shirt. “I totally could have dated her back in high school but, you know, don’t want to get tied down to any one filly.”

“Right,” Eren nodded, rolling his eyes as he turned his back.

He pushed the sleeves of his hoodie up and reentered the basement. Levi had set out several swatches of fabric on the table above Eren and he and Petra were poring over the contents. She leaned over the table and Eren saw it: a pair of bright red lacy panties under her dress.

“Oluo!” Eren hissed. “Oluo get down here!”

He waved at him and Oluo eventually pushed off his resting spot by the door and joined Eren in the basement.

“What?” he asked and Eren pointed upward.

Oluo looked and his face went bright red. He covered his eyes and slapped out at Eren trying to cover Eren’s as well.

“You can’t look at that, don’t look at that!” Oluo said in panic as Eren pushed his arm away. “I don’t want to get in trouble!”

Oluo stumbled up the stairs out of the basement, both hands over his eyes and tripped over the boxes in his attempt to flee the scene.

“Eren!” Levi called and Eren jumped as Levi opened the trap door.

“Yeah?” Eren asked, clearing his throat and climbing up the ladder to poke his head out.

Levi seized the top of his ear and tugged it sharply.

“Quit perving on my customers,” Levi hissed lowly so Petra couldn’t hear.

“Ow! I wasn’t!” Eren protested.

“I’m busy showing Petra swatches and Mrs. Gillespie wants to know if we have more skeins of the Lion Brand. Here’s the colorway number and remember—“
“Same dyelots!” Eren remembered.

Levi released his ear and tapped his cheek fondly.

Eren ate his lunch outside on the bench in front of the store. The hardware store owner was outside sweeping again, which Eren thought must be an excuse to spend the last few rays of sun before the rain set in. He watched the older woman next door arrange flowers in the boxes outside the store. An ancient Scottie followed her around, wagging its blunt tail. It toddled over to where Eren was sitting and looked up at his sandwich with milky eyes.

“Here you go,” Eren said, pulling off a bit of crust for the dog.

The hardware store owner grunted and shook his head. Eren didn’t know if the gesture was meant for him so he paused before lowering the treat for the Scottie. It stared at the space by Eren’s hand, not moving forward to claim it.

“What’s the matter? Don’t like bread? Can’t see it boy?” Eren asked and pushed it in front of the dog’s nose.

Without warning it let out a vicious snarl, snapping its yellow teeth at him and Eren leapt up onto the bench to get away from it, where the horrid creature then gobbled up his entire sandwich.

“Bites,” the man grunted as the dog choked on Eren’s food.

“Oh don’t mine Sonny,” Mrs. Partridge waved as the dog kept Eren trapped on the bench, its teeth bared. “He’s just a playful boy. Sonny, you scamp come here.”

The dog waddled back to its owner and plopped into his bed.

“You’ve been next to Levi’s store for a while, right?” Eren asked the man. He could see a nametag on his apron which read “Mike”.

“Yup,” Mike nodded, still sweeping.

“Is he…” Eren trailed off. “He’s not really…you know…a witch?”

Mike tapped his large nose, leaving Eren confused.

“I’ve been next to this store ever since Levi’s mother opened it,” Mrs. Partridge said loudly. Despite her poor eyesight she apparently had an ear for gossip.

“And…is Levi a—“

“Witch? No dear. He’s a homosexual,” she said brightly and went back to fussing over her dog.

Eren looked around at Mike to see if this was the case, but he had apparently finished his work.

“Eren!” Levi barked, poking his head out the door. “Break’s over!”

“Yeah! Coming!” Eren jumped up and pulled on his apron.

“Have a good lunch?” Levi asked, tying the strings for Eren as he had some trouble.

Eren snorted.

“Sonny ate half of it,” Eren rolled his eyes.
“Did you pet the dog? Don’t pet the dog,” Levi said quickly.

“Yeah, I won’t make that mistake again.” Eren sighed as his stomach grumbled.

“Did he get you?” Levi asked, picking up Eren’s hands and examining them closely.

He ran his thin tapered fingers over the cuts and scrapes on Eren’s hands from wrestling with Jean over control for the Xbox, then turned it over and ran along the lines on Eren’s palm. Levi pulled Eren’s hands a little closer and hummed to himself.

“What?” Eren asked, a little breathless. “What do you see?”

Levi looked up at him, his grey eyes like twin crescent moons, a small enigmatic curl at the corners of his lips. Eren’s breath hitched. Without answering, Levi slapped a fresh rag into his hands.

Sunday was the one day the shop was closed. Grisha Jaeger spent the entire day on the couch, exhausted from a busy weekend on call at the hospital, but he sent Eren to church anyway. Mr. Hannes and his wife swung by to pick Eren up and took him out for pastries afterwards. Eren watched the closed craft store. It was strange to see the shop with the dark curtains drawn during the day. But then again, the entire street felt odd. Many of the shops closed after Labor Day due to the lack of tourists. Rows and rows of empty businesses and the streets empty of people save for those at the Reeves’ Bakery. And to think, by night the comely white washed building was the town’s occult center.

By Monday morning Eren had rested enough to feel almost back to normal. He met up with Mikasa at their usual stop sign and hopped off his bike to walk next to her.

“Aren’t you cold?” he asked as she tugged her sweater over her knuckles. “It’s supposed to rain today.”

It was nearly October and she had yet to wear her coat, choosing instead thick sweaters and socks.

“I’m fine,” she dismissed his concerns.

They walked by Armin’s house and he ran out, tearing an off-brand Poptart packet open and offering Mikasa half. She uncurled her frozen fingers to take it.

“Ugh, cold Poptarts, gross,” Eren said in disgust as they both ate hungrily.

“Actually these are…’Toaster Pops™’,” Armin said, reading the label. “Whatever those are…”

“Do you have any more?” Mikasa asked, brushing crumbs off her bottom lip. Eren frowned.

Armin nodded and dug out another.

“You guys are not going to believe what happened to me this weekend,” Eren started.

“Wait so his name is Lucky and he wears a four-leaf clover belt?” Marco asked for clarification.

“You’re making that up,” Jean snorted.

They were out by their favorite brick wall, blowing into their hands for warmth. Connie was busy
bouncing a hacky sack with Reiner and having considerably more success. Marco and Armin were comparing notes. Bert was busy playing on his Gameboy Advance, ignoring the third or fourth retelling of Eren’s story.

“So I don’t understand, Levi had to know that Lucky was at the bar because he told her about the four leaf clover,” Reiner said as the hacky sack flew over their heads and onto the grass above the brick wall.

Connie ran up the handicap ramp to grab it and threw it down at Jean’s face.

“No, he never told her about the four leaf clover, she saw it in the wheel,” Eren said.

“What is the wheel? His crystal ball?” Reiner asked, dropping the hacky sack again.

“What does a spinning wheel even do?” Connie asked.

“I guess it’s sortof like a crystal ball. And, Connie, a spinning wheel spins yarn.”

“I thought it was for turning flax into gold. Or pricking princesses’ fingers so they fall into a sleep.”

“I—no—have you ever seen a spinning wheel? Anyway, he never told her, she saw it.”

“Confirmation bias,” Armin said, teeth chattering as he squinted at Marco’s notes. “She interprets his vague predictions in a way that suits her and then she sees Lucky later in the bar and thinks it’s her prophecy come true, ignoring all contradictory evidence. Or, it’s the power of suggestion, he gives her just enough clues and she fills in the blanks. She says she’s unlucky in love so naturally she sees a four leaf clover, a symbol of luck. Plus, you don’t even know if these two found each other afterwards.”

“Yeah…that’s true I suppose,” Eren frowned. “It was just a weird coincidence, you know?”

“And that’s all it is, coincidence,” Armin said smiling a little. “There’s this thing called a ‘cold reading’ where the fortune teller or medium uses clues about the person’s appearance to make guesses about their background. They emphasize accurate guesses—hits—and wave aside incorrect guesses, which they call misses. This is actually really common practice among con artists—”

“He’s not a—“

“I didn’t say he was, Eren,” Armin said in a soothing voice, placating him because Eren was getting hot under the collar again. “I was saying that some people—not necessarily Levi—take advantage of others for their own financial gain using this method. I mean, think, he guessed the one woman was a nurse, were there any obvious clues that might give him that idea?”

Eren thought hard. In fact, he had seen her hospital badge when she set her purse on the floor…and she was the only one wearing sneakers instead of high heels.

“No…maybe,” Eren said, flushing a little in embarrassment, feeling along the brick wall.

Armin smiled understandingly. Eren looked through the windows to the cafeteria and saw Mikasa sitting with the other girls, hands folded and tucked close to keep warm, no meal in front of her. He frowned.

In class, Eren found himself rethinking everything about Levi’s witching session. He turned his
head back slightly to eye Jessica Bollinger. He was still reeling from the discovery that on the weekends she went from braces-faced, frizzy-haired teenager to Miss America contender. He tried to imagine her with a frozen smile as she waved with her fingers glued together. Was there a bathing suit portion? Eren squinted at her and tried to picture her posing in a sequined evening gown. She caught him staring and her hand immediately went over her chin to hide a small zit there, face flushing in embarrassment. Eren immediately turned his gaze to the darkening clouds outside.

“Better focus, Eren,” Mr. Woerman, Eren’s trigonometry teacher sneered at him. “This will be on the exam. And if any one of you get less than a C-minus on this test, you will be ineligible to play any extracurricular activity. That means no football, no soccer, no cross, and no model UN.”

He eyed each of them in turn, saved his most venomous expression for Eren although, the one he sent Armin was a close second. Jean laughed at Eren’s expense and poked his back with the point of his mechanical pencil.

The rain finally hit halfway through fifth period and made such a racket they had a hard time hearing the teacher over the noise. Eren thought about Mikasa and her ratty sweater and frowned.

“No outdoor practice!” Jean said, hopping and whooping. “There’s lightning on the field so we’re in the weight room today.”

Eren met Mikasa on his way to the weight room and pushed his coat into her hands wordlessly. When she tried to return it, he ducked into the boy’s changing room.

Biking through the rain in just his hoodie was not advisable, but his father was picking him up after his shift at Stitchcraft. He squinted in the rain, avoiding huge puddles, but he couldn’t avoid one giant one and splashed over a woman standing in the center of the bridge. He caught a flash of her white dress just before his wheels kicked up mud.

“How does it work?” Eren asked finally.

“How does what work?” Levi asked, eyes still focused on the stitches, brows furrowed in concentration.

“The witch thing,” Eren prodded.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Levi lied smoothly. He seemingly found his problem with his knitting and the crease smoothed away.
Eren didn’t protest, he only frowned and watched Levi work. When he reached the tail end of his skein, he paused and looked up at Eren.

“Here,” he said, putting a new hank over Eren’s hands. “This one got all tangled so I can’t put it on my swift.”

Eren held it still as Levi wound it into a ball, staring out the front window and the sharp rain bouncing off the sidewalk.

“How much did you hear?” Levi asked, staring at the ball in his hands.

“On Friday? All of it.”

“Shit.” Levi winced. “Look kid, I’d really appreciate it if you didn’t go around telling people about what you saw or heard.”

“Why? Afraid you’ll be burned at the stake?” Eren teased.

“More like…” Levi looked uncomfortable talking about it. “People come to me and tell me things and trust me with secrets they won’t tell their loved ones and I don’t want to betray that trust.”

Did witches have like…witch-patient confidentiality?

“I won’t,” Eren lied. Or rather, he wouldn’t tell anyone else. He’d already told his friends.

Levi nodded and resumed his work.

“It’s not what I thought it would be,” Eren confessed.

“What did you think it would be?” Levi asked.

“I don’t know…blood sacrifices, potions, bubbling cauldrons, magic wands, toads…” Eren trailed off.

Levi coughed, covering his mouth in what Eren knew was an attempt to hold back a laugh.

“I just thought it would be…magical. But everyone asks for such petty stuff.”

“Petty?” Levi seized on the word. “What’s petty about it?”

“You know…just people and their small problems.”

“Well other people’s small problems may not seem like such a big deal to Eren Jaeger, teenager, world philosopher and very important person,” Levi teased. “But they’re very important to them.”

Eren looked unconvinced.

“What would you ask for? If you saw a shooting star or threw a penny in a well, if there were no consequences, what would you ask the universe for?” Levi tilted his head to the side.

Eren thought about it.

“To make varsity!” he beamed.

Levi eyed Eren with a mixture of bemusement and mirth and Eren felt his face heat up.

“Well I’m sure others might find your wishes and problems petty too,” Levi said in a placating
voice because Eren’s brows were drawn down into a scowl.

It wasn’t fair! Eren had problems too! Everyone thinks teenagers have it so easy, but here he was getting up at 6AM, biking out the door at 7:30 and then sitting in school from 8-3PM, then he had practice, then he had to spend several hours listening to the same mix (the tin whistle for “My Heart Will Go On” started up and Eren felt his eye twitch), and he wouldn’t get home until at least 9PM! It wasn’t fair! Still...he thought of Mikasa and the way she pulled her sweater over her fingers and realized his complaints were petty compared to hers.

“…Does it work?” Eren asked.

“Does what work?” Levi asked, trying to untangle a snarl.

“The…the things…the stuff.”

“The spells?” Levi asked, a hint of amusement at Eren’s discomfort.

“Yes, the spells.” Eren felt a little silly calling them spells like they were casually discussing Harry Potter. Because Levi didn’t wave around a magic wand and fix people’s problems. In fact, Eren wasn’t quite sure what it was exactly that Levi did, which is why he asked.

Levi shrugged in answer to Eren’s question.

“As much as anything I suppose.”

Eren sighed in frustration.

“Yeah, but how does it work?”

“What do you mean how does it work? You sat there in the basement for two hours, you know how it works.”

Eren was silent, nose scrunched up in thought.

“Look, it’s the same as taking your car into a mechanic. I offer a service. People come to me with specific problems they either can’t or are uncomfortable taking elsewhere. And I help them. Or try to.”

“So what if I had a problem I needed help with?” Eren asked lightly. “What would I have to do?”

“First, you’d have to wait until I’m taking clients,” Levi informed him. “I put the candle out to let people know that the witch is in. And you’d also have to pay me and I’m guessing your allowance doesn’t cover my fee.”

Levi finished winding his ball and got up, stretching.

“I might as well move the displays if no one is coming in,” Levi said. “Get the basket, would you?”

Eren did as Levi asked, still staring into the fire, thinking hard as he set it down on the table.

“Varsity, huh?” Levi asked, pulling down several skeins. “Think fast!”

He whipped the skein at Eren’s head but he caught it.

“Not bad,” said Levi.
Eren tossed it into the basket and Levi threw another one.

“Look at that, perfect spiral,” Levi crowed as Eren caught it.

“It’s yarn, it doesn’t have a—hey! I wasn’t ready!” Eren flinched as the soft yarn bounced off his shoulder.

“You gotta stay on your toes, Eren! Eye on the ball!”

“Stop!” Eren laughed as Levi hit him with another one.

“Gotta be fast!” Levi said, throwing a skein of heather blue.

Eren went to tackle Levi before he could throw another, biffing him with whatever soft things he could get his hands on, but Levi was too great a match for him. Their fun was interrupted as the bell chimed and someone entered the shop.

“Dad!” Eren chorused, trying to poke Levi in the face with yarn even as Levi swatted it away.

“What are you doing here? I still have an hour and a half!”

“That’s fine, it’s dead here anyways,” Levi said, picking up the skeins from their play-fight.

“I know, but something came up at the hospital and I need to go in.”

“What? What about guy’s night?” Eren asked, wilting at this information.

“Eren!” Dr. Jaeger said impatiently, looking at his watch. “Come on, we need to go! Night, Mr. Ackerman.”

“Dr. Jaeger,” Levi nodded back

Eren waved to Levi and climbed in the front seat and buckled up. He looked in the backseat to see a bouquet of flowers and turned his head to slowly glare at his father.

Grisha caught the way Eren’s chin jut out stubbornly at the next stoplight.

“What?” he asked.

“Flowers?” Eren asked icily, arms crossed in front of his chest.

“Yeah, I popped by Mrs. Partridge’s shop. That dog of hers bit one the buttons off my coat. I should’ve asked your boss for a replacement while I was there. Ah well.”

Eren continued to burn a hole into Dr. Jaeger’s temple.

“What? Can’t a man buy flowers?” Dr. Jaeger protested.

Eren huffed and looked out the window. Only then did he realized his father was taking Jennings out to the Crossroads again. He sat a little taller in his seat, chewing his lip nervously. As they approached the Crossroads intersection, with its one blinking yellow light that barely illuminated the dark path, Eren sucked in a shaky breath and closed his eyes.

“Still?” Dr. Jaeger asked incredulously. “Eren…you can’t—“

The wipers beat a fierce pace and through the watery glass they could see the little white crosses dotting the road.
“Eren…you saw that therapist, didn’t that help with anything?” he started again. “It’s been five years, son.”

“Yeah, it’s only been five years Dad! And you’re going on a date? A date? You’re gonna forget about mom, just like that!?”

“I told you, something came up at the hospital and—“

“Stop the car!” Eren shouted.

“Eren!”

“Stop the car! Stop!” he screamed, thrashing in his seat and kicking the dashboard.

Dr. Jaeger squealed to a halt and Eren grabbed the flowers and ran out into the deluge.

“Eren!” Dr. Jaeger called a note of panic in his voice rainwater streaking his glasses. “Eren get out of the road, it’s dark and raining and no one can see you! EREN!”

Eren set the flowers down in front of one of the little white crosses, waited for a car to pass them and then ran back. He slammed the door closed and fixed his father with a stubborn, victorious smile and he looked so much like his mother then, that Grisha could only put the car in drive.

“Sunflowers,” Grisha finally managed as the blinking crossroads faded from the rearview mirror.

“Huh?” Eren asked, wiping bitter tears and rainwater off his cheek.

“Those were daisies, we should…we should get some sunflowers. Those were your mom’s favorite.”

The second Grisha pulled in the driveway, Eren jumped out of the car and stormed into the house and flung himself on his bed.

“Okay, there’s a twenty on the counter for some pizza and don’t stay up too late, okay?” Grisha asked, fussing with his tie in the mirror.

“Whatever,” Eren spat.

Grisha closed Eren’s door and Eren could hear him dialing a number on the phone and he cracked his door.

“Hey Susan. Ha. No, I’m not bailing on you, sorry I’m just running a little late, but I am leaving now. Great. See you there.”

Liar, thought Eren.

He lay in bed, with his arm over his eyes, reveling in his own angst and nursing his hurt feelings. He ignored the hunger pangs in his belly, content to lay there and starve. That would show his Dad. He wasn’t even going to order pizza. He wasn’t going to take any of his father’s money.

With a grumbling stomach and an angry rancor in his heart, he fell into an uneasy sleep. The sound of the rain beating against the window like a steady metronome set the pace of his breathing. For a moment, he could remember being out on the water with his father as a young child, watching his bobber float as the rain created ripples around them. The sound echoed against the metal boat and the cork dipped down disappearing beneath the surface.
Tap tap tap.
Eren rolled over in his sleep.

Tap tap tap.
He shot upright at the sound. There, pressed against the window, looking directly at him was a pale face with wide, black eyes.

“Let me in! Let me in!”

Chapter End Notes

HEATHCLIFF! IT'S ME YOUR CATHY I'VE COME HOME AND I'M SO COOOLD LET ME IN YOUR WINDO-OW!!!

Mrs. Partridge is the worst. Such a goddamn busybody. Nearly as awful as her dog.
Lol Mike, I love him.

Some of you might not know this and idk if other countries do this but in the U.S. little white crosses on the side of the road denote where someone lost their lives in a traffic accident. When I went on my cross country trip this year, some states actually have whole organizations that volunteer to put them up, or they may not have crosses and instead have markers symbolizing death. In Michigan, where the fic is set, usually it's private church groups or families that put up these crosses. These are usually meant just as a warning like "don't drink and drive" or "slow down." So it's hinting at the fact that Carla died there.
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Eren turns to Levi for help with an upcoming test that could determine the fate of his football career!

Chapter Notes

My tumblr is perksofbeingawaifu.

If you like please leave kudos and/or comments! They mean a lot to me!

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It's been a while and I'm sorry to have kept you waiting. I tried to use November to finish up some of my other fics, but was mildly successful. And then I was sick and now I'm in the middle of a move. Oof. Here is the new chapter! It has lots of retail hell moments! Enjoy!

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There were THREE beautiful pieces of fanart for darkstag in between chapter posts! This gorgeous piece of art by @deberbutts featuring Levi with his yarn basket! This one by @tofuandnuts with so much detail of Levi's shop! And last but not least this gorgeous and nsfw piece of art by my waifu @tanekore featuring a dark Eren and blissful Levi!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Eren! Let me in! It’s freezing out here!”

“Mikasa!” Eren gasped, opening the window. “You scared the crap out of me!”

“Sorry, I didn’t want to wake up your dad,” she said, stepping onto his window ledge and shutting it.

Eren held out his hand to help her down, but she turned it down, nimbly hopping onto his floor with silent grace.

“He’s out. Again. What are you doing here?” he asked.

She held out his coat silently.

“Brought this back,” she said, wiping at her nose.

“Idiot,” Eren said tapping her head with his hand lightly. “What are you supposed to wear now?”
She shrugged. Her stomach rumbled and reminded Eren of his own hunger.

“I’m gonna make dinner,” Eren said. “You want anything?”

Her eyes brightened at the mention of food, but she kept an impassive expression on her face.

“Sure. I mean, if it’s not too much trouble.”

Eren pulled down a large family sized box mix of Mac N’ Cheese and started boiling water. He shoved the $20 his father had left him into his pocket. They ate on the couch with overflowing bowls and flipped through the channels until they found a heavily edited-for-TV version of Die Hard 2.

“He did not just say ‘Jerkface’ there,” Eren cackled and Mikasa hummed in agreement.

A ten minute infomercial came on and they groaned.

“You cold?” Eren asked because his feet were resting by the small of her back and her sweater was still damp.

She nodded.

Eren raided Grisha’s closet and found a ripped Grateful Dead t-shirt. She pulled it and a pair of Eren’s sweats on and they resumed their movie. There, covered in several blankets, they fell asleep in front of the television. When Grisha came home in the early morning, humming happily to himself, he pulled the remote out of Eren’s hands and turned off the television. He intended to let them sleep when Eren spoke.

“How was your date?” Eren asked groggily.

“It was…nice. Susan is nice. You’d like her.”

Eren snorted, doubting that very much.

“You know her, she has a son a few years younger than you. Dale Laine?”

“Wait…you had a date with Mrs. Laine?” Eren asked in disgust.

“She’s nice.”

Eren groaned and rolled over.

Dr. Jaeger drove them to school that morning and as Eren made to get out of the car, Grisha held him back.

“Look Eren, I know Mikasa’s your friend and you two have a lot in common and I think that’s great. But—“

“Dad I gotta go, I have to do my homework for 4th period before school starts!”

“But, you can’t…you can’t keep having these little sleepovers. It’s not appropriate.”

“Ew! Dad! Ew!” Eren cried. “That’s gross!”

“Eren, people might get the wrong idea. Next time it gets that late, I’ll take her home, okay? I just, you know, need to think about Mikasa’s reputation here.”
“Oh yeah? And what about yours! You didn’t even get back until 4AM!” Eren shot back.

Dr. Jaeger flushed in embarrassment.

“That’s different! I’m an adult and you are children,” Dr. Jaeger’s voice hardened then pleaded. “I mean it, Eren. I don’t mind if Armin stays over, but Mikasa can’t anymore, okay?”

Eren didn’t answer, he just tore out of his father’s grip and left for class.

<>

“Hey, Levi,” Eren said as he breezed in ten minutes late for his shift. “Can I maybe leave early tonight?”

“Why?” Levi asked, checking his watch. “Got a date?”

“Ha, no, I just need to leave early, is that okay?”

“We’ll see how busy it is,” Levi answered vaguely.

Eren rushed through inventory and after that he dogged Levi’s footsteps, asking him every five seconds what he needed to do next. He followed Levi like a shadow and even when the vein in Levi’s temple started going, he didn’t stop.

“If you ask me one more time, I’m going to keep you here a whole half hour after close to scrub out the toilet!” Levi snapped.

He couldn’t actually keep Eren past 9PM legally, what with child labor laws and all, but Eren didn’t know that. Eren huffed. But after that, he got the idea and left Levi alone. Levi caught Eren staring out the window, brooding at the shops across from them.

“What? What is the emergency?” Levi asked. “Do you really need to hang out with your friends that badly?”

“I have a trig test on Thursday and I’m going to fail,” Eren said, sniffing and wiping at his nose. “I thought I was doing okay but I got back my practice test and I failed that and Mr. Woermann said if I fail the actual test he’s going to have me pulled from the game on Friday. He said he is going to grade all of the football team first. If he’d just wait until after the game, then I might have time to make up the grade, but he’s doing this on purpose! All because he hates me! And he hates football players!”


He snapped his fingers and pointed to a chair at the table. Eren sat, still shaking in panic.

“You sit here and you study. Okay?”

Eren nodded and pulled out his book.

Levi thought he might have been putting on a show to get out of work but when he looked over, Eren was scratching at his head with his eraser and then he jotted down an answer. Then he flipped the book to the back to see if he’d written the correct answer. Levi guessed he hadn’t by the loud sigh.

The bell tinkled and Levi set down his mug of tea. The sound of a screaming toddler assaulted their ears and Eren looked up from his textbook.
“Hi! I am so sorry to do this to you, but do you have a first aid kit? Or a bathroom we could use?” the harried mother asked.

She looked up and then realized what store she’d stumbled into and her face flushed a little darker.

“Sorry to bother you Mr. Ackerman, I’ll just go down the block—“

“Yes, the bathroom is over here. And Band-Aids are…Eren!”

“Yeah?” Eren asked, squinting at his calculator.

“Where did you hide my first aid kit?”

“Didn’t hide it. I organized it.”

“Where did you reorganize it to?” Levi asked exasperatedly.

“The bathroom, because buried under a pile of push pins is not a good place for your First Aid Kit.”

Levi opened the bathroom mirror and grumbled to himself about how Eren shouldn’t touch his stuff, but he had to admit it was a much better spot.

“I’m so sorry,” the mother said, trying to soothe her screaming son. “We stopped in to get some flowers for my mother-in-law’s birthday and that awful dog nipped at him and startled him.”

Levi clucked sympathetically.

“I don’t think it bit him, but he fell and scraped his knee. Oh and that horrid woman had the gall to yell at us for ‘antagonizing’ the beast!”

Levi snorted.

“Please, darling, please stop crying!” she cooed to him.

“Hey,” Levi said quietly and the toddler immediately stopped screaming and stared at him wide-eyed.

He was silent as his mother placed the Band-Aid on his knee, looking at Levi with some trepidation. Eren understood. Levi was scary. Yet the second the bandage was on, the child took off like a gun, running through the store laughing and pulling down buttons and grabbing the ribbons. Eren hopped out of his seat to follow behind the child. His mother was busy asking Levi’s advice on a sewing project and didn’t see the child tangling himself up in yarn happily.

“Hey buddy…no, no,” Eren winced, trying to distract the destructive child.

The mother looked over to see her child laughing as he shook a box of buttons.

“Oh Isaac! No darling! I’m so sorry Mr. Ackerman,” she apologized over and over again.

She made to clean up the mess as Levi rang her up.

“Don’t worry about it,” Levi said, handing her the receipt.

She looked uncertain but left, Isaac holding her hand and waving at them through the window.
“Man, I thought you were gonna scream at that kid,” Eren said sympathetically as he picked up the mess.

“I don’t like raising my voice,” Levi said quietly, placing the buttons back where they’d come from. “And I wouldn’t yell at a child that didn’t know any better. Now an adult…”

He trailed off and Eren grinned goofily at him, elbow on his textbook.

“Or a bratty teenager,” Levi said, flicking Eren’s ear. “Who should be studying.”

Eren sighed and turned back to his work. After a half hour he let out a groan and put his head down on the book.

“How goes it?” Levi asked casually, looking sideways at Eren.

Eren let out a muffled cry, smacking his head into the book.

“I’ve been staring at the same numbers for so long, I’m forgetting how to do basic multiplication,” Eren said when he surfaced, face red.

“Well I’d help you but I’m not very good at math,” Levi said, polishing the wood on the table as Eren obligingly lifted his arms and book. “I never took Trigonometry. Barely made it through Algebra.”

He looked a little embarrassed at this.

“How am I going to pass this test?”

Levi didn’t answer, he left Eren to it.

Except…Eren discovered after a few moments of avoiding studying by discreetly observing Levi…Levi was actually not bad at math.

“No, the deal says 2 for $5! You’re ripping me off!” Ms. Simmons, the rich woman who ran the elite boutique down the street snarled at Levi. “Two for five. That means if I get sixteen, then it should be forty dollars!”

“Yes,” said Levi calmly not batting an eye. “If you purchase sixteen, the cost is forty plus sales tax.”

“What? I’ve never had to pay that much in tax before! You’re just pocketing the rest!”

“The sales tax in Michigan is six percent as it has been since the mid-90s,” Levi reiterated in a bored voice.

“Well I refuse to believe it is that much!”

“Look, 6% times $40 is $2.40—“

“You can’t know that without a calculator!” Ms. Simmons sputtered at him.

“Eren?” Levi asked looking over at him and Eren nodded in agreement.

“Add that and your total remains $42.40 as I said initially,” Levi continued.

Eren held up his calculator for her to read.
She practically threw her change at Levi and he handed her the bag and receipt. She ripped it out of his hands and then took off.

Levi’s customers were…interesting.

“So if I buy twelve skeins is there any discount?”

“No, the price is still the same.”

“Do I get the thirteenth skein free?”

“No.”

“Why not? You get a baker’s dozen discount over at Reeves! They always throw in a thirteenth donut hole for free!”

“Look at me Pamela, do I look like a baker?” Levi asked flatly.

Eren snorted.

She huffed but paid full price.

“Okay, but what if I want to make a pretty scarf like this, how much yarn would I need?” asked another customer.

“It would depend on how many stitches you cast-on,” Levi said evenly, holding out the sample scarf for Miss Perkins to admire.

“How many stitches should I cast on then?” she asked.

“Well a scarf like this has a repeating lace chart of seven stitches so you need a multiple of—“

“Of seven, yes I got it, so if I cast-on twenty-one stitches I should be good, right?”

“Well, actually,” Levi continued smoothly despite the interruption. “The lace chart is only seven stitches, yes, but you need to take into account the border garter stitches so that’s another three stitches on each side. So really, your pattern looks more like 7x+6. You just need to determine how many times you want the chart to repeat. So if it repeats three times then you multiply seven times three and then add six and you have your total number of stitches which is twenty-seven.”

“…Do you have anything easier?” she asked, looking at the scarf now with apprehension. “You see I don’t like having to follow a pattern or think when I’m crafting.”

“He’s so patient with them, don’t you agree?” Petra whispered next to Eren and he jumped.

“You don’t want to follow a pattern…or…think?” Levi repeated slowly.

Eren nodded in agreement as Petra sat down across from him at the large table.

“Have you tried crochet?” Levi asked, steering Miss Perkins toward the crochet hooks.

“Hello Petra, I’ll be right with you,” Levi rapped his knuckles on the table before hurrying to ring up Miss Perkins.

“So how did you convince Levi to hire you?” Petra asked, leaning over the table interestedly. “He’s never had a shop clerk last longer than a day.”
“Uh, I didn’t,” Eren said, doodling tree roots in the creases on his notebook paper. “He’s not even paying me.”

“Right now, you’re not even working,” Levi pointed out as he breezed by again to help another customer. “Petra don’t distract him, he’s supposed to be studying.”

“I can’t think anymore,” Eren mourned. “I’m going to fail and then Dad will kill me and then ground me which is okay because if I can’t play in the game on Friday there is no point to living anyway!”

He fell dramatically upon his textbook and Petra exchanged a look with Levi, covering her mouth to keep from laughing.

“Fine, take a break, wind these please!” Levi said, tossing several skeins at Eren from across the room.

Eren caught them expertly and set about winding them. Winding skeins was about the extent Levi let Eren near the product. He didn’t trust Eren to help the customers either. So when Levi was busy and Eren had his hands full and a customer came up to him to ask where they could find the pattern selection, Eren froze.

“Here, it’s this way,” Petra said, bouncing up and steering them in the correct direction.

She left them to peruse the pattern books.

“You should work here,” Eren pointed out, giving the winder one last crank and the cake spun on the spot. “You know more than I do.”

“Oh,” Petra waved him off. “I’ve been coming here for years. Besides my Davey wouldn’t let me work.”

At Eren’s politely curious expression, she clarified, “Davey is my fiancé.”

“Oh.”

“We’re due to be married in May,” Petra continued excitedly. “He doesn’t want me working. Says he wants to take care of me and pamper me until we have children.”

Eren grinned at her delighted expression.

“Davey works at the dealership out on Plymouth. You see that brand new 2003 red Ford Focus out there?”

Eren craned his neck.

“Davey bought that for me as an engagement present. He is so good to me and I am so lucky to be marrying him.”

“Wow!” Eren exclaimed. “Mannn, I wish I had a car. Dad won’t even let me practice driving. I have my learner’s permit and everything.”

Petra continued to gush about her fiancé and Eren listened with a smile on his face. He couldn’t imagine being that happy in love, but he couldn’t wait to find out. His parents must have felt like that once.

“Sorry about that Petra, here we are,” Levi said, setting down a large package that had been
delivered that morning.

He carefully cut the tape with his box cutter, tucking it back into his back pocket when he finished. Then he pulled out the fabric, still wrapped around a wooden slat. Petra took hold of one corner and together they spread it out on the table, Eren lifting his books.

“Oh Levi,” she whispered, putting her hands to her face. “It’s gorgeous.”

It was. A soft champagne silk that brought out the red in her hair. Eren reached out his hand to stroke the alluring fabric and Levi slapped his hand away.

“What’s it for?” Eren asked.

“I’m making my wedding dress,” she explained.

“Oh,” Eren said, wrinkling his nose. “Isn’t that kindof difficult?”

“Not for me,” Petra laughed. “I made this dress.”

The dress in question was a bright green and made of corduroy.

“I just want my dress to be as unique and special as Davey,” she sighed wistfully.

Eren grinned happily and then looked over at Levi. Levi only sucked his teeth in response.

“Let’s get you rung up,” he said.

Maybe Mrs. Partridge had been wrong about Levi. He was acting just a little too much like the jealous love interest.

The next day Levi didn’t even bother handing Eren a list of chores to do. He pulled out the chair and pointed at it, but Eren didn’t need any invitation. He sat down and began cramming his head full with as many formulas as he could. His brain was swimming with sine of this and cosine of that. Levi sat at the large table, quietly knitting and enjoying the heat from the fireplace. Without warning, Eren threw his book aside and let out a loud cry.

“That’s it, I’m done for,” he sobbed. “I’m too stupid for this. I’m going to fail and I’m going to be kicked off the team and then I’ll have to repeat Trig next year and I’ll never get into college and I’m gonna have to be one of those losers who never leaves his hometown.”

Eren put his head down, back shaking.

Levi said nothing, he just kept silently clicking away.


“I told you, kid, I’m no good at Trig.”

“No, I mean…you could cast a spell.”

Levi’s needles halted for a moment, then resumed.

“Levi, I need you to work a spell for me!”
“All the magic in the world couldn’t help you pass this test.”

“I’m desperate! And I don’t need to pass the test, just postpone it until after the game and all of my friend’s meets.”

Levi squinted at him as if seriously considering it.

“Kid I’m not in the business of charity, so unless you have money to pay me, you are barking up the wrong tree,” he said, finishing up his row and setting it down.

He stood and made to leave to work on inventory but Eren grabbed his arm.

“Wait!”

He fished out the twenty dollars for pizza his father had given him the other night. Levi eyed it interestedly.

“How much would a spell like that cost?” Eren asked.

“Well…” said Levi, his eyes following the movement of the green paper. “I’d say…eighty bucks.”


“Because there’s a time crunch involved and it’s a big spell.”

“What if I paid you the twenty now, and then the rest when it’s done?”

“You think I let people like Miss Perkins come in and say they’ll pay half before and half after they complete a project?”

“No…”

“Then why would I give it to you for free? Look, if you get another $60 from your friends who also want out of the test that would cover it. Although I don’t think I could stretch it for more than four people…” Levi was busy thinking it over.

Hm, $60 to split between three more of his friends wasn’t so hard, but how did he convince them to pony up the cash? Jean might be able to pay, but he’d think the whole thing was stupid. There was no way Armin would pay—and he didn’t need to, he was the brilliant one. Connie might. Actually no, since kindergarten Connie had racked up an impressive debt of $250 with Eren—it started with chocolate milk and most recently a 2-liter of Mountain Dew. Reiner wasn’t likely to take this seriously.

“What if…” Eren tried and Levi sighed in annoyance. “I paid for it some other way?”

“Like how?”

“I could work more hours here!” Eren suggested.

The agreement Levi and Eren’s father had worked out expired at Christmas.

“Kid, I don’t want you here any longer than that. You are a disaster magnet.”

Eren scowled.

“I could…do chores for you at your house!” Eren insisted. “Yeah! Me and my friends will do
anything you want! Uh…within reason.”

“Like what?”

“Uh, we’ll rake leaves! Dust! Garden! Fold laundry! Please Levi!”

“Hm. Sold. $80 in cash or the hard labor equivalent. But—“ Levi leaned in. “If your friends bail, you are on the hook and you are stuck doing all the work yourself.”

Eren thought about it.

“Sure.”

“And if you filch me,” Levi said dangerously. “You don’t want to know what kind of spell I can work.”

The witch’s curse!

“I won’t!” Eren promised.

Chapter End Notes

If reading Petra's description of her fiance set off a shitton of redflags then good.

Next chapter! Eren tries Levi's spell. What will happen? Will he fail his test? Be forced to sit on the bench for the BIG GAME?
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Eren gets a spell from Levi to postpone the test so he can play in the big game!

Chapter Notes

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TW: Animal Injury

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Eren woke up early and blew off meeting Mikasa and Armin before school, instead cycling over furiously to Levi’s. The shop didn’t open until 10AM but Levi told Eren to knock.

“Levi!” Eren called pounding on the door. “Levi!”

Levi took his time opening the door, too busy sipping his tea as Eren paced out front.

“Do you have it?” Eren asked when Levi finally cracked open the door.

“Do you have it?” Levi rubbed his thumb and forefinger together.

“I only have the $20,” Eren said placing it in Levi’s palm. “I haven’t had a chance to ask my friends yet.”

Levi took the money and tucked it in his jeans. Eren tapped his shoe impatiently.

“Here,” Levi said, holding out a rolled piece of paper tied with twine. “Now you must follow the instructions to the letter. Do you understand?”

“Yeah,” Eren said lunging for it.

Levi held it out of his reach.

“Look me in the eyes. Do you understand?” Levi asked slowly.

“Yes,” Eren reassured him but Levi still didn’t hand it over.

“Now, I’ve thought about it a little bit and…” Levi started and inwardly Eren screamed. “I want you to ask yourself if this is what you really want.”

“Yes…” Eren didn’t understand.
“Because all this does is postpone the inevitable. It might be better to take the test. You’ve been studying really hard, you might surprise yourself on how well you do.”

Actually, following his conversation with Levi last night, Eren had gone home and not done another lick of studying. He frowned.

“Trust me, Levi, I want this,” Eren said holding out his hand.

“Once you cast the spell it’s done, it can’t be undone,” Levi warned.

“I know what I’m doing!” Eren insisted, grabbing it out of Levi’s hands, hopping on his bike and pedaling away.

“Did you study for Mr. Woerman’s test?” Marco asked Eren, standing outside against their favorite brick wall.

“Why does it smell like cows?” Jean complained, pulling his sweater up over his nose. “Ugh, this is why I hate this podunk town!”

“Then go back to Detroit,” Eren countered.

“I’m actually feeling a lot better about the test,” Marco continued. “I looked over the practice test and could see where I made some silly mistakes so I’m optimistic!”

“That’s good!” Armin said brightly. “I’m feeling very prepared. How about you, Eren? Did you study more?”

“Didn’t need to!” Eren crowed, hands on his hips. “I bought a spell from Levi!”

They stared. Even Connie paused his hacky sack game.

“Oh Eren,” Armin said, putting his hand to his temples.

“No I’m serious! He gave me a real spell!”

Jean snorted.

“See?” Eren said, pulling the little scroll from his pocket.

“Eren…” Armin started.

“Oh my god, he’s like that jackass that buys magic beans!” Jean burst into laughter.

“Shut it horseface!” Eren countered, growing red. “It’ll work, you’ll see!”

“Eren I really don’t think—” Armin put his hand on his best friend’s arm and Eren shook him off.

“It’ll work! All I need is $20 from each of you to—”

They all stared at him with flat expressions.

“Or you can help me do chores at Levi’s house…” Eren suggested weakly.

“I’ll take my chances with Woerman,” Jean scoffed.
“Yeah, Eren, it’s better to face these kinds of things head-on,” Reiner boomed and Bert nodded quietly next to him.

Eren scowled.

Except after third period, they waited outside Marco’s class anxiously. He emerged a pale wreck. Even his freckles looked several shades lighter.

“How was it?” Jean asked.

Marco looked about as if in a daze.

“Brutal,” he said. “There was stuff on there I didn’t even study like—“

“Now now!” Mr. Woerman interrupted, a sneer on his face. “No talking to my other classes or you’ll fail your test!”

Marco scurried down the hallway not even bothering to look back at Jean who held out his hands helplessly.

“Not that it’ll help you anyway,” Mr. Woerman continued with a smug expression. “The questions are completely different for 4th period! Have a nice lunch boys!”

He shut the door in their faces.

“I’m dead,” Connie moaned.

“Do you really think it was that bad?” Jean asked nervously trying to catch Marco, but he dodged him.

“I’m going to skip lunch and study with Bert in the library,” Reiner said, ditching them.

“Okay, if I get a 71% but manage to get a 95% on all my other tests that means I can still get a decent grade without it affecting my GPA too badly. That’s the lowest. But if I get a…” Armin was busy thumping on his calculator in panic.

“Say Eren…” Jean tried. “You still have that spell?”

“Maybe,” Eren said, flicking a bit of lint off his shoulder. “Like I’d share it with you after you guys made fun of me.”

After they’d laughed at him, he’d begun to reconsider the whole thing. Levi’s word’s echoed in his head and he wondered if he should just bite the bullet.

“Okay, we’re sorry, just do the spell thing,” Jean waved him on.

“But if I get a 68%—no that’s impossible, I would never get a 68% but if I got 82%…that is workable…but not good enough if I want to be valedictorian—“ Armin was talking aloud and leaning on the brick wall holding his calculator to his nose.

“Mom’s gonna put me in a casket. I’ll just be one of those super seniors who has to stick around another year,” Connie moaned, face to the brick wall, his nose pressed against it.

“Fine, give me $20,” Eren held out his hand.

“For what?” Jean fumed.
“It’s my spell so you need to chip in, the cost is $80 and I only had $20 on me.”

“Do I look like I carry cash on me all the time?” Jean asked.

“Probably spent it all on Pokemon cards,” Eren accused.

“I told you I haven’t played with those since the 8th grade!” Jean shouted.

“What am I doing? I should be reviewing my notes,” Armin flipped open his notebook and began scanning the pages.

“Then you need to help me do yard work at Levi’s house,” Eren bartered.

“How’s this: If, and only if, your stupid spell works, then I’ll help out.”

That was about as good as Eren was going to get from Jean.

“Connie, you in?”

“I don’t have any money,” Connie moaned into the brick wall. “But I will gladly scrub a toilet if it means I can skip this test.”

“Armin?” Eren tried.

“Eren please!” Armin waved him off. “I am trying to—oh forget it.” He shut his notebook in defeat. “Yeah, sure why not? Certainly can’t hurt.”

“Okay!” Eren beamed.

Eren pulled out the little scroll from his hoodie pocket and unrolled it. A small candle fell into his palm.

“What’s it say?” Jean asked leaning over his shoulder.

“Mind your own business horseface—“ Eren elbowed him, holding the scroll to his chest. “I need to do everything as instructed.”

Eren looked at the candle and then back to the instructions written in Levi’s tiny scrawl.

“Place the candle on the ground and form a circle facing north, south, east and west,” Eren read.

“Which way is—“

“Sun is setting West—“ Armin pointed exasperatedly. “So East, North and West. This is so stupid, I can’t believe I’m doing this.”

“Out of the way asshole—“ Eren elbowed Jean.

“I’m North!” Jean insisted.

“Back off!” Eren nudged him into a different position. “Light the candle. Shoot, I don’t have any matches. Connie?”

“I don’t smoke,” Connie scoffed. “Do you hear these lungs? Beautiful and pink, baby.”

He inhaled and exhaled loudly for emphasis, Jean pushing Connie’s face and halitosis in Eren’s direction.
“I got it,” Jean said, pulling a lighter out of his coat.

“Are you still setting off bottle rockets even after what happened last summer?” Armin asked Jean critically.

“What of it?” Jean snapped, lighting the candle.

“Pyromaniac,” Armin muttered.

“You know you’re only this cranky when you’re stressed about school,” Jean pointed out and Armin crossed his arms over his chest defensively.

“And now the leader—oh that’s me—needs to do the following: ‘Put your right hand into the circle. Hold it over the flame. Remove hand. Place hand in. Wave hand.’ It doesn’t say how to wave it so I hope that’s okay. ‘Turn around.’” Eren proceeded to do exactly that.

“That’s what it’s all about,”” Connie sang in a whisper to Jean.

“Oh Eren,” Armin repeated, pinching the bridge of his nose.

‘Hop on one foot in a circle facing counter clockwise,’ Okay.”

He paused and Armin directed him widdershins. Jean tried very hard not to laugh as Eren jumped around like a demented flamingo.

“Now we all have to spit.”

Connie hawked a big one.

“You ‘ear that?” Connie said pointed at his mouth. “’Es phlegmy.”

“Don’t do that, you know I have a poor gag reflex and—“ Armin retched a little. “Oh god.”

“Spit,” Eren ordered.

They did.

“Then what?” Jean asked.

“That’s it I think,” Eren said rereading the instructions.

“You guys, lunch monitor coming,” Connie pointed out.

Jean picked up the candle to extinguish it.

“Quit playing with the wax, what is wrong with you?” Armin asked as Jean held the candle out of his reach.

“Boys!” the lunch monitor called. “Lunch is done in ten minutes, don’t let me catch you out here by then!”

“Yes Mrs. Lemmings!” they called.

“How does it work?” Connie asked, putting his hands in his pockets and leaning against the wall.

“God, it’s so stinky out here,” Jean complained. “Freakin’ cows man. Wait…fertilizer is flammable, right?”
“Stop it,” Armin warned him.

“I don’t know.” Eren put his hands to his lips in thought.

They waited.

“Maybe you didn’t do it right,” Connie suggested.

“No, I read the instructions three times! I did it right!” Eren protested, scanning the slip of paper again.

“Maybe you didn’t ‘shake it all about’ correctly,” Jean said.

“I don’t understand,” Eren frowned.

“Eren, this is what I was trying to say. It’s just a scam to get money. He’s just going to say, ‘Oh you were supposed to hop on one foot in a circle the other way!’ This kind of stuff doesn’t actually work. I can’t believe I wasted valuable cramming time doing this stupid thing.”

“Boys come on! Bell’s rung!” the lunch monitor called.

Eren groaned.

“I’m an idiot. I gave him $20 for this,” Eren said, slowly realizing he’d been duped.

There was a loud shout in the distance and a great deal of noise as students moved in between classes.

“C’mon boys, time to face the music,” Connie said wearily.

“Good-bye chances of playing in the game,” Jean bemoaned.

They all sighed against their brick wall.

There was a loud clang, the sound of something metal hitting the rail above them and then they were all doused with a warm, stinky mixture. Armin gasped in shock, Jean put a shaky hand up to his hair, Connie spat some out of his mouth. And Eren, well Eren had the worst of it. He felt it slide down the back of his pants. He could feel it in his hoodie.

“This had better not be what I think it is,” Jean said, quivering in rage.

It was.

Turns out that up on the hill in the field where the farmhands were spreading manure, someone forgot to replace the rock behind the wheel of the cart. It rolled down the hill, gaining momentum until it struck the railing and tipped, covering the four of them in premium cow dung. Coach Hannes made them stand on the grass as he hosed them off, half of the school watching out the window and laughing. They were able to use their sweats from their gym bags but even after the hose and a shower, the stench was so bad that they were excused for the rest of the day.

Levi was busy eating his own lunch when he heard the shop bell tinkle and a strong scent overwhelmed him.

“What the—“ His nostrils flared as he looked for the source.

“I want a refund,” Eren said dully.
“Oh my god, is that you?” Levi sniffed at him.

“You had me do the Hokey Pokey, didn’t you?” Eren said still in the same tired tone.

“You really did the whole thing?” Levi asked, covering his mouth, but Eren could still see the smile hidden there.

“A cart full of cow manure fell on me,” Eren continued in a monotone. “I want a refund.”

Levi burst. He laughed. Eren had heard him give a chuckle before but this was a fully belly laugh. He doubled over wheezing.

“Oh my god, you actually did the whole thing. Oh I wrote that to mess with you—oh god.”

“I want my money back,” Eren repeated.

“Oh my, oh man, oh— “ Levi had tears in his eyes his back shaking. “This is the best thing that’s ever happened.”

“Did you hear me?” Eren repeated tiredly. “I want— “

“Oh no, no refund for you. I told you, once you do it, it can’t be undone and—” he paused to shake with laughter again “—boy is it done. You got what you paid for.”

“Well I am obviously unsatisfied with my purchase.”

“You asked to have your test postponed and the universe responded. Don’t blame me for something that I had no control over.”

“You mean you didn’t do it on purpose?” Eren asked doubtfully.

“This?” Levi indicated Eren’s smelly state. “No, I definitely would not have thought of this in a million years. Oh cow shit. That’s brilliant. That’s perfect, that’s—” he kissed his fingers.

“Someone said we should change our school mascot to a cow pie.” Eren glared.

“Would be better than that racist one we have now,” Levi shrugged.

“This is all your fault!” Eren complained.

“Doesn’t work like that, Eren,” Levi said, dismissing him and gathering some fiber to spin.

“How does it work then? It’s your magic!”

“It is not ‘my’ magic. It is magic. It does what it wants.”

Levi began to place some of the fiber on a scale to weigh it.

Some of Eren’s anger was starting to ebb away now that he knew Levi hadn’t intended for him to be covered in cow turds.

“Yeah?” Eren asked curiously.

“Yeah. I mean, I’m not gifted with any particular power. What I have is knowledge. Knowledge of certain rules. I follow the rules—you didn’t need the paper by the way. I did the spell last night after you left. Witches like me…we just exploit a system. Tip the scales in favor of the client.”
He pressed one finger on the antique scale before releasing it.

“How did you learn those rules?” Eren asked, tilting his head.

“My mother,” he nodded at her picture above the mantle.

“And how did she learn it?” Eren asked.

Levi gave an enigmatic smile and set about drafting the fiber to spin.

“So can you really curse people?” Eren asked, wrinkling his nose and setting his elbows on the table.

Levi didn’t answer, but kept the same little expression on his face.

“There’s a saying among witches and among some modern Wicca practitioners: Ever mind the rule of three, what you get comes back to ye.’”

“What does that mean?”

“It means, be careful of whatever spell you cast because whatever you do will come back to you threefold.”

He slipped the fiber onto his spindle and it caught, twisting a beautiful strand of purple in front of him. It was so thin in his hands that if Eren hadn’t seen him do it a million times he would have thought Levi was making the spindle hover in front of him.

“So…karma,” Eren deduced.

“Sortof.” Levi shrugged. “So yes, I can curse someone, but only if I don’t mind receiving it back threefold. And really it’s not worth it. Fortune has a way of swinging back and biting people in the ass.”

He gave the spindle a little extra kick and it swung in front of him like a pendulum and back. He caught it and those grey eyes flicked up to Eren’s face.

Eren heard a squeal of tires and a yelp outside and he jumped up. He looked out the window in time to see the black cat racing down the alley across the street.

“Call an ambulance!” Mrs. Partridge wailed loudly. “He’s dead! Someone help!”

There was already a large group outside as Eren exited the shop.

“I didn’t see him I swear!” a man sitting in his car protested as Mrs. Partridge cried.

The crowd parted when the little bell jingled and Levi stepped out of his shop. All eyes turned toward him.

“You!” Mrs. Partridge accused, pointing her finger at Levi. “You did this to Sonny! I saw him! Officer!”

Officer Dawk had appeared on the scene, still holding his cruller from Reeves Bakery and was immediately accosted by the hysterical woman.

“Officer! I saw him! He set that mangy cat on my poor Sonny and Sonny chased him into the street and was struck by this horrid man! And now he’s dead!”
“Uh…” Officer Dawk said looking down at the dog who was busy licking his own balls.

“You should arrest him immediately!” she insisted.

“Maybe you should keep your dog away from small children and cats,” Levi said smoothly, leaving the scene.

He turned back to the door and Eren caught sight of a small victorious smirk. It was a sinister expression, the same one he’d fixed Eren with when he placed the hat on his head. The kind that let you know exactly how much power he held. Eren felt a shiver run down his spine and he hovered in the doorway anxiously.

“Don’t bother working today, you smell like shit. I will see you at my house Sunday at noon.” He paused, delicate fingers tapping on the doorway. “Don’t be late.”

His grey eyes flashed and he closed the door in Eren’s face, drawing the shades to better ignore the nonsense.

It was actually serious. The car barely bumped the dog, but Sonny was old and did break both of his back legs as Eren later found out. Instead of lurching for every scrap of food or inattentive fingers, Sonny would just drag his bright green casts around and growl pathetically. Mrs. Partridge stopped everyone who would listen how Levi had commanded the black cat to trick Sonny into the street. Eren didn’t correct her and say that wasn’t the case. Levi hadn’t even been looking out the window when it all happened. And yet…he couldn’t shake the niggling feeling that Levi had something to do with it. All he knew was he had no desire to discover what would happen should Levi choose to curse him. It was best to stay on the good side of the witch.

Chapter End Notes

Did Levi really curse Sonny???:O Next chapter: THE WITCH’S HOUSE!
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

The witch's house!

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sundays were the one day the shop was closed and Eren knew Levi loved his only day off. After Eren and Armin were done with church, they waited for Connie and Jean to join them at the Bakery. Then the whole group headed over to the witch’s house on the other side of Reiss Lake from Eren’s house.

“I think you boys are pretty great, taking the initiative and doing a little hard work for some extra cash,” Hannes praised them, his mustache especially bristly that day.

Except Coach’s praise didn’t help their dour expressions. They thanked Hannes for dropping them off and then stared glumly at the dead end of the road.

“I can’t believe you put us in debt with the witch,” Jean complained, yawning.

“Let’s just get this over with,” Armin said, exhausted.

“Yeah, we don’t want him to curse us too,” Connie agreed.

Eren had explained all about the events of Thursday and it spooked all of them enough to show up Sunday.

“’I’ll get you my pretty! And your little dog too!’” Jean cackled.

“Shut up!” Eren slapped his arm. “What if he hears you?”

“Where is this hovel of his?” Jean asked.

They walked up the dirt path to Levi’s house. Jean grabbed a cattail and biffed Armin and Eren over the heads with it, sending the plant exploding with little seeds. They grew quieter as they neared, dragging their feet and catching their sneakers on jutting rocks. And then they were over the hill and they could see it there in the shade of a large willow.

“Is…this the right place?” Connie asked. “It looks…”
“Nice,” Armin finished.

Eren didn’t really know what he had been expecting, a hut by the lake overgrown with weeds and dried flowers and crow’s feet hanging from the rafters, but instead it was an older remodeled cabin with well-cared-for oak siding and freshly painted green trim on the windows. The windows glinted brightly in the autumn light.

“Yeah, this is definitely the right place,” Eren answered confidently. “It’s too clean.”

“You’re on time,” Levi observed, getting up from the flowerbed where he’d been hidden, brushing dirt off his kneepads.

“What are you wearing?” Eren asked indicating his hat.

“UV Rays are dangerous,” Levi said waspishly, patting the straw hat. “Follow me!”

They all waited anxiously looking at Eren for direction.

“And watch out for snakes!” Levi called over his shoulder.

Eren laughed and followed after Levi.

“Snakes?” Jean asked Armin in a panicked whisper.

“There aren’t any venomous snakes this far north in Michigan,” Armin reassured him. “And even if there were it’s way too cold for them to be out.”

“Snakes?” Jean called to Levi, ignoring Armin.

“Oh yeah, I keep a few pets on property.”

Jean gulped.

“Ignore him, he’s joking,” Eren laughed. “So what are we doing today, Boss?”

“I need the leaves raked in the backyard and Eren pick a friend and the two of you can paint my fence. Here, you’ll need to put a tarp down unless you want a wet ass. Clean strokes!”

Jean and Connie began raking the leaves, taking as much time as possible to complete the task. Eren and Armin zipped along on the fence. Meanwhile, Levi was a flurry of activity. He finished digging up the dead morning glories, then he swept the porch, then he was inside making lunch for himself. Eren’s stomach gurgled unpleasantly. Following his lunch, Levi stretched out on a hammock hanging from two peeling birch trees and placed his straw hat over his eyes.

“Wow, we’re working our asses off and he’s napping,” Jean said murderously.

“This is such a waste of time,” Armin fumed. “All this time we’re spending doing his chores we could spend actually studying for the makeup test on Monday.”

“Funny how that works,” Levi drawled from under his hat and the chatter stopped.

“I gotta piss.” Jean hopped up and down.

“Inside. To the left,” Levi pointed. “And if you get any dirt on the ground, I’ll make you lick if off my floor, understand?”
Once inside Jean, picked up the phone and dialed Reiner. When he exited, he nudged Connie. Under the pretext of getting the wheelbarrow around front, they ran for Reiner’s idling car.

“What are you doing?” Eren mouthed.

Jean flipped him off and then waved at Armin.

“Armin…” Eren begged.

Armin looked from freedom to the fence and then back to sweet, sweet, freedom.

“Sorry Eren,” Armin apologized, and he did look truly sorry. He ran around the side of the fence and then Reiner took off.

“Wow,” said Levi, stretching from his siesta to find only Eren. “You’re like a reverse Tom Sawyer there, kid.”

“My friends bailed on me,” Eren sighed, still working on the fence. “I think they were pissed you were busy with nap time.”

“I woke up at 5am, went for a run, swept and dusted the entire house, did the washing, scrubbed all of the toilets, cleaned the gutters and raked the front yard all before you showed up,” Levi said, grabbing his gloves and taking care of the abandoned leaves. “I deserve a power nap.”

“I know that. I’m just disappointed. I mean, I know they didn’t want to be here, but I kindof thought they’d stick around for me,” Eren said, looking discouraged.

Levi didn’t say anything, he just finished up the leaves and then disappeared around the front. Eren finished the fence and sought him out.

“The paint is still wet at the beginning, did you want me to wait before adding a second coat?” he asked. “What are you doing?”

“Sundays are the only days I have to work on the yarn bowls,” Levi said, throwing clay on the wheel.

“I thought you hate dirt,” Eren pointed out as Levi’s grey-coated fingers slid along the edge of the bowl smoothly. Pottery seemed like a hobby adverse with Levi’s fastidious nature.

“Yeah, but it’s all about the ritual, right?” Levi appeared unconcerned, the crease between his young eyes somewhat lessened. “You get a little dirty while cleaning and then the last thing you do is take a nice long soak in the tub. Then…clean the tub obviously.”

“Obviously,” Eren said, watching him. “Can I try?”

“By my guest, Demi,” Levi said, using wire between two sticks to remove the pot. He set it aside and used a small knife to carve out a loop for the yarn. Then he grabbed a small dowel to etch a design.

“How do I…” Eren looked around, taking Levi’s abandoned stool.

“The foot pedal,” Levi indicated.

Eren stepped on it and the wheel spun. He hadn’t done this since grade school. He dipped his hands in water and then gently pressed his thumbs in the spinning center.
“How do you get the top so smooth?” Eren asked, tongue tucked in his teeth.

“Practice,” Levi said, finishing with his and setting it aside to dry.

“How’s it look?” Eren asked, when he’d completed his project.

“It’ll make a great ashtray,” Levi said, slipping the wire underneath it to remove it from the wheel. “It needs to dry for a few days and then we can glaze it.”

Levi started on another bowl as Eren busied about pushing a forget-me-not pattern into his bowl.

“So I was thinking a lot about what you said the other day,” Eren started, looking sideways at Levi. “About how it’s not your magic that does things…does…does that mean witches are made, not born?”

“I never really thought about it like that, but yeah,” Levi agreed, smoothing out the edges on his bowl.

“So that means…theoretically, that I could become a witch?” Eren didn’t look at Levi this time, he pretended to be busy with his bowl, but he couldn’t think of much more to add but his initials on the bottom.

“Theoretically,” Levi agreed, giving him a look.

Under his hat he wore a kerchief to keep his bangs out of his face, but a few wisps had escaped and he looked through them suspiciously at Eren. He cut the bowl from the wheel and began carving out the whorl, mouth set in a thin line.

“What are you doing there?” Eren asked as Levi made little notches along the bowl. It was a pattern he’d seen on a lot of the others. “Are those runes?”

“Yes,” Levi answered in a brusque tone.

“And what’s this?” Eren asked looking at an odd broken lump sitting on a shelf.

“It’s a teapot,” Levi said scowling. “And cup.”

“Why is it broken?” Eren asked, picking up the fragments in his hands.

“Because handles are hard,” Levi grumbled. “Stop asking questions.”

He wrapped each bowl in plastic, including Eren’s and then washed his hands thoroughly. Eren joined him at the sink rubbing the bar of soap between his hands and looking down at Levi.

“What?” Levi asked, growing uncomfortable.

“Levi, teach me how to be a witch!” Eren exclaimed.

“Why?” Levi grabbed a clean towel, snapping it with some vehemence. He dried his hands and then threw it behind him at Eren.

“Because I want to do what you do,” Eren said, fixing Levi with his most sincere expression.

Levi looked up at him, squinting.

“Tch,” he said, replacing his hat.
Between the two of them, the second coat on the fence went by quickly. Eren tried to keep up with Levi’s quick pace, but stopped once Levi scolded him for his shoddy work.

“Let me take a quick shower and then I’ll drive you home,” Levi said, standing up and twisting until he worked out the crick in his back. “You can come inside, but don’t touch anything!”

“Whoa,” Eren said, once his eyes adjusted to the interior. “Your house is beautiful.”

“…Thanks,” Levi managed, struggling like the words were choking him.

It didn’t sound like Levi thanked people very often. Eren ran his hands over the wooden stairs and banister.

“What is this?” he asked, fingers finding little notches in the wood to explore.

“Treads are fir, banisters are mahogany.”

“Wow, this must have cost a fortune to install,” Eren said, tilting his head back to look at the ceiling.

Well, no, I did it myself,” Levi said, shrugging. “I don’t have any money to hire a professional.”

Eren gaped at him.

“I mean, it was just a crummy little cabin when Mom and I lived here and I just started replacing the rotting wood here and there. Took me a while to get the hang of it.”

“But it’s so smooth,” Eren said, running his hands over the banister.

“Well, I can see all the mistakes here and frankly it’s embarrassing.” Levi squinted. “Right. Shower. Here are some pinwheel cookies. Don’t get crumbs anywhere.”

Eren sat in the center of the couch, bouncing his knees and eating the cookies absentmindedly as he examined the interior of Levi’s home. The couch was against the wall of the staircase and he tilted his head, leaning it against the wall to look at the view. Across from him was an ancient television. Levi clearly put most of his extra cash from his witching nights into his home. Eren bit at another cookie and leaned to the left. The house was on an angle such that the back peered into the woods and the reedy lake simultaneously. He could hear a loon call out on the lake and geese flying overhead. A gust of wind set the chimes on the porch singing merrily and he found himself growing tired.

“Ready?” Levi asked and Eren started, upsetting the empty plate of crumbs. “You finished all of them?”

“Sorry,” Eren apologized.

“Right, let’s go,” Levi said. “Help me get these finished bowls into the car.”

Eren carried each one carefully and with great reverence. Now that he knew how much time and effort went into each one, he felt incredibly guilty for smashing the entire display.

“So…will you?” Eren asked as Levi shut the car trunk.

“Will I what?”

“Teach me to be a witch!”
“Tch,” Levi said, placing a few on the floor mats in the backseat.

“Is that a yes?” Eren prompted.

Levi snorted.

“Is that a no?” Eren bounced after him.

“Get in the car,” Levi ordered.

Eren could barely keep his eyes open on the ride back to his house. He fell forward heavily and when Levi pulled to a stop, he jumped up, sucking spit back into his mouth.

“You gonna make it?” Levi asked as Eren yawned.

“I’m so sleepy. I spent all night playing videogames. First thing I’m going to do when I get back is take a very long nap.”

“What about your makeup test?”

“I’m done worrying about that. Whatever happens will happen. Man, it’s so dark already.”

“Days are getting shorter,” Levi agreed.

“Well I don’t like it,” Eren complained.

“Here we are, get some rest,” Levi said, putting the car in park. “Thanks for toughing it out today.”

“Night Levi!” Eren called waving.

He tripped up the stairs and Levi sat there waiting for Eren to find the right key. When he took too long, Levi leaned on the horn.

“Bye!” Eren called, unlocking the door and stepping inside.

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“Teach me to be a witch, Levi!” Levi thought as he reversed out of the Jaeger’s driveway. Like it was that easy.

Eren was a funny kid, but a hard worker and Levi appreciated his work ethic. Sure it could use a little polish, but he was a fast learner. Levi checked the clock. If he hurried back he could set up the display with the few finished bowls, have a cig, and then be back in time for Simpsons. Or maybe he’d work on those swatches for the class on Monday. Levi fiddled with the radio until that old Meredith Brooks song came on and he sang along off-key, running his hands through his still damp hair.

“I’m a bitch, I’m a lover, I’m a child—“ he sang distractedly, speeding a little on the backroads.

He crested over the small hill before the Old Crossroads and as his lights illuminated the path, recognized a familiar shape in the road, still wearing his hoodie. Eren. Levi slammed on his brakes and swerved, driving straight into the muddy ditch. The airbag went off and smacked him in the face.

“Fuck!” Levi cursed, holding his nose.
The car stilled and he kicked open the door. His neck twinged. Great. Whiplash. He rubbed at it as he climbed through the mud.

“Eren!” he shouted. “Eren!”

What the hell was he thinking? Standing in the middle of the road like that! He was lucky he didn’t get himself killed! What if Levi hadn’t stopped soon enough?

“Eren!” Levi yelled until his voice was hoarse.

He rubbed at the back of his neck, twisting every which way to find the teenager.

Maybe Levi didn’t stop quite as fast as he thought he did. He crawled back down into the mud to look under the car for a scrap of clothing or something—anything—to indicate Eren had been there.

“Eren,” Levi whispered an uncomfortable feeling crawling in his belly.

Phone. His phone. Levi dug around in his pocket. He’d always thought cellphones were silly—who wants their phone on them all the time?—but talked himself into one for business purposes though he rarely used it. He dialed Eren’s number into the Nokia fingers shaking. That image of Eren in his headlights kept flashing in front of him and his chest seized in panic.

“Yeah?” Eren asked sleepily.

“Where are you?” Levi asked angrily.

“Huh? Levi I was sleepin’.” He yawned for effect.

“Right now, where are you?” Levi repeated, moving toward the center of the road and looking in all four directions.

“I’m at home, Levi!” Eren whined.

Levi didn’t say good-by, he simply hung up. He looked around at the crossroads. It was empty, but he could feel eyes on him.

“What the fucking shit?” he whispered into the night air.

Nothing but the whistling wind greeted him back.

Chapter End Notes

:O

HOLY PLOT TWIST BATMAN!

I bet you thought you knew where this plot was going. YOU THOUGHT. YOU THOUGHT BISH YOU THOUGHT.
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Levi questions Eren about his sleeping habits. Halloween approaches.

Undone (The Sweater Song)/Weezer

Chapter Notes

Sorry guys, it's been a while. It's not because I've forgotten about this fic, but I think you know I have too many wips going and I have had health problems lately. This is still my favorite fic to work on so I hope you like it!

I also hope you like the knitting themed music I picked for today's chapter. Bahahaha!

My tumblr is perksofbeingawaifu.

Tracking tag: #fic: darkstag

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“So what exactly happened?” Officer Dawk asked as the tow truck lifted Levi’s black Dodge Neon out of the water.

“I told you,” Levi said, rubbing at his neck. “It was a deer. I saw it and swerved.”

“You’re not supposed to swerve and risk hurting yourself and others, just hit the deer.”

“Sorry, it’s instinct. You see something, you swerve.”

“Could’ve gotten some choice venison,” the mechanic said as he pulled out Levi’s car.

“Now I gotta ask. You been drinking?” Officer Dawk asked.

Levi fixed him with a death glare.

“Alright, alright. Well he’ll get you all patched up here and go to the ER and see about your whiplash okay?”

“Yeah yeah,” Levi grumbled.

Except he didn’t. The tow truck graciously dropped him off at the shop with his several newly broken bowls and he climbed up the spiral stairs and fell onto the futon exhausted. When he woke, his neck was still sore so he took a few pain pills and then started a pot of tea. When it was finished brewing and he felt the warmth surge through him, he descended the stairs and removed all of the knitting notions from the top of the trunk and opened it. He rooted around inside until he found what he was looking for: his grandfather’s pipe.
Levi never smoked it, he simply put it between his lips whenever he was solving a particularly difficult problem. He liked to smell the pungent musk that lingered in the handcarved wood, a memory of a man he barely remembered. He tapped it on his bottom lip and leaned back in his grandfather’s rocking chair staring at the ceiling, deep in thought.

That was exactly where Eren found him the next day.

“Well, good news is: I finally took the test. Bad news is: I’m pretty sure dad is going to ground me when he sees the results. But I feel better about it. You’re right I should have just taken it to begin with. What should I get started on? Bathroom? I’m feeling bathroom!”

He hummed happily to himself and went to grab the cleaning supplies for the toilet. Levi watched him, resting his neck, only his eyes moving. When Eren finally ran out of things to do, he came to Levi expectantly.

“What’s next?” Eren asked.

“You cleaned the windows?” Levi said, lifting the pipe from his mouth.

“Yes and I pulled everything out in the back displays and dusted because I noticed they were getting a little dirty.”

Eren beamed, clearly proud of himself. He slid into seat at the big table and traced the knots in the wood. That had been Levi’s Mother’s Day gift nearly eight years ago. It had held up quite well, he thought, watching Eren run his hands over the wood distractedly.

“So I was thinking of our conversation earlier,” Eren said, biting his lip. “And I was wondering if you’d maybe made a decision?”

“About what?” Levi asked, eyebrows knit tight together.

“About you teaching me to be a witch!”

Oh that again. Levi had nearly forgotten.

“You see that box over there?” Levi pointed with the pipe. “The one with the wicker sides?”

“Yeah!” Eren nodded standing up.

“Get that out.”

Eren did as asked.

“Open it,” Levi instructed.

Eren did so, looking like he half expected it to be full of spiders but his face filled with confusion when he saw the contents. He pulled out the mess of red yarn and looked at Levi holding it up.

“I need you to untangle and wind that skein without cutting it.”

“Oh. Oh. I get it. Like Mr. Miyagi. Wax on, wax off.”

“Sure,” said Levi and Eren set about on the mess eagerly.

Levi watched him with narrowed eyes. Eren was just a teenager, right? To be honest, he’d been so busy dodging Eren’s persistent questions he hadn’t learned much about his new shop clerk.
“Say Eren…you ever…sleepwalk?” Levi tried.

“Huh?” Eren asked, lifting the mess up to the lights to examine. “No. I mean, I used to when I was little.”

“Ah.”

“But not anymore. I guess I grew out of it.”

“What do you dream about?”

“Not much. I have really boring dreams. Armin said he had dreams where he swam the depths of the ocean and even one where he flew! But mine are always boring.”

Levi digested this bit of information. Ah well, it would do no good to dwell on it. He pushed out of the chair and began stocking the new mitten kits.

“Afternoon!” Petra called breezily as Levi sorted the kits.

“Hi Petra!” said Eren.

Levi greeted her with a grunt.

“Oh my, that’s quite a mess,” Petra said, eyeing the yarn.

Eren didn’t look up, he was too focused on his work, his tongue poking out of the corner of his mouth.

“Levi, I need some advice, I’m worried I did the darts on this wrong, can you take a look? I would hate to have to recut everything.”

Levi pushed aside some of Eren’s mess and only then did Eren look up. Levi carefully stretched out the dress Petra had worked so hard on over his table. Beautiful work as always. He examined it closely. It was machine sewn and thus tidy and uniform, but there was slight puckering around the edges. Levi frowned.

“Oh wow that’s amazing!” Eren said leaning over it. He reached out a hand to touch the fabric and Levi slapped it away.

“Looks good to me,” Levi said evenly. “Some of these lines will smooth when you add the cups. Are you adding cups?”

Petra flushed to the root of her hair and Eren coughed.

“I had bought some, yes,” she choked out.

“I don’t think you need to recut it, but if you ripped out these stitches you could redo them to prevent the ripple that’s occurring here if that’s what’s bothering you.”

Levi was a perfectionist and would never have been able to tolerate those imperfections, but it wasn’t his wedding dress.

“Do you have any tips to keep that from happening again?” she asked, worrying at her lip.

Levi went about explaining a hand sewing technique she could use but was distracted by someone asking for the pattern books. He led them and helped them find a good pattern for a fairy costume.
“She wants to be Tinkerbell for Halloween,” the woman said cheerfully in the hopes of engaging Levi in conversation.

Levi only grunted in acknowledgement.

Ugh. Halloween. Halloween and Christmas were perhaps the busiest times of the year for Levi. Imagine hundreds of novices coming in with absolutely no idea what they were doing and no desire to learn. One woman wanted to create a Victorian Era costume the night before! And of course, when they couldn’t finish, they came to him offering him money to finish it. Sometimes if the money was good enough he would. Often it wasn’t. And they always wanted to talk about their children to him and he really couldn’t be bothered. He helped the mother find sparkly green lycra and then left her to it.

“Hi Levi,” said another woman browsing the pattern books as Levi tried to organize the mess from previous customers.

“Marie,” he acknowledge coolly. “Are you finding everything?”

“Yup, I’ve got some black felt here. Nile is going as roadkill, he’s just dressing up in his deer costume from last year and I’m adding tire tracks over it,” she said, flashing her dimples as she smiled.

“That sounds about Nile’s level of wit,” Levi said sinking his teeth into the last syllable.

“Speaking of roadkill, Nile said you were in a nasty accident last night. Why didn’t you come see me, hm?”

Marie was a nurse at the hospital and often worked the night shift.

“Didn’t feel like it,” Levi said dismissively.

“What?” said Petra, overhearing. “You were in a car accident?”

Eren looked up from his mess, concern spreading across his face.

“Yes, and he has a nasty case of whiplash,” Marie said, examining his pinched face.

Marie, unfortunately, was a great deal more competent than her husband. Levi punched her total into the register.

“Is there anything else you need Marie?” Levi snapped.

“Nope, just these,” she said sharing a knowing look with Petra.

She left, another customer entering after her and Levi gave a sigh of relief, fixing the mitten kits. When he turned back around to the table he found Eren had a visitor and pulled up short.

“I just love this shop, it’s so quaint,” said the girl, swaying in her pink peacoat, the tangled yarn laced in her fingers as she wound an end quickly.

**Quaint.** Levi’s eye twitched.

“Yeah, it’s cool,” Eren nodded in agreement. “Here, you go under and I’ll go over.”

She stepped under his arms, her eyes bright and giddy as if Eren were inviting her to a dance. She continued watching him dreamily, humming along to, “My Heart Will Go On.” Levi’s nostrils
flared.

Oh gross, the last thing Levi wanted was horny teenagers coming in here and dragging their hormones all over the place. Teenager energy was the absolute worst. He got out his broom and set it against the sales counter, ready to sweep out any trace of her wistful sighs.

“And here,” she offered, switching the yarn in her hands for his, jumping as the backs of their hands touched. “If we go here we—“

The large snarl fell loose under her hands and she and Eren let out a little cheer.

“You’re really good with knots, Christa,” he complimented.

Oh so she had a name. She tossed her golden hair, her silver sparkly beret catching the lights and she shrugged, clearly pleased.

“I like knots, they’re very calming,” Christa said, grinning as she stepped under Eren’s outstretched arm again. “I can undo any knot you throw at me.”

“Really?” Eren asked.

Yeah, try me,” she said and she held out her wrists.

Eren looped some of the yarn around and tied it with a knot he must have learned in Boy Scouts.

“Ha! Try to get out of that!” Eren said, putting his hands on his hips, feet still wrapped up with the red wool.

“Easy!” she said and with a few tugs was free.

“You’re like a modern day Houdini!” Eren complimented.

Levi watched the unfolding scene with a curl in his lip.

“They’re adorable aren’t they?” Petra said suddenly appearing at his side. “Oh puppy love.”

“This is like watching the Kidz Bop version of bondage,” Levi said, wincing in secondhand embarrassment as the two continued their awkward flirting. “Promise me we were never that awful.”

“Stop it, it’s cute,” Petra chided him.

“Here, try again!” Christa offered.

“No, that’s enough of that,” Levi said hurrying to break up their strange conversation. “Sorry, you can play with Eren a different time, he’s working right now.”

“Oh, sorry,” Christa put a hand over her mouth. “I hope I didn’t get you in trouble Eren! I’m actually here to get fabric for my costume.” Then, she cupped her hand and whispered to Eren, “I’m going as Glinda.”

“Oh wow, that’s perfect for you,” Eren nodded, attempting to free his foot and hopping in place.

Levi stepped on the yarn and Eren pulled the yarn off the tongue of his sneaker.

“Thanks! I’ve got my wand already and I’ve been practicing. ‘Are you a good witch or a bad—“
Christa stopped her eyes trailed to Levi’s stormy face.

Levi crossed his arms, his long fingers tapping against his arm impatiently.

“Could you show me your pink tulle please?” she asked timidly, sensing his displeasure.

He directed Christa to the fabric and helped pick the correct shade and then cut it for her. As he was ringing her up at the counter, her eyes strayed to the mitten kits.

“What are these?” she asked, picking one up.

“Mittens,” Levi said tersely as he wrote her receipt.

“Oh,” Christa said, still eyeing the kits. Then when Levi had finished neatly packing her bag, she looked over her shoulder, “Wish me luck on my costume!”

“Good luck!” Eren waved, not looking up from his work.

She beamed.

“Good luck!” Petra called, ripping out the stitches on her dress. “I need to get started on my costume too. I’m thinking Raggedy Ann doll.”

“That sounds perfect!” Christa beamed. “I just love Halloween! The pumpkins!”

“The crisp leaves,” Petra agreed.

“Apple cider!” Christa agreed, stepping forward and Levi sighed because she was never going to leave.

“Mhm! You should put up some decorations Levi,” Petra motioned to the shop. “Some fake cobwebs. Or bats. ‘Come into my parlor,’ said the spider to the fly.’”

Petra waved her arms over Levi’s flat face. Was he supposed to be the spider?

Christa and Eren giggled. Levi’s brow twitched.

“I don’t understand why we celebrate filthy vermin during this holiday,” he said, picking up his broom and sweeping at Christa’s ankles hoping she’d take the hint. “I don’t spend all my time dusting just to put up fake cobwebs.”


“Is there anything else I can help you with, because otherwise, if you’re not buying, I’m going to ask you to leave,” Levi said, steering Christa towards the door. If he let one of Eren’s friends stay and chat the rest of them would never leave.

“No, I think I have everything. Bye Eren! See you tomorrow!” Christa called over her shoulder as Levi stood behind her.

He opened the door for her to leave and then without warning tugged her back inside the shop closing the door in front of her face like it were a shield. He managed just in time too. There were several loud cracks as the projectiles struck the glass door. Christa gave a small little scream and put her hands up over her face instinctively, then lowered them when she realized what had happened.
“Oh those little—I hate Halloween!” Levi growled, watching egg yolk run down his previously streak-free window.

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Levi sent Eren out to clean up the mess after which Levi granted the kid a break. When the shop had finally died down, Levi stepped out to the back for his daily clove cigarette. His neck was killing him.

“C’mon,” Eren was urging the black cat. “Come on!”

The cat eyed Eren’s outstretched hand with disdain, busy cleaning his paw. When he saw Levi, he hopped down from his trashcan and wound himself around Levi’s legs.

“Aww,” Eren sighed, putting his head in his hands. “I’ll get him one of this days. Just you wait.”

He was eating a pb&j, the front of his shirt covered in small crumbs. When he saw Levi’s eye move towards them, he hurried to brush the front of his shirt. The tomcat hopped back up on his perch and Levi scratched his chin absentmindedly.

“We should name him,” Eren said, struck by this idea.

Levi didn’t see the point. He was just a stray like any other. If Levi stopped feeding him he’d simply head down the block to the next meal. Not that Levi would stop feeding him. He felt better with a good mouser around. Especially since the deli down the block left their trash open for seagulls and raccoons. One time Levi found his big tom carrying a possum joey in his mouth and an extra kick in his step. Levi felt like a proud father.

“You are now Jack,” Eren said solemnly waving his hand in front of the tom’s face.

The cat flattened his ears as Eren came up to pet him, but allowed, his tail twitching in warning. Levi snorted.


“Because of his eyes. He’s got orange eyes. He looks like a Jack o’ Lantern.”

Ugh. Halloween.

“Jack, Jack, are you a good boy Jack?” Eren asked.

The tom lazily swiped Eren, dragging his claws across the back of his hand. That’s my boy, Levi thought hiding a smile with a drag.

“Ouch Jack!” Eren checked his hand.

“What do you dream about?” Levi asked quickly.

“Huh?” Eren said, sucking on the back of his fingers to reduce the sting.

“You said you had boring dreams, why are they so boring?”

“Oh,” Eren appeared flattered that Levi was interested. “Dunno. Just are. I’m always walking. Just…walking. I don’t know where I’m going or where I’m coming from, but I just keep walking.”

Levi watched him closely. Eren’s green eyes were far away as he conjured the memory. He was a
handsome child. Still at that stage where he was built like some homunculus. All large hands and large mouth and large nose, waiting for him to grow. And his brows were so bushy and dark. Levi traced his eyes over the soft beginnings of a beard on his chin.

“Although one time I had a dream I helped the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles save the JC Penney’s from aliens,” Eren said thoughtfully and Levi nearly inhaled his cigarette.

Levi coughed and Jack grew annoyed and stalked off. Huh. Levi was calling him Jack already.

“Why? Does…does that mean something?” Eren asked, eyes wide. “Is…is this some kind of test? To see if I’d be a good witch?”

“Depends.”

“On what?” Eren asked.

“On if you passed your trig test,” Levi said, putting out his butt in the old coffee can.

“Yes! I got it back, I got a—“

“Show me,” Levi insisted.

He kicked out the brick holding open the door and stepped back in the shop, Eren running ahead of him to dig out his backpack.

“79%!” Eren crowed holding it out for Levi to see. “Not great, but enough to keep me on the team!”

“Homework?” Levi asked.

“Don’t have any.”

Levi’s eyes narrowed.

“I mean, I have a report due at the end of the week, but that’s a group thing and we have time in the computer lab to work on it tomorrow.”

“And your father is…” Levi led.

“He’s usually on call Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday,” Eren listed off from memory.

“I see,” Levi said, reaching for his grandfather’s pipe and tucking it into the corner of his mouth.

Eren stood there, vibrating with excitement, looking between Levi’s eyes quickly for any sign of what he was about to say next. Levi checked his watch.

“Lock the door, flip the sign and pull the drapes.”

Eren did so and then spun on the spot.

“Put away that yarn—“ Levi indicated Eren’s half-finished project.

Eren placed it back inside the basket and then hopped up, his throwing arm shaking a little like he were waiting for a toss on the field.
“Get out that chest—“ Levi pointed with his pipe.

Eren carefully pulled out the contents, holding the black table cloth with reverent awe. Together they smoothed it over the wood and then prepared the space. Levi picked out the candle and lit it, placing it against the window. Eren’s eyes were like saucers. Levi turned back to him, a dark and predatory look on his face. There was a knock at the back door and Eren jumped.

The witch was in.

Chapter End Notes

A little bit of a boring chapter, but I'm setting the foundation for future exciting chapters. :3

My tumblr is perksofbeingawaifu.

Tracking tag: #fic: darkstag

If you like, please leave comments or kudos!
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Witching hour!

Chapter Notes

I'm trying to get a bunch of darkstag chapters out so I can post the Halloween chapter in October. Look forward to lots of updates!

TW: mention of abortion. i debated keeping this scene in or not, but the overwhelming majority of people i asked said i should keep it.

My tumblr is perksofbeingawaifu.

If you like please leave kudos and/or comments! They mean a lot to me!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“It’s just that I gave him the best years of my life, you know?”

Oh how Levi knew. He’d spent the better part of his evening listening to her sob story.

“I want him dead!”

“That’s a little outside my paygrade,” Levi said, stifling a yawn.

He hoped Eren was learning a great deal about being a witch. Hopefully this would dissuade Eren of Levi’s supposed glamorous lifestyle.

“I want his dick to rot and fall off!” Paula continued.

“Sorry, I don’t curse people.”

“I want his slut to get hit by a car and lose those perky boobs of hers!”

“Again, I don’t curse people.”

“And you just know—you know—he’s going to want to start a new family. He’s going to get her pregnant as fast as possible. He’ll move on to his new family and forget all about his children! I don’t mind the cheating as much as I mind the thought of him leaving.”

“Now that I can work with,” Levi said, sitting up a little straighter.

She left with a strand of artfully knotted twine, looking considerably happier.
“You still awake?” Levi asked.

“Barely,” Eren mumbled, sticking his head up and looking over the edge of the loft.

He wiped off the corner of his mouth and Levi really truly hoped he wasn’t drooling on his futon.

“Well you’re supposed to be paying attention,” Levi reminded him.

“I’m trying, it’s just all so…boring.”

“Other people’s problems can seem pretty boring,” Levi agreed, hitting the button on the music.

He couldn’t dance because his neck was still sore, but he shuffled in place as Eren hopped down the spiral staircase. Eren’s idea of dancing was to jump in place like some prairie dog or meerkat looking out of its hole. He made V’s with his hands and passed them over his eyes like he were John Travolta.

“What’s the matter Levi? Don’t like my moves?” he asked. “Also what is the point of the dancing?”

Levi didn’t answer so Eren attempted to gain his attention by dancing in his face.

“You’re supposed to be observing. Quietly,” Levi said pinching Eren’s nose.

A knock at the door and Levi turned off the music. He opened the back door just as Eren’s sneakers made it up the spiral staircase.

There was a teenage girl on the back stoop. She was wearing a hoodie from Roseville, the next town over so she wasn’t Eren’s schoolmate. Levi inwardly bit back a groan. Grown adults and their problems he didn’t mind, but teenagers were the absolute worst.

“Please sit.” He offered her a chair. “Now what can I help you—“

“I need an abortion,” she blurted out.

Levi’s eyebrows raised so high he thought they’d flap off and away from his face.

“Uhhhh,” Levi said, trying to gather his thoughts. He looked upwards and Eren was staring down at him open mouthed. “What is it exactly you think I do here?”

“You’re the witch right? I need an abortion. My family is very conservative and if they found out I was pregnant they would kill me.”

“Let’s back up, please,” Levi said, pinching at his brow. “How did…this…happen?”

“My parents don’t allow me to date, but I’ve been seeing this boy. I’ve been sneaking out of my room at night. My mom always said if I kissed a boy I would get pregnant and last night, I did.”

She said this very seriously. Levi pursed his lips together, not fully understanding.

“Sorry…did what?”

“I kissed. We kissed. So now I’m pregnant.”

“Um…” Levi said, feeling a migraine coming on. “And…and is that…all you did?”
“Yes?” she answered cocking her head to the side. “And I know that the Planned Parenthood is all witches harvesting fetuses so I thought I’d go straight to the witch.”

“I see,” Levi said slowly.

He heard a muffled noise upstairs and glared in Eren’s direction.

“Well, unfortunately I’m not a strong enough witch to cast this spell,” Levi said. “But I’m going to give you the name of my associate—“

“Are they a witch too?” the girl asked.

“Yes, they are the strongest of my coven. Her name is Marie Dawk—“ he scribbled on a piece of paper. Marie was going to hate him for this. “She is a nurse at Shigansina Hospital and she probably has already started her shift so you can find her easily. Just tell them who you’re looking for.”

“The witches are in our hospital?” the girl whispered.

“Yes,” Levi said very seriously. “And I want you to tell her, exactly—exactly what you told me.”

“About the kissing?” she asked.

“Yes. She will need to know.”

And with that he escorted her from the store. She paused just before he went to close the door and for a moment he thought she might thank him, but instead.

“You’re going to hell you know.”

“Okay thanks for stopping by,” Levi said, closing the door.

The moment he did, he heard Eren howl with laughter. Levi bit back a grin as he ascended the stairs.

“I can’t breathe,” Eren gasped, rolling around on the floor.

“It’s not funny,” Levi said nudging him with his slippered toe.

“She wanted—she thought she was—oh god,” Eren was sobbing.

“Hey, it’s not her fault she never got any comprehensive sex ed,” Levi protested. “Hopefully Marie can give her a better talk about the birds and the bees than I can.”

Plus he could get back at her for mentioning his whiplash in front of Eren and Petra.

“It’s just so—“ Eren seized up with laughter again.

“Knock it off! You’re supposed to be observing quietly!” Levi said, taking off his slipper and smacking Eren’s head with it.

Levi forgot how much he missed having someone here with him. Before it had been him who would sit up in the loft or at his mother’s side. It’s how he learned his trade. For a brief moment he allowed his head to be filled with the fantasy of Eren at his side, watching as Levi performed his craft. He’d never really asked to do this, it was just something his mother did and he was expected to help just like he did with everything. And here Eren was eager and willing. Perhaps a little too
eager. Levi’s mother had given him this training, this gift, but she’d never told him what to do with it. So he had simply carried on what she had started. It seemed a shame to waste that knowledge. Still…Eren was young. Although not as young as Levi was when he started.

Another knock on the door. Man, he was busy for a Monday night.

“Stay here and stay quiet,” Levi threatened, leaning over Eren, who covered his mouth with his hands and nodded, eyes still teary with mirth.

Levi hopped back into his slipper and hurried down the stairs adjusting his shawl, then tripped a little. Eren snorted.

“I’m serious!” Levi snapped, but there was no heart in it.

He pulled open the door.

“Welcome,” he said in his calm voice.

“Hello Levi, dear,” said the woman shuffling into the store. She looked to be in her mid-60s, plump with a round face and greying curly hair. She looked like she had come straight from her bed and was wearing a heavy winter coat over her nightgown and cork house shoes. “Is your mother here?”

“No…no Mrs. Pellem,” Levi said quietly. “She passed two years ago.”

“Has it been that long since I’ve been here? Oh, oh I am sorry to hear that Levi,” she said clasping his hand and patting it. “We don’t much get into town these days I hadn’t heard. She was a lovely woman.” She hummed sadly and then looked around.

“Please sit,” Levi indicated the table.

She jumped a little.

“Well, I’m not sure you…well you’re still very young dear and…well it’s…I had better be driving back…” As she spoke she turned slowly on the spot.

“Please,” Levi said, still putting on his calm voice and indicating the chair.

“No, I’d…”

“Sit,” Levi said curtly, dropping into the brusque temper he usually saved for Eren or the more obnoxious customers.

She dropped quickly into a seat and resumed nervously tracing over her keys.

“Now how can I help you Mrs. Pellem?” he asked.

She looked around at his belongings and the yarn in the shop and everywhere but at him as she gathered her thoughts.

“It’s my Percy, you see,” Mrs. Pellem admitted finally.

Ah at last they were getting somewhere.

“Well you know about his injury, he and his brothers were trying to get a boat that was sinking out of the water and the motor switched on and the propeller blade sliced right up his leg…”
Levi had a vague recollection of that happening the summer after he graduated high school. The blade had torn up his leg, “like hamburger meat,” as one less sensitive friend had told him. Mrs. Pellem had split her time between her husband’s hospital bed, the church, and Levi’s mother, in hopes that the latter two would be able to save him.

“Well there is some nerve damage to be expected, that’s what the doctor said,” she nodded, her blue eyes large and a little red. “He limps about and the pain keeps him up at night, especially when it rains. He doesn’t really do much but fish anymore. He wakes up before I do, walks down to the end of the boathouse and fishes. Then he putters around in there, changes his reel, fixes the squeaky door. He’ll come back in for breakfast, lunch and dinner, but otherwise, he’s out there….just…fishin’. And I know, older men go through a change, but even after we had the kids, he was still very…you know amorous.”

She said the last bit as if in a confession.

“The doctors said everything is in working order and they gave him those little blue pills that you see on the TV, but they didn’t do much of anything. One doctor suggested it was more…what’s the word…psychological? Psycho…soma something. That it’s in his head. Well Percy won’t go talk to some doctor about what he’s thinking and what he’s feeling. He won’t even tell me. You know, that man fishes more than he talks.”

Levi’s memory of Mr. Pellem was of a taciturn but good natured man who let his wife talk for both of them and was always sucking on some hard candy. They had been pleasant to his mother. More than he could say for some people. People who came at night with their tears but when Levi saw them on the sidewalk the next day they would cross the street, pretending he and his mother didn’t exist. Levi pulled out his grandfather’s pipe and tapped it on his bottom lip.

“He just doesn’t want to do much of anything anymore,” she sighed. “Don’t wanna hunt. Don’t wanna go to church. Don’t wanna make love. I would think he was sleeping around if he ever left the boathouse, but…” she trailed off. “He hasn’t been retired very long. And I have the church to keep me busy on the weekends, but is this going to be the rest of our lives? I mean, I guess I wouldn’t mind if it was as long as we were both happy, but I don’t think he is happy. He seems embarrassed about it, if I’m being honest. Men don’t like to talk about those sorts of problems you know. Do you have anything for him?”

She leaned forward in the chair and it creaked under her weight. Levi regarded her with a pensive expression on his face.

“For $200, yes,” he said finally.

He stood and rummaged around in his favorite chest, pulling out something he’d carved a long time ago. He would need to make a replacement, he decided as he set the wooden cup on the table for her along with the last of his larger beeswax candles. He would need to grab more from his stores at home.

“Take this candle,” Levi said quietly, thinking of how best to proceed with this. “Light it and walk around the inside of your house, clockwise. Then, take this needle and prick your finger, you only need one drop. Then put the needle in the palm of your hand. Walk around the house, clockwise again, with the tip always pointing north. Then take this cup, fill it with grape juice—“

“Oh we don’t drink,” she said earnestly.

“Grape juice then,” Levi said after a moment’s consideration. “Make the same walk around the house. Take a sip. Offer your husband a sip. And then if he will let you, pour some on his wound.
Then take it, and throw it in the water of the boathouse.”

“Just throw something this beautiful…in the water?” she asked, examining the hand carved cup.

Levi smothered a spark of pride that reared itself at her words.

“Yes.”

She looked at it doubtfully as if she couldn’t imagine wasting something so beautiful. Elaine Pellem was a woman who stopped at every garage sale and second hand store, always looking for something beautiful but overlooked. Her house was littered with bric-a-brac, small porcelain figures of children building snowmen and cow eyed maidens carrying milk pails and blue willow plates to place in the window.

“Then I need you to place the candle by your bedside table, still lit. And every time you’re…in the mood, just light it and blow it out when you’re finished.”

She dug around in her purse and handed over the cash. She wasn’t a wealthy woman, but she saved her pennies for things that mattered like a doll with a worn dress that needed a home or for her husband who, though he was a curmudgeon, had given her three happy children. She thanked him profusely when she left and Levi closed the door behind her.

Levi sighed and flopped himself into a chair. Witching was exhausting business.

“Why the candle?” Eren said, from somewhere over his head and Levi opened his eyes to see Eren standing over him. To be honest he had almost forgotten about him. “Why the cup? Why did you give the woman before a knot? Why the blood for the needle? Is it like some dark magic? Why—“

“You ask a lot of questions,” Levi said weakly, putting his hands up in defense.

“Because you’re not really teaching me anything,” Eren said, crossing his arms.

“I—“

Another knock at the door.

“Again?” Levi sighed. “Get up there, and be quiet!”

Eren stomped up the stairs and Levi rolled his eyes wrenching open the door.

“Oh…Nanaba.”

He stepped aside and let her in.

“Should you be here?” he asked, eyebrows contracting in concern.

“Well don’t tell Mike because he’ll be cross with me,” she said, pressing her fingers to her lips.

Levi had absolutely no desire to tell Mike that his little sister was spending what little funds they had on spells.

“I’m sure by now you’ve heard,” Nanaba said, smiling widely even though the smile didn’t reach her tired eyes. “Remission didn’t last very long and uh…well last time…” She tucked a small curl behind her ear. “…chemo was…really hard on me and mom. And Mike too. Dad, is, well you know my father, he’s…quiet. Mike is so much like him, but I can always tell what he’s thinking. Dad is still a mystery. So yeah…and before you say anything—“ She cut Levi off even though
Levi never opened his mouth to speak. “—I don’t think any of this is going to cure me, so don’t try and talk me out of it. I just…I can’t take the pain, Levi. I can’t. I don’t know that I’m strong enough to do this again—“ She sniffed a little. “I just…what does twenty dollars get me?”

Levi looked at her face and then he looked at the twenty. He took the money.

“A luck spell,” he said.

“Luck, I definitely need that.”

He handed her a candle and sent her on her way. Then he hit the button on the music and skated around in his slippers.

“Jump in the line—”

Eren’s sneakers appeared on the stairs as he made his way down. He walked past Levi who was bending his knees still stiff necked, and smacked the music off.

“Why did you do that?” Eren asked accusingly.

“Do what?”

“She—she has cancer and you gave her a candle?”

“Well she only had $20.”

“She came to you for—for—for help and you took advantage of her!”

“I only did what she asked me to do,” Levi said, going to turn on the music again.

“My girl’s name is Senora—“

Eren slapped it off again.

“What did you want me to do, Eren?” Levi asked exasperatedly. “You heard her, she knows I’m not going to cure her. She’s scared and she just wants to know things are going to be okay. Half of these people’s problems would be fixed if they just put in the effort and the other half are more afraid of the uncertainty—of the unknown—and that’s what I give them, the illusion of control, a sense of relief, of peace.”

Eren looked at him now as if he were only truly seeing him for the first time.

“You’re not a good person,” Eren said bluntly and then he left.

Levi watched him go, any reply stuck to the roof of his mouth. Eren let in Eugene as he left.

“Heya Levi!”

“Hello Eugene, what can I do for you?” Levi said, rubbing his temples.

“Well I won $20 off the scratch cards, but I really need a big one Levi. I need a big win. You know the plant is laying off people?”

Levi pinched the bridge of his nose with a sigh.

“The plant is always laying off people, Eugene.”
My tumblr is perksofbeingawaifu.

If you like please leave kudos and/or comments! They mean a lot to me! And keep me motivated! Now that buskerdu is finished and i only have one chapter left to post of it, there will be lots more updates!
The Stranger.

Eren teen angst it up, Levi’s patience is waning (as is Grisha’s).

Chapter Notes

My tumblr is perksofbeingawaifu.

If you like please leave kudos and/or comments! They mean a lot to me!

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TW: for brief mention of Petra's fiance's abusive behavior (it's implied he destroyed the wedding dress she worked so hard on).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Some people, Levi’s mother had once said, are like storm clouds. They suck up all the sunshine from the air and cast their shadow of gloom over everything else. Eren was less like a storm cloud and more like a tornado. His bad mood was not only infectious, but it was destructive. He had already knocked over two displays and sat at the table, moodily working at the tangled yarn, only making it more knotted. Every few seconds he gave a dissatisfied grunt and threw it aside.

“Are you going to return it?” Eren asked when it was quiet.

“What?” Levi asked, honestly having no idea what Eren was talking about.

“That $20 you stole.”

“I didn’t steal anything.”

“Well if you can’t promise results, then you should return her money. It’s just like stealing if you don’t actually do the thing they asked for.”

“I’m not returning the money.”

Eren appeared to drop it, but when Levi went to straighten the display at the back, Eren punched the register open and grabbed a $20 and, before Levi could stop him, ran over to the hardware store Mike’s family owned and slapped it on the counter.

“Eren!” Levi raced after him.

“Take it!” Eren yelled at Mike, running out Mike’s back door and into the alley with Levi hot on his heels.
“Go home if you’re just going to be a menace!” Levi shouted after him.

He went to take the cash back from the counter, but it was nowhere to be found. Mike only gave a long sniff, hands in the pockets of his work apron.

“Really? Nice, really nice Mike,” Levi snapped and stomped back to his store.

He didn’t make it far before the sidewalk exploded in bright yellow eggs. The teenagers in the car whooped and three more eggy missiles stained the front window.

“I hate Halloween,” Levi growled murderously to himself. “Eren! Come clean this…” The store was empty. “…up.”

He sighed.

<*>  

Eren’s bad behavior continued throughout the week. He didn’t bother to come back the next day and then the day after that he showed up very late carrying a milkshake from the MacDonalds and tugging a baseball cap over his eyes.

“But you had plenty of time to stop for that,” Levi indicated the drink.

Eren gave a sarcastic grin then sat down, putting his hat over his face.

“You know, I could call your father, let him know that you’re going back on our deal.”

“You should do that then. If that’s what you think is right. But somehow I don’t think you will because you don’t know the difference between right and wrong.”

*I hate teenagers*, Levi thought.

“Are you really going to continue with this attitude all week?”

“You know my friend, Armin? He says you’re a conman. That you scam people.”

“Why would I care what your friend Armin says?” Levi asked, stocking items.

“He’s really smart.”

“I don’t care.”

“Well you should because—“

Levi was spared Eren’s half-assed debate argument by Petra.

“Petra!” they both greeted.

“Hi Levi, so I…I messed up and need to order more fabric.”

“Messed up? I thought you were almost done. It was nearly finished.”

“I just tried to rework a few things and then just ruined it, so I need to purchase more. I have some leftover, but not nearly enough.”

“Let’s see what we’re working with, maybe we can salvage it.” Levi was glad for something to distract him from Eren.
Petra looked uncertain but finally placed the garment on the table. He looked over the ruined dress and immediately assessed the situation. It was indeed unfixable. The fabric was ripped to shreds. And not by a seam ripper or careless pair of scissors, but torn apart by bare hands. Levi could only imagine who those hands belonged to.

“Yes, I think you’ll have to start over. We may need to reorder a few more yards, depends on if you wanted a longer train.”

Eren didn’t say anything, he continued to look at the dress, touching a boot print on the trim.

“Did you want the same fabric? We might have some leftover from your order in the cutting room, if you wanted to look.”

“I think I will,” she said, leaving to examine the leftover fabric in the cutting room.

Levi frowned at the dress. The pieces folded inward like rumpled petals of a flower and he sighed. Two drops appeared on the fabric and Levi looked up to see Eren with tears in his eyes. Eren was a sensitive boy who picked up on other’s emotions even if he didn’t fully understand them. And even though he was frustrating at times, he was still just a kid. Levi made to comfort him, reaching out to his shaking shoulder.

“Don’t touch me!” Eren snarled shaking him off. He seized his backpack and fled.

<>

“I got a call today.”

“Wow, how exciting,” Eren said picking moodily at his food.

“From Mrs. Laine.”

“Your new girlfriend?” Eren asked. His father’s cooking was terrible and Eren was too angry to respect that an effort had been made.

“Someone put a brick through her office front window.”

“Sucks for her.”

“Eren!” Grisha Jaeger snapped. “They have security cameras!”

“What are you accusing me? You always accuse me of doing things!”

“I know you didn’t go to your job yesterday! Mr. Ackerman called me.”

He hadn’t gone. After an infuriating day at school, he had picked up a loose brick in the sidewalk and spied Mrs. Laine’s home furnishing store and impulsively chucked it.

“I’m not going and you can’t make me. It’s weird and it smells like mothballs in there because he has some weird cleaning fetish.”

“Eren,” Grisha pinched the bridge of his nose. “You’re going or you can’t play on the football team. You’re already on academic probation as is with this test you failed.”

“I studied!”

“Obviously not hard enough! Armin got full marks on his! Tomorrow, you’re going to work right
Eren ignored him the next day. Practice was weight training in the gym again as the rain continued outside. After practice a group of them walked to Jean’s house to play video games.

“Don’t you have a job to get to?” Jean asked.

“No, it’s stupid so I quit.”

“He didn’t quit, he’s just not showing up,” Armin explained.

“Won’t your dad be pissed?”

“Who cares? Ha, gotcha!”

“Goddamnit Eren stop sniping me! That’s it, next game no snipers!”

“You can’t ban snipers just because you’re terrible! It’s your fault for camping in the same place!”

“Well you can’t play anymore then.”

“Jean…’ Marco sighed, from on top of Jean’s bed where he and Armin were doing their homework.

“He can’t because he cheats.”

“Oh my god, fine. No snipers.”

Eren watched as his character died from a sniper shot to the head.

“You’re such an asshole, Jean.”

“Boys!” called Mrs. Kirstein. “Someone’s parents are outside!”

“Not me!” said Eren.

“Probably my mom,” Connie said, grabbing his things.

He ran down the stairs three at a time and then they heard him lugging his stuff upstairs.

“Yo Eren,” Connie said. “Your Dad is here.”

“Bullshit,” said Eren. “You’re just trying to take my controller.”

“Eren,” called Mrs. Kirstein. “Your father is here!”

At Eren’s shock Jean started laughing. “You’re so fucking dead,” Jean cackled.

Grisha Jaeger was there, in the Kirstein’s kitchen, politely refusing Nancy’s cookies.

“All those long hours at the hospital, you probably don’t have time to cook, you should let me make you dinner sometime! A nice family meal for you and the boys.”

“That’s really wonderful of you to offer,” said Grisha Jaeger, looking very cornered and uncomfortable.

He caught sight of Eren and his expression changed. “Get. In. The. car.”
Eren had to stand at his father’s side while Grisha pleaded his case to Levi.

“Honestly, Dr. Jaeger, I understand, but this is a business, not a babysitting service. I don’t even care about the pottery he destroyed. I’m not interested in forcing someone who clearly doesn’t want to be here—“

“Look, he’s a good kid, he just has a little bit of a temper and he’s stubborn. And things have been kind of strained since his mother died,” Grisha lowered his voice.

Levi’s eyes flitted to his own mother’s picture and then back to Eren.

“Sorry. It’s no excuse.”

“’M sorry. I’ll be on time, tomorrow,” Eren mumbled.

Levi and Grisha looked at him. Levi’s nose twitched the way it did whenever he was irritated.

“Fine. This is your last chance,” Levi said with a note of finality.

<*> Eren tried, he really tried. It wasn’t his fault that Coach held them after, making up for the rain outside by giving long-winded speeches. And when Eren was caught trying to sneak away before practice was over, he was tasked with putting away equipment.

“I’m here! I’m sorry!” Eren said, bursting into the shop, sliding in his muddy shoes.

It was pouring outside and he had driven through several large puddles to make it. The October rain was the only sound beside the light music of the five CDs Levi’s player cycled through.

Levi looked from Eren’s feet to the clock and pursed his lips, looking away.

“I’ll do the toilets?” Eren tried, grabbing a brush.

Levi didn’t respond so Eren went and scrubbed at them and when he finished he hovered at Levi’s elbow nervously.

“What should I do next?” Eren asked.

Levi shrugged.

It wasn’t fair! He tried to be on time! He was here wasn’t he?

Finally, there were no more tasks for Eren to work on. He sat across from Levi with his head in his hand, looking at the pile of tangled yarn as Levi knit. Petra came in, looking just as gloomy as they felt and dug out her crocheting as they all sat in the empty shop. Petra let out a sigh and then jumped a little startled at the noise. Eren agreed in his own sigh. Levi only focused on his knitting.

The door opened, bell tinkling merrily and Levi stood up to greet the customer.

“Mr. Pellem,” he said, pulling up short.

Mr. Pellem was a short rotund man with a face like a squashed toad. He hummed happily to himself as he shook off his umbrella. He spotted Levi and walked over to him somewhat duck footed and limping. Levi froze, preparing for the worst, but was surprised when Mr. Pellem grabbed him by his pointed ears and kissed him full on the lips. He blew a kiss at Petra and then
humming, Mr. Pellem shuffled out in what might have been a two-step.

Levi stared and then touched his lips. He looked back at Eren and Petra with a shocked expression. And then Petra burst into giggles. Eren couldn’t help it, he tried to muffle his laughter by shoving his fist in his mouth but that did little to stem the tide. And then Levi cracked a half grin and they all lost it.

“Near…far! Wherever you are!” Eren sang, ascending the stairs to the loft.

“Seriously you need some new music, Levi,” Petra tittered at Eren’s dramatic performance.

“What’s wrong with my music?” Levi asked.

The bell tinkled again and Nanaba walked into the store.

“Levi!” she said, spotting him. “It worked! So I honestly forgot about this, but the radio station had some contest where if you signed up you could win a trip to Hawaii and I entered the raffle and forgot about it completely, but guess what? I won! I’m going!”

She kissed his temple and waved at Petra before leaving. Levi looked up at Eren who had his mouth open. Mike entered the store in Nanaba’s wake and pulled $20 out of his apron and placed it on the counter wordlessly before joining his sister outside.

“Eren,” Levi said, holding out the $20. Eren stared at the money and then at Levi’s face. “Get us three hot cocoas and whatever else you want, but bring back my change.”

Eren returned with only 75 cents and a large slice of cherry pie for each of them.

“I like Reeves Bakery because most places put strawberries in their cherry pies, which makes no sense,” Eren said talking with his mouth full of delicious flaky crust.

“It’s cherry pie,” Petra said.

“Exactly, it’s CHERRY pie, not strawberry pie. And they don’t use those gross canned cherries, they use real Michigan cherries and freeze them.”

“Very tasty,” said Petra. “Although I can’t have much, I have to watch my figure to fit in my dress.”

“Is it good Levi?” Eren asked him.

“It’s great, you’re getting crumbs everywhere.”

Eren finished and went back to his tangled yarn, Petra chatting with him amiably.

The storm clouds lifted.

“Hey…I think I got it!!!” Eren said, quickly winding the yarn into a ball victoriously.

“Good,” said Levi.

Levi dug around in his trunk and pulled out two hand carved knitting needles. Slapping them on the counter, he stood behind Eren.

“Now we’re going to make a slipknot,” Levi said.
“I don’t know what that is,” Eren said.

“I’m going to show you, hold on,” Levi said, flicking the side of Eren’s ear.

He wrapped his arms around Eren, his pointed chin resting against Eren’s temple.

“You take this thread and you make a loop, then you’re going to bring this end through the loop. There now it’s adjustable.”

He put it around Eren’s index finger to demonstrate. Eren giggled.

“Now you’re going to put it on the needle, like so…”

Saturday was bright and sunny and Eren was too distracted to learn how to cast-on. He sat at the table staring wistfully outside.

“You can go if you want,” Levi said.

“No, I mean, I need to make it up to you from earlier in the week,” Eren said resolutely.

He’d purposefully set his alarm early and showed up a half hour before opening to get the store ready. And now it was late afternoon and the rays were all yellow and slanting through the windows and he felt restless, but determined to show Levi he was serious.

“You’re fine. Go outside. Go on, go have fun.”

Eren beamed and grabbed his backpack to leave, but stopped at the door.

“Right, I forgot! I got Jack a collar!”

“A…what?”

“A collar! Because he’s like…our mascot.”

Eren grinned with his tongue between his teeth, holding out the little red collar with a silver nametag that simply read “Jack” no phone number or any other information.

“Get out of here,” Levi said, ruffling his hair and sending him out the door.

“Promise me you’ll put it on him!” Eren said. “He won’t let me, he bites.”

“Go!”

Eren chased the last of the rays onto the college paths, pedaling furiously. Despite the rain earlier in the week, the air felt warm and the sun lit up his face. He felt something pull at him, a tug near his navel. Like things were rounding a corner. Like they might get better. He closed his eyes and embraced the sensation, extending his arms feeling the slipstream under his palms.

This was a terrible idea. He collided with a very solid stranger, knocking them both to the ground.

“I’m sorry! Sorry!” he said, falling over. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s fine,” the jogger wheezed, getting up out of the dirt. “I wasn’t really watching where I was going.”
“Still I hit you really hard, I’m so sorry!”

“It’s okay—oof—you knocked the wind out of me.” The man put his hands on his knees and leaned over.

When he stood upright, running a hand through his blond hair, Eren caught sight of his orange sweatshirt with a familiar white longhorn logo on the front.

“You’re a Texas fan?” he asked, wrinkling his nose.

“Ha, yeah, that’s where I’m from. Why you like football?” he said in a drawl, brushing dirt off his knees.

“Yeah, I’m a wide receiver,” Eren said proudly. “But Texas is a lame team, Michigan is better. Michigan knows how to win. Go blue!”

“Oh yeah? You’re saying that with a Tiger’s hat on,” the man laughed, tapping the brim of Eren’s cap, his blue eyes filled with mirth. He had a pleasant Texan drawl that Eren warmed to immediately. “The Tiger’s haven’t won a world series since 1984.”

“Yet!” Eren said grinning as well, adjusting his hat and tilting it back. “They haven’t won yet.”

The stranger’s smile slowly slipped from his face and his brow furrowed.

“Eren?” he asked.

Eren’s grin dropped.

“Eren!” the man said, looking underneath the hat at Eren’s face, his eyes widening in shock.

“How do you know my name?” Eren asked, eyes widening in fright.

“Eren, you know me!” he said, grabbing Eren’s shoulders. “Eren!”

“Get off of me you creep!” Eren shouted and he punched the man in the gut with all his strength and hopped on his bike, pedaling as fast as he could.

He looked behind him and the man only stared but didn’t chase him. And when Eren chanced look again, he was nowhere to be seen.

Chapter End Notes

"Lose Your Soul"//Dead Man's Bones

Next chapter is Halloween! Let's hope I finish it before then! :’)

My tumblr is perksofbeingawaifu.

If you like please leave kudos and/or comments! They mean a lot to me! Lemme know how you like the ending, hueheuheueh. :3
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Jean hangs out with the wrong crowd™ and discovers something in the cornfield.

Chapter Notes

"Pa Pa Power"/Dead Man's Bones

THIS IS HALLOWEEN THIS IS HALLOWEEN HALLOWEEN HALLOWEEN Halloween Halloween!!!!

I decided to do a Jean POV for this chapter because Jean knows something Eren and Levi don't. I thought long and hard about it but I decided I didn't want fandom and fanfic norms to dictate how I told my story (plus this opens me up to write possible Jeankasa smut later :3).

***TRIGGER WARNINGS: Animal Death*** that is possibly very upsetting. I know you guys are going to have a lot of opinions, but I had this planned from the beginning. So if you've lost a furry friend recently, please consider skipping this chapter or shooting me a message on tumblr for a summary. I was very careful how I handled it, but it's still an upsetting topic.

My tumblr is perksofbeingawaifu.

HOPE YOU'RE READY FOR SOME SPOOPY SHIT!!! (the real dark shit won't happen until after the time jump, but still)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jean didn’t like being out of the loop, which was really quite unfortunate since he was rarely in the loop. More like standing on the outside of the loop looking in, he knew enough to know that there was a loop, but just couldn’t find himself amongst those privileged few who actually knew what was going on. Jean’s sphere of knowledge was limited to the many, many movies he watched late at night on the tv in his room and the bits of gossip he picked up secondhand from Connie. See, Connie knew nothing either, he was useless, but Sasha knew everyone’s business and shared it all with Connie. Jean just had to lean on Connie and he’d start babbling, but even radio Sasha was silent on the Eren drama so Jean was stuck on the outside.

It was always like that! Eren treated him different just because he hadn’t gone to pre-K with him. Eren always said, “He hasn’t been here long enough!” but Jean had moved from the Bloomfield Hills and Detroit Country Day over three years ago when he joined the sixth grade class of this podunk town. It wasn’t fair he was always pushed to the outside like this, never being allowed in on the details. All he knew was that Eren Jaeger was getting everyone’s attention again. Now he
didn’t have to turn in yesterday’s homework (not fair!) and all the teachers (save Woerman), were
tiptoeing around him like he was some fragile glass sculpture.

“They had me look at a bunch of photos but I didn’t recognize him,” Eren said in a hushed tone to
Armin and Mikasa.

“See who? The butt bandit?” Jean asked petulantly.

Eren, Armin, and Mikasa all turned around. Armin’s mouth hung open in shock.

“…What?” Eren asked.

“The butt bandit. He steals your butt,” Jean said, coming up and poking him in the ribs.

“You are so fucking stupid, Jean,” Eren said shaking his head and shoving his hand away.

“Eren would like a bandit to steal his butt. Boop! Bye butt!” Jean poked him again.

“Are you serious right now?” Armin asked, his pale brows turning upward in incredulity.

“Boop! Butt is gone,” Jean poked him again.

“Knock it off!” Eren slapped away his finger.

“Or what? Afraid we’ll know you want your butt stolen? Hey guys, Eren likes a stolen butt.”

“You asshole,” Eren said, losing his temper and lunging for Jean.

<> 

It wasn’t the worst damage Jean had suffered from a fight with Eren. But it was his favorite shirt
and Eren had torn a hole right at the armpit. Jean looked at it in the mirror and angrily kicked the
school tile walls. It wasn’t fair. Eren got away with everything and pulled shit like this all the time
and teachers just let it slide. He didn’t know why Mikasa or Armin hung out with a psycho like
Eren.

“Quit being a sore loser Jean!” Eren shouted from outside the locker room.

“I only lost because you ambushed me!”

Well at least Eren was out of that weird mood.

“He ripped my favorite shirt,” Jean said to Marco, rubbing his nose as he exited the room.

Marco sighed.

“What?” Jean turned to him.

“You did kindof start it.”

“Why are you always on his side?” Jean asked, hurt and betrayed.

“I’m not, but you always egg him on—Jean—Jean come back—“

Jean stalked away and stayed ahead of the group as they walked past the cornfield to the
downtown. They were all walking slowly, partly because they were walking together and partly
because Coach had insisted on burpees for the junior varsity team and they were sore and tired. For
some reason now Coach said everyone had to walk together with Eren. He said it was team bonding, but it was stupid that Eren wasn’t allowed to be left alone. Jean wasn’t his babysitter and really, who would want to hang out with that suicidal jerkoff?

“Aww, lookit the widdle baby froshies,” jeered Daz out the window of Hunter’s Bronco.

“We’re sophomores you dumbass,” Eren spat as Armin nervously tugged his hat over his eyes to avoid being seen by the seniors.

“Hey Eren, do you think you can walk a mile without us holding your hand?” Daz said.

“Ha!” Jean laughed in appreciation.

“I think Kirstein just earned himself a ride,” Daz said and Hunter slowed the car to a stop.

When Jean didn’t immediately move, Daz motioned for him to hurry. Stuttering to life like a frozen statue, Jean leapt into the car. He rolled down the window to shout, “Enjoy walking!” and flipped the bird.

They sped away laughing. Really this was where Jean belonged—with the cool seniors. The kids in his grade just couldn’t take a joke.

“Man, that Jaeger kid is a real piece of work.”

“You have no idea,” Jean said, rolling his eyes. “Like now all he does is talk about his stupid job, it’s so annoying. He’s so immature.”

This, Jean thought, was a very mature thing for him to say.

“At the old lady shop?”

Jean didn’t really think of it like that but to be honest he didn’t know anyone who knit who wasn’t a grandma.

“Yeah. Like the owner is some new age freak who does all these little spells and Eren just falls for it hook, line, and sinker.”

“Oh yeah? Like what?” Jesse asked, turning his head to look at Jean interestedly.

Jean had never had such an eager audience before. He began recounting some of Eren’s stories, now realizing that thanks to all the time Eren had repeated them (much to Jean’s aggravation) he now knew all the details. For once he was the one in the loop.

He listed all of Levi’s spells and customers, but the names and the fine details escaped him so he embellished a little.

“Do they work?” asked Jesse.

Jean didn’t really have an answer to that.

“Well Eren cast a spell that Levi showed him to get us out of a test, but I think Levi cursed us instead so…” he shrugged. “Eren just never shuts up about him and his stupid cat.”

“Cat?”

“Yeah, his familiar, you know. All witches need one.”
Err…don’t they?

“Yeah, witches and familiars, like they tit feed them,” Jesse said, with more considerable knowledge on witches than Jean ever had.

Jean very much doubted Levi breastfed his cat. Anyway, wasn’t milk bad for cats? Or was that chocolate? He didn’t really remember.

“Yeah Eren is obsessed with it. He got it a collar with its name. Jack the Cat. Stupid name for a cat.”

“Oh hey, look it’s Annie—NICE ASS LEONHARDT!” Daz shouted out the window.

“Fuck off slothbrain!” she said, flipping the bird.

Jean ducked so she wouldn’t see him. She would literally kick his ass if he ever said something like that to her. One time in sixth grade he asked if he could see her boobs after losing a dare (to Eren naturally) and she put him in a headlock. She had only released him when he pointed out that he was even closer to her boobs than he had been before and then she punched him in the sternum.

Jesse handed Jean a large case of eggs from the large restaurant supply chain on the outskirts of town. “Here hold this,” he said.

Jean had never seen so many eggs in his life outside of a grocery store.

“What are you doing with these?” Jean asked, not understanding.

“Bombs away,” Jesse said, lobbing them at the head of some freshman.

It cracked and splattered and Jean burst out laughing.

“Here, you go,” Jesse said and Daz slowed so Jean could line up a perfect shot and knock the flute case out of another freshman’s hands.

“BAND NERD!” Jean shouted.

Devil’s night. The night before Halloween. Back when they lived outside Detroit, Jean’s mother hadn’t ever let him go outside on Devil’s night. Jean’s dad said she was overprotective. Then he and Mom moved up here and Dad stayed in Detroit with his new girlfriend. Devil’s night in Detroit put a whole city on edge. The news had all sorts of pictures of buildings ablaze from suspected arson cases and a young Jean thought this was the true spirit of Halloween and could only marvel at the destruction.

“Hunter! Go by the bakery,” Jesse asked, shaking the driver’s seat.

They peppered the window as fat Mr. Reeves came out running. He cursed at them and then tripped over his own apron, slipping in the wet egg. Jean had never laughed so hard in his life. He was wiping tears from his eyes as they did a U-turn to get the other side of the street. Jean heaved six eggs at once and they all landed on Levi’s window.

“Nice shot! You’ve got good aim, you know. You could be quarterback your senior year,” Jesse said and Jean hid a smug smile.

They sped out of the downtown area just in case anyone called the cops and drove around the neighborhoods, occasionally egging houses and stopping to smash any pumpkins that were too
close to the sidewalk. When they ran out of eggs, Jesse rummaged around for a baseball bat. He took the first swing to Mr. Dallard’s ugly mallard mailbox. The head of the duck flew off in a rain of splinters and they all crowed with laughter. Jesse passed Jean the bat as they steered into the less nice side of town. Jean aimed and swung, destroying a bright green mailbox. Jean’s laughter was stifled as a man came running out in only his underwear cursing them in Spanish. Jean recognized him.

“Shit,” Jean muttered.

“I can’t breathe,” Jesse howled. “Dude came out in his tightie whiteys man!”

“Fuck,” Jean cursed. “That was Marco’s uncle. What if he saw me?”

“So? Who cares?” Daz said, rolling his eyes.

“You don’t understand, he’ll tell Marco’s mom and Marco’s mom will call my mom. I’m dead.”

Jesse continued laughing, which turned into a hacking cough.

“Just stop here, let me out, I’m close enough to home,” Jean said.

They stopped and Jean got out. He reached in for his backpack and Hunter stepped on the gas. Jean jogged to catch up and they pumped the gas again.

Jean finally grabbed his backpack and slammed the door shut before stomping toward his house.

He lay in bed, his belly full of writhing eels, waiting for the other shoe to drop. And when his mother called up, “Jean?” he lay still as a corpse, anticipating the worse.

“Jeanbo! Dinner is ready, mon petite chou! My little cabbage!”

She kissed his temple as he crawled down the stairs looking like a burglar afraid of being caught. The dreaded phone call never came.

<*>*Halloween was a Thursday. It was also two days before the big varsity game downstate so the coaches were scrabbling with extra practices for the older team members and the junior varsity team didn’t have much to do. Instead they decided on a joint practice with the cross country team. The cross coach was tired and often distracted so that meant they could do whatever they wanted as long as they did it while running. And unlike the football team which thought Halloween was for little kids, the entire cross team dressed up.

“What are you supposed to be?” Jean asked Sasha.

“A squirrel,” she said and Jean supposed those painted buck teeth looked like a squirrel.

“Where are your nuts?” Jean teased and Eren sighed impatiently.

“In my pouch,” Sasha said, not quite understanding his question, pulling out a bag of assorted nuts.

He shouldn’t have asked.

“And why are you Hitler?” he asked Armin.

“I’m not, I’m Charlie Chaplin, for the fourth time!” Armin said, smoothing his hair, but gave up.
He rubbed off his fake mustache with water from the spigot outside.

“Guys, you can’t just stand around here, go on, we’re doing a twenty minute run. See you all on Jennings,” said the cross coach not looking up from his clipboard.

“Running is stupid,” Jean grumbled, but they all set off at a jog.

They weren’t intent on going anywhere fast so they paused to look at anything interesting, only kicking up their feet when the coach passed by in his truck.

“What’re you guys doing?” Connie asked, sprinting up from the soccer fields.

“Joint practice. Don’t you have practice of your own?” Eren asked as their group joined up with several of the others who were walking home, most practices having been cancelled due to the holiday. They all had plans to meet up at the movie theatre downtown before the movie so Christa, Mikasa, and Ymir were walking to Ymir’s house and Bert and Marco were heading for the park.

“Oh. Well they’re doing a different kind of joint practice,” Connie shrugged.

“Stoners,” Jean rolled his eyes.

“The rest of the group is way up there,” Marco pointed out as they slowed to walk next to him.

“Ugh, this is stupid,” Jean whined. “We have to run all the way to Jennings and back. It’s pointless.”

“Well…you could take a shortcut,” Connie thumbed at the corn field.

The corn field sat right next to the cow pasture. At the moment the stalks looked more like skeletons, bleached and dead in the in the late October cold. The group walked to the edge of the decaying field and stared.

“We could race,” Eren said, suddenly mischievous.

“You’re on,” Connie said.

“Connie you’re not even on the cross team,” Eren snorted.

“Dunno, Coach always said the soccer team could run circles around us,” Armin said shrugging.

“I want to race too!” Christa said, carefully setting down her book bag.

“Yeah, me too,” Mikasa said, stretching in preparation to race.

“We’re doing another competition? Good, can’t wait to beat Freckles again,” Ymir said.

“Sorry, I can’t help you with this one Ymir,” Reiner said laughing.

“No need, I’ll beat your butt, you’re too big, too much inertia to get going,” she said confidently.

“First one to the edge of the field wins!” Connie said, taking role of MC as he always did in their little games. “Everyone pick a lane.”

“Good, because I don’t want Eren staring at my ass the entire time,” Jean drawled, stretching. When Eren rolled his eyes, Jean mouthed, “Butt bandit.”
“I swear to god, Jean—“ Eren started but was cut off as Mikasa stepped in between the two of them and shoved them apart before taking her own spot.

“On your mark, get set—“ Connie started, but Jean took off before Connie gave the final word.

“Goddamnit Jean—“

“Go!” Connie said.

Jean was quite a ways ahead of the rest of the group but Eren, despite his late start, was doing everything in his power to catch up. Jean could see Eren and Mikasa in his peripheral vision, bisected by the tall plants. Connie sprinted to his right smacking the leaves like he was high fiving a long line and laughing as he ran. The people next to him became a blur. Lines and lines of dried husks sped past him. He had to beat Eren. Mikasa was always following around that jerk. He had the foolish idea that if he beat Eren at this one thing then maybe she’d see him in a different light. “Oh that Jean, he’s so fast and good looking.” “Oh that Jean, he is better than Eren at everything.” It was an indulgent thought, but he clung to it. He began fantasizing already on what would happen if he won. Or if they won the game or if he made varsity or if he made quarterback or team captain. It was foolish, but it spurred him on and he pushed forward. The late afternoon cast tall shadows and the dark shapes of his friends chased after him. He chanced look over at Eren’s lane to shoot him a victorious grin and with a lurch he realized:

That wasn’t Eren.

Dozens of shadows raced down the lanes. Strangers. All of them.

In his panic Jean tripped over a rock and fell sideways, crashing into Connie’s lane. He stood up dizzily, whipping his head around. The smell of decaying plant matter and the cow pasture was making him disoriented and he couldn’t remember which direction he’d come from.

“Hello?” he shouted.

Nothing.

“Guys where are you?”

The leaves of corn swallowed up his words. Silence. There was no other sound but his own heart pounding in his ears and his heavy breathing. It was as if someone had vacuumed all of the noise out of the space. Jean’s shouts didn’t carry past his feet. In the dead air of October, in the stillness of everything, any tiny sound had him leaping like a scared deer. He crushed a twig under his foot and jumped the tiny noise seemingly magnified, he brushed against a stalk and the scrape of it against his ripped shirt had his arm hairs on end. His senses heightened, he watched and waited and listened.

Someone sped past his ear, just out of sight, but he heard them slapping against the leaves.

“Guys stop it! I’m serious!”

He heard a giggle and turned his head, but whoever it was, darted out of sight again.

“Where are you? I’m lost!”

*I’m lost, I’m lost, I’m lost.*

Jean froze as his own words were thrown back at him. It wasn’t an echo. It felt like someone was
whispering it just behind his ear, just out of sight. He put his arms up preparing to fight and watched a small beetle climb up onto a leaf.

“Hello?”

*Hello, hello, hello.*

“Stop it!”

It stopped. Then the leaves at the far end of the row began shaking violently as if by a strong breeze. The vibration spread to the next stalk and the next, gaining speed as it came for Jean. All of those neat rows pointed like an arrow to him. He didn’t wait to see what was coming for him, he ran. He didn’t care where he was going as long as it was far away from that. He crashed out of the field and barreled into Mikasa. He fell down, nearly taking her with him as he scrambled away from the edge of the field.

“What took you so long Jean?” Eren laughed, blinking sweat out of his eyes.

Jean couldn’t tear his eyes away from the field but when he did it was to see all of his friends laughing or hiding their laughter at his expense.

“Where the hell were you?!?” Jean shouted. “I was lost for ages!”

Or at least it had felt as much. He could have sworn an hour had passed since they had all run in.

“He got lost,” Eren laughed to the others.

“Fuck off!” Jean said shoving him.

Eren shoved back. They wound up on the ground again.

“What the hell is your problem?” Eren said when Marco managed to separate them.

“That wasn’t funny!” Jean spat. “Fuck you guys. Fuck all of you.”

“Jean…” Marco sighed.

“Fuck you too!” Jean wiped at his nose and stormed away toward the road.

The group followed behind him at a distance and he worked into a jog and joined the rest of the cross group refusing to look back at them. He only relented when practice finished. They had made previous plans to go see a movie. Reiner was going to drive them to go see *The Ring*. Jean loved movies. He loved going to the movies with his friends.

“Come on Jean!” Eren shouted.

“I’m not going unless I get shotgun,” Jean said, crossing his arms over his chest, still upset.

Eren looked like he was going to say something or possibly fight Jean but Marco nudged Eren and he said, “Sure, go ahead.”

“Connie you’re on the hump,” Reiner said and Connie groaned loudly.

They got situated and Jean continued staring out the window moodily. He felt something wrap around his chest.
“Sorry you got lost,” Eren said, wedging his head between Connie and Jean’s shoulders.

“Why didn’t you guys answer me?” Jean said wiping his nose. “I was calling for you.”

Eren pulled back in surprise, “We didn’t hear you.”

“How could you not? I was shouting at the top of my lungs!”

“Jean, we didn’t hear you. Besides you made it out on your own.”

Now that he was out of the field, he was feeling foolish. He had panicked. It was already embarrassing enough with his friends knowing. And besides, he couldn’t even really remember what had happened or why it had frightened him so. A leaf shook. He could just hear Eren’s laughter at his expense: Jean Kirstein, frightened by wild husks of corn.

After the movie, hyped up on a giant Cherry Coke and adrenaline pumping through their veins from the movie, he felt better.

“Seven dayyyyyys,” he whispered into Eren’s ear.

“Ugh! Your breath is disgusting.”

“That’s milk dud breath,” Jean said.

“You’re going to pop off a bracket,” Sasha said, flossing popcorn out of her braces. “That’s how I lost my last three. Well that and Tootsie Rolls.”

Jean checked his brackets in the mirror. Perfect. Eren didn’t need braces. Asshole.

They walked arm in arm, singing the school fight song or wrestling with one another as they crossed the bridge.

“But…okay…going back to Firestarter—Armin, she starts fires with her MIND,” Jean said, shaking Armin. “Tell me that isn’t cool!”

“Oh my god you are so obsessed with fire,” Armin said laughing.


“What?”

“Firestarter,” Eren whispered in his ear and both Jean and Eren burst out laughing. Even Armin couldn’t stop.

“Butt bandit,” Jean whispered and Eren had to drape himself over Reiner’s shoulder to stay upright they were laughing so hard.

“Man, you guys are so funny,” Ymir drawled sarcastically.

“Look,” said Connie in a muffled voice somewhere behind them.

They turned to see he had zipped up his fleece over his head.

“Headless horseman!” he said and galloped at them as Sasha made clip-clop noises with her mouth.
“The horseman can’t pass over the bridge,” Armin pointed out.

“And you need a pumpkin for a head,” Jean said, picking a Jack O’Lantern one up off the front stoop of the grocer’s.

Connie put it on his head and Christa gasped, “Ew!” in disgust.

“Not too bad actually,” Connie said. But when he tried to pull it off it wouldn’t budge.

“It’s those big ole jug ears of yours,” Jean laughed as Reiner stepped in to free Connie.

Connie fell backwards when he popped out and Jean couldn’t contain his glee. While Jean loved all movies, horror movies were his favorite. His body longed for the thrill. He would sit in the dark and wait for that jolt of a jump scare or the screech of jarring music or the dimly lit shadows that held unspeakable things. He loved it. Because it was all good fun. It was all fake. He’d stay up all night watching cheap cable horror movies on the television set in his bedroom.

“I don’t think I’m going to be able to sleep tonight after that movie,” Christa said, tucked into Ymir’s arm for warmth. “That movie was too freaky for me.”

Jean personally thought the movie was creepy, yes, but not that scary. It was innovative—at least if one wasn’t familiar with Japanese horror it was, but nevermind that. He didn’t jump or get scared anymore wondering if the Candyman was going to come after him. Now it was all about the story. Which is why he couldn’t resist doing what he did next. It was Halloween after all.

“Have you guys ever heard the legend of the witch?” he asked, a sly grin tugging at the corner of his mouth.

They all blinked at him. How had they not heard this story? Everyone knew this story.

“I might have?” Sasha said raising her hand.

“I think you told me,” Marco said.

“Both of you shush. I’m going to tell you all the story.” Jean paused for dramatic effect. “The witch set up her shop in that building over there.”

Jean pointed down the street to Levi’s craft store. It was well after closing time and dark save for the street lamps.

“No one knows where she came from, but she arrived like that!” He snapped his fingers. He didn’t know how accurate it was, but that’s what one of his mom’s boyfriend’s had said. “She arrived with nothing but her broom and her son, who many say is the spawn of the Devil.”

Eren snorted and everyone turned and looked at him for confirmation. He only shrugged.

“Then one dark and stormy night, dressed all in white, after a lover’s spat, she threw herself from this bridge!” Jean leapt dramatically to the edge.

“I’m not sure that would do much damage,” Armin said, looking down at the very short bridge. “I mean, you might break a leg but it’s not very high.”

Jean tsked impatiently because Armin was ruining his story.

“And some people say that you can still see her ghost in her white gown. And on nights when the moon is full, if you look in the window of the shop...” he crept closer to the darkened store front.
“You can see her portrait hanging there. You have to look at it for ten whole seconds and if she looks back, you will die in a year.”

They all gathered at the window to get a good look at the odd portrait of Levi’s mother, counting under their breath.

“You’re so full of it, Jean—“ Eren started, coming up behind the group.

“Oh!” Marco gasped, cutting Eren off.

“What?”

“That car drove by and I thought she…nevermind, trick of the light,” Marco laughed sheepishly.

“What is this?” Eren said, now more interested in the door of the shop than the window.

A large ugly nail had been driven through the front door with a piece of wire hanging from it. The wire had been cut with a pair of pliers, leaving a jagged edge that Eren toyed with curiously. It was strange and unsightly sure, but it was also taking focus away from Jean’s spooky story.

“That’s not usually there,” Eren frowned.

“Now if you just turn your eyes inside—“ Jean tried again.

“I don’t want to look,” Christa wailed, still covering her eyes as Ymir attempted to stare down the portrait.

“Yeah, you know what Jean, I think I’ve heard this story before,” Connie said scratching his head.

“But you got the details wrong. She didn’t jump off a bridge she hanged herself.”

“No, I heard it right,” Sasha rolled her eyes. “She was strangled by her lover.”

“I heard she stabbed herself,” Armin volunteered quietly.

“Cancer.”

They stopped their chatter and froze as Levi’s hoarse voice could be heard somewhere on the other side of the white painted bench.

“And it was very painful. And very expensive.”

“Levi?” Eren asked, the only one brave enough to approach.

He sat hunched over on the cold cement, a bottle of wine braced against his thigh and large shoebox between his feet. In his fist, he clutched something small, but glinting in the lamplight. They all looked around nervously at one another trying to figure how much he had heard, but with his hair in his eyes it was impossible to tell his mood.

“Levi, are you drunk?” Eren asked, putting his hands on his hips as the rest hid behind him.

Levi gave a hollow laugh. “No. Thinking about it though.”

“Well, what are you doing down there? It’s dirty.”

He held out his hand to help Levi off the ground. Levi stared at it for a moment and then at the item curled in his palm.
“I’m sorry, Eren,” he sighed.

He opened his hand and Jean’s heart plummeted. Suddenly he felt worse than he had when he had destroyed Uncle Tio’s mailbox, because he knew, he knew, this was all his fault. And even though he’d never seen it before, Jean immediately recognized the little red collar for what it was and what it meant.

Chapter End Notes

My tumblr is perksofbeingawaifu.

If you like please leave kudos and/or comments! They mean a lot to me! Lemme know how you liked the corn scene. Based on real life experience -.-

Also please, if you have a black cat (or any outdoor pet) bring them inside for the Halloween weekend. People are sickos.
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Armin tries a little witchcraft of his own.

Chapter Notes

ARMIN POV! i hope you're psyched. and yes, next chapter we go back to Eren and Levi POV. i really want to do a Mikasa pov chapter but i don't really have need for it yet, so we'll see.

***TRIGGER WARNINGS: Animal Death*** there isn't a new animal death or any gore discussed but it is mentioned in this chapter as Eren and Levi bury Jack and the catalyst for Armin's actions. Message me on my tumblr or skip ahead if you're worried.

My tumblr is perksofbeingawaifu.

"Pop Corn"//Gershon Kingsley

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Magic, Armin realized, was not so different from science. It was just what people called an event when they couldn’t explain it. Like before people knew about gravity, they just assumed things simply stayed there because of magic. There was always an explanation for the supposed supernatural. Armin had always scoffed at the trashy headlines in the checkout line: “Angels saved me during explosive car wreck.” No, angels didn’t save anyone, first responders did, the angels were merely a response to shock. Magic, like science, followed rules. Just like in grade school, don’t step on a crack or you’ll break your mothers back.

Following death, there were so many traditions, Armin mused. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Civilization started when people began caring for their dead. Pharaohs were buried with their cats. During the Victorian period, the obsession with death was so prominent even as sex was practically verboten. People like Levi and Levi’s mother built their business hosting séances and faking ghost pictures (he couldn’t stop thinking about how people used to take pictures with dead bodies, it haunted him). Armin wasn’t surprised Eren was drawn to Levi. Those who have experienced personal loss gravitate towards those who claimed a connection to the occult.

Christa cried the entire time Levi and Eren dug the hole. Ymir asked Reiner to take them home, but Christa refused saying she wanted to be there. It was quiet save for her sniffles and the scrape of the shovel. Eren and Levi worked together (with Levi doing the bulk of the work) working up a sweat, their breath coiling up to the streetlamp. Reiner had offered to help, but when his help wasn’t needed, he stood to the side awkwardly, hands in his pockets.
“Pet Sematary,” Jean said suddenly.

Armin stopped and stared. Eren and Levi halted their digging to squint up at him. Jean’s face slowly turned color and he rubbed at his nose again.

“What is wrong with you?” Armin mouthed at him and Jean flushed even darker.

They lowered the shoebox in the ground and all stood around the hole.

“Someone should say something,” Christa said as the silence grew.

“Um, here lies Jack,” Eren said, wiping at his eyes but only smearing dirt across his cheek. “He was a good cat. He liked tuna and having his chin rubbed.”

“He liked visiting me every morning,” Levi nodded. “And every night.”

And that was it.
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The next day at lunch everyone was sullen. The varsity team was meeting in the cafeteria before leaving for their big game on Saturday and their boisterous conversation was at odds with the solemn air of Eren and their friends. Jean was unusually quiet. Christa couldn’t stop crying. Mikasa was the only one seemingly unaffected, but she was always so stoic and hard to read, even for Armin who was used to her ways.

“How can they just act like they did nothing wrong?” Christa asked, sniffling.

Then Daz meowed loudly and the seniors all burst into laughter. Christa stormed from the table in tears. Eren got up out of his seat with the intent of hitting him, but Mikasa pulled him back down.

“Remember what Levi said,” she murmured quietly, hand firmly on his shoulder.

Levi had instructed Eren not to seek out the perpetrators.

“It’s not your job to carry out some kind of half-assed vengeance,” Levi said, walking back with the shovel slung over his shoulder, even as Eren looked like he was about to do just that. “This isn’t the first time something like this has happened.”

Armin thought Levi was very wise to try and stop Eren from taking out his anger in revenge. But Levi was at a disadvantage. He didn’t know who had done this. They did. They knew exactly who had committed this act.

“I’m going to go study,” Jean mumbled, getting up from the table.

“Can I have your tots?” Sasha asked and Jean wordlessly pushed his tray toward her.

Levi the witch made his living based on his reputation, Armin mused. If he were a homeless man on the street telling people to hop in a circle three times to prevent the black plague, no one would believe him. Levi cultivated his mystery. He also was very good at making his promises vague. He would help lead people to a conclusion, but then stay back enough and let them make the connection themselves. A raffle ticket bought far before a luck spell? Confirmation bias. A husband watching his wife perform a spell she thought was going to save their marriage suddenly feeling amorous? Placebo effect.

What would it take to convince someone like Daz, Jesse, and Hunter they were cursed?
Armin decided he was going to do a little magic of his own.

“Hey Eren, do you remember how you said you would help Grandpa and me clean the storage room at the shop?”

“Yeah,” Eren said, having a hard time removing his eyes from the varsity team.

“Do you think Levi would mind if you did it tomorrow?”

“I’ll have to ask him.”

The Saturday after Halloween, Armin carefully took down all of the decorations and stored them in the box. Armin’s parents had passed away many years back. They were making an entire journey around the mitt when their sailboat sank. He barely knew them, it had always been him and Grandpa. His grandfather owned a music store tucked away in the inner corner downtown. They rarely had customers. And if they did it was just for guitar strings or reeds for woodwinds. As such they needed to cut back their inventory.

“Did you know, I could learn to play the complete library of Britney Spears songs on piano?” Eren asked, turning the booklet to him.

Armin snorted and took the book of sheet music away from him.

“C’mon, the backroom is a mess.”

Armin’s grandfather couldn’t lift the heavy boxes anymore so he usually had Armin do it and when it was too large a task for him, he asked Eren to come help. It had been a while since they had last organized the back and it was a mess.

“What…” Eren asked, picking stuff off the shelf. “Is this?”

“Tape recorder.”

Armin’s grandfather used to repair old recording equipment too, but since the age of digital music, no one used cassette recorders. And people who had dropped theirs off to be repaired had long since moved on and forgotten their machine. Armin’s grandfather, dutifully repaired them and then called them back, but no one responded. Now after a year (more than a year for some), they were in the process of throwing them out.

“What’s that?” Eren asked, looking at the tape in Armin’s hand.

“Oh, it’s one of the sound effect samplers we have. Yeah, every Halloween we stock a bunch of these and haunted houses come in and buy the tapes and then play them. Or sometimes the civic theatre will buy them for their shows. “I was thinking…we could use it.”

“For what?” Eren laughed.

He grabbed it out of Armin’s hand, his tongue between his teeth in a silly grin, and popped it into the recorder.

Witches cackling, doors creaking, bats flapping their wings, heavy footsteps, a cat yowling, a sinister laugh.

Eren stared at it and rewound it back. Heavy footsteps, a cat yowling. He rewound it back. A cat yowling.
“Armin…” he said, now starting to see what Armin was proposing. “How many of these do you have?”

“Recorders? Dozens. Tapes? I can copy this track and make more.”

Eren was still looking at the device in his hands, his brain connecting the dots. Armin decided it was time to lead him to the conclusion. He grabbed Eren’s wrists.

“Eren, let’s cast a spell.”

“What are you doing, Eren?” Bertholdt asked nervously as Eren began gathering materials on the cafeteria table.

They were all sitting at the table for lunch, their trays in a pretty circle that broke when it met Mikasa’s seat. She carefully worked at a bag of chips given to her by Annie.

“I’m casting a powerful curse!” Eren thundered. Eren’s voice always carried but today he was being especially loud. Everyone in the cafeteria, having already heard rumors that Levi was a witch and was teaching Eren, suddenly grew quiet so they could listen in.

“I don’t mess around with spells,” Marco said, crossing and excusing himself from the table.

“Curse? Really Jaeger?” Jean asked, putting his chin in his hand as he watched this unfold.

“A CURSE TO PUNISH THOSE FOR THEIR MISDEEDS!” Eren bellowed.

They watched him pull out a container of eye black and dip his thumb in it. Eren dragged his chapped and nail bitten thumb down from his forehead, over the bridge of his nose and lips. He made another line perpendicular to this just under his eyes and across his high cheekbones crossing at the bone of his nose. He closed his eyes and gripped the lunchroom table, leaving a smear of black on the cheap fake wood. He took a shuddering gasp and exhaled.

“Eren…what are you doing?” Jean asked, picking up his chocolate milk in alarm.

“Something Levi taught me,” Eren said before beginning a slow haunting chant.

Jean backed away from the table and the silence in the cafeteria grew. The seniors turned to look as Eren continued speaking in this foreign tongue and then he slammed his hands on the table. The sound made Sasha jump and pick up her tray and move away from him. He slammed the table again. Mikasa stood up, leaving Armin the only one left sitting.

“It is done!” Eren said, rising from his seat.

“I don’t feel…” Mikasa said, trailing off before slumping to the ground.

There were screams and shouts and someone grabbed the Vice Principal to help with Mikasa. All in all, thought Armin, it was a very good impression.

Daz was the youngest of three boys, all of which were loud and large and hard to ignore. Daz had seen his first porn mag at the age of nine when he went to go fart on his brother’s pillow (the boys came down with pink eye from this and his exasperated mother had dragged them all to the emergency clinic). Flipping through the glossy pages of the bare breasted women bent over in
ludicrous poses, he found himself feeling a great deal like Indiana Jones discovering some hidden treasure. And so after that he always kept a magazine nearby to look at (or maybe to jerk off in the school bathrooms). But when he went to his locker again, he found the magazine warped and wet and covered in what looked like blood.

“It’s rust,” Hunter said dismissively.

“It’s blood,” Daz insisted.

“It’s just rust,” Hunter said, running his hands over the top of his locker, his hand coming away stained red and wet. “Rust.”

But then Hunter’s car wouldn’t start. They were forced to walk.

“I’m not taking the bus,” Jesse said as Hunter emerged from under the hood.

“Well you don’t have much of an option,” Hunter said as he walked over to the payphone to call a tow truck.

“I’m serious, I’m not taking the bus.”

“Then drive your own car. Oh wait, I forgot, you’re the loser who just bums off me,” Hunter said and Jesse huffed away.

They all took the bus the next day.

“Fucking embarrassing. I’m like stuck sitting next to this freshman and this eighth grader like a total dickwad. Did you get it fixed yet?” Jesse said, shouldering his gear bag.

“No but they’re getting it looked at today,” Hunter said, quickly losing his temper as he punched open his locker. “Dude, what’s that smell?”

“I don’t know,” Jesse said only now catching wind of it.

“Is it your BO?” Hunter said sniffing at him, but that wasn’t the source.

Jesse opened up his locker and the stench hit them like a brick wall.

“Oh gross, ugh!” Daz retched. “What is that?”

“I don’t know!” Jesse said coughing.

Armin watched them carefully from the other side of the hallway as he stopped at the drinking fountain. When they looked back at him, he was already hurriedly walking to his next class.

The vice principal called an exterminator to the school to look for the source of the smell, thinking it was like last time when a raccoon got in the air ducts and when that didn’t help, his secretary paced the halls, her nostrils flaring as she searched for the source. Soon, people avoided that hallway, including Jesse’s crush Lea. All of his books and coat reeked and when he passed her by in the hallway she gagged to her friends and they ran giggling away.

“Fuckin’ bullshit man,” Jesse complained, trying to smoke out the smell. “Got no ride, got no chicks, got nothin’.”

Worse still for Daz and his crew was the noise. Hunter first noticed it when he got back in the car. The mechanic said they found nothing wrong with it but the sound—he had asked them about the
creaking noise and they said there was no sound. Then Daz said the noises seemed to follow him around. He pulled his hoodie over his ears to muffle it.

Then, nearly one week to the day after Halloween, Daz simply couldn’t take it anymore.

“Can you hear that? CAN YOU HEAR IT?” Daz shouted. “Reiner, tell me you can hear it!”

“Hear what?” Reiner asked and Daz’s face crumpled.

Daz left the locker room still screaming his head off to anyone who would listen that he was cursed.

“It’s here! It’s following me! I wants me dead!” he cried.

Reiner sighed and grabbed Armin’s arm.

“C’mon, this has gone on long enough. This was enough to freak me out, it sounds like some demonic portal to hell,” Reiner said.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Armin said, wiping his face completely clear of any expression.

Reiner sighed and gave Armin one last look of brotherly admonishment before heading to the parking lot.

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“Why does it sound like that?” Eren said, standing on a chair and pushing up a panel in the ceiling to pull down the device.

Demonic portal to hell was right. The hissing and yowling of the cat on the recorder had slowed down and the pitch dragged down to a sinister level that had Armin’s hairs on end.

“It’s probably out of batteries, we just need to switch them.”

“We should probably also move it,” Eren said. “It’s not good to keep it in the same place every day.”

“I agree,” Armin said. He had thought as much earlier. They should also adjust the sound so it wasn’t quite so loud and obvious.

He pulled a pack of batteries out of his coat and switched them, then flipped the recorder over. He clicked his tongue when he realized the tape had spung out and tangled in the recorder. Digging out a pencil he set about rewinding. While he did that, he recited the combination to Daz’s locker from memory and Eren opened it.

“The bottoms are false, so just pull it up and put the recorder in like we did the milk bottle,” Armin said.

“Yup. On it,” said Eren, wedging a stiff wooden ruler underneath to pop the metal plate.

They heard the jingle of keys and ducked down.

“Hello? Someone there?” Coach Hannes called.

“Turn it off!” Eren hissed, hitting all the buttons in panic.
“I’m trying,” Armin said, ripping it out of Eren’s hands and hitting the power button.

They fell to the floor, using the shadow of the bench to hide. They heard Hannes shut and lock the door and relaxed.

“Let’s just hurry and then we can—”

“Gotcha!” Hannes said, shining his Maglite in their eyes.

“Oh…hey Coach!” Eren said as they both attempted to hide the recorder behind their backs.

“What’re you two still doing in here?” Hannes asked, his watery blue eye suspicious.

“You know, I forgot my Trigonometry book and you know Mr. Woerman he’s a stickler,” Armin said waving his hand.

And that might have been the end of it, if Hannes hadn’t noticed the locker ajar.

“What is that?” Hannes said, motioning to the locker.

“Dunno, it was open when we got here, I was just going to close it,” Armin continued, his face completely devoid of expression.

“Eren, why is this locker open?” Hannes pressed.

“Um…” Eren looked at Armin.

“I just told you,” Armin said.

“Arlert, I know your gramps and he’s a good guy and I also know it was Kirstein who blew up my shed with the bottle rockets last summer and you had this whole story about a possum and—

“You shouldn’t keep kerosene for your lamps or gas cans in there, it was only a matter of time before something happened. In this case, the possum—“

“Eren, was there a possum in my shed?”

“I…don’t…I don’t remember,” Eren said wincing.

“So I’m gonna ask you again, what are you two doing with that guilty look on your face.”

“I told you, just looking for my Trig book,” Armin said. “And you caught us, we thought Daz might have taken it, but we didn’t want him to get in trouble, because it’s just a little joke and—“

Hannes was ignoring them as he plucked something up off the top shelf of the locker, not listening to Armin spinning falsehoods.

A pill bottle.

Hannes turned it around in his hands, the Maglite shining through the little red bottle. His face hardened.

“Did either of you put this here?” Hannes asked.

“No,” Eren said honestly and Armin shook his head.

“Do you know what this is?” Hannes shook it at them.
The pill bottle was completely lacking a label.

“No,” Eren answered, now confused.

“No,” said Armin, chewing on his chapped lips.

“Get your asses in my office right now,” Hannes said, pointing.

“Language Coach,” Eren said meekly.

“JAEGER!” Hannes shouted, kicking his rear.

In the end Coach didn’t kick him from the team, or suspend them, or even give them detention. The Coaches had other matters to attend to. Due to the elusive nature of what was in the prescription pill bottle, Coach Shadis had all team members, varsity and junior alike, take a drug test. Nearly all of the varsity team failed. Parents were outraged, how dare the Coach kick their son from the team! But Shadis was firm. He believed first in good sportsmanship and ignored the principal when he begged Shadis to let them back on the team, at least just for the big Homecoming game. But the principal didn’t know Shadis as well as Armin did. Shadis would not be moved and he would not tolerate drug users on his team. No one ever tested the little bottle to see what was in it. And if they had, they might have been perplexed to see it was simply Grandpa’s old heart medicine.

Chapter End Notes

If you like, please leave kudos and/or comments! Really your comments are the only thing keeping me writing this fic (the fandom is so dead it's so disheartening T_T). Thanks and enjoy!

My tumblr is perksofbeingawaifu.
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Levi tries to show Eren how to plant a seed. Eren discovers Levi plays a sport.

Chapter Notes

My tumblr is perksofbeingawaifu.

Happy Reading!~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The sound of someone slamming their palm against the window startled Eren from his seat where he had been working on his first scarf. He thought it might be a bird at first, since birds often mistook Levi’s too-clean windows for more blue sky. But it was not a bird, it was Officer Dawk, chewing on a piece of Trident and pressing a paper against the window, glowering in at both of them. Eren stood up, but Levi put a hand on his shoulder and opened the door.

“Wednesday!” Dawk barked, spitting out his gum into the gutter.

Levi grabbed the paper and examined it closely.

“This is $25 more than last year!” Levi protested.

“Fees are steep at the rink,” Dawk sighed, stepping into the shop, his thumbs on his utility belt.

Levi sped up the spiral staircase and Eren heard him opening the petty cash box before coming down and handing Dawk a good $250 or so.

“Thanks,” Dawk grunted. “I gotta hit up Mike now too. We’re meeting in the usual spot. You got gear?”

“I always have gear,” Levi said, waving him off.

Dawk cocked his finger at Eren and then left, the bell tinkling as the door shut. Levi looked at the piece of paper, his eyes suddenly alert. He looked…excited.

“Fuck, I need to…” Levi muttered to himself and then pulled out a calculator. “Eren, I can’t drive you home Monday or Wednesday nights anymore. Shit where is my…”

He drifted off midsentence to go upstairs and then Eren heard him printing out a new sign.

“New store hours!” Levi said happily. “We close early on Mondays and Wednesdays until early March.”
Eren stood up to examine the piece of paper Officer Dawk had handed Levi.

**Shingansina Men’s Hockey League Schedule.**

***ICE FEES ARE DUE AT THE FIRST OF THE MONTH. YOU DON’T PAY YOU DON’T PLAY***

Contact Nile or Marie for more information at –

What followed was a long list of numbers and members and their numbers and each fee and due date.

“What’s this?”

“New hockey schedule,” Levi said, tape between his teeth as he lined up the new hours perfectly.

“For hockey?” Eren asked. “Are you like…their stats keeper or something?”

“No, I’m on the team.”

“Ha, no seriously.”

“I am serious,” Levi said, squinting at Eren.

“You. You play hockey.”

“Yes…?”

“Oh okay then,” Eren nodded and placed the paper back on the countertop. “It’s just you’re…you know.”

Levi waited with a hand on his hip.

“Not…the…typical…erm…size…for a hockey player.”

Levi snorted and went about sorting spools of thread.

“Ice fees are more than I was expecting this year,” Levi said, talking more to himself than Eren. “I’ll need to—Hey Eren!”

“Yup? What’s up? Garbage time?”

“No. I was wondering what time your Dad gets home tonight.”

“Oh, he’s on call so he’s not home.”

“How about another witching session?” Levi asked, his grey eyes alert and bright.

“Really?” Eren perked up.

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“It’s been over two months and nothing. I’ve been keeping track of ovulation. I take my temperature. I write lists. My doctor recommended I see a fertility specialist down in Flint to get some answers, but I don’t think I can make the trip without my husband knowing. I thought about telling him I’m visiting my sister. I could drive down there without him knowing. What do you
“We’ll wait before it comes to that,” Levi said, tapping the pipe on his lips. “Come and see me in two weeks when you’re at your most fertile, don’t bother about coming at night, come right to the front counter and I’ll have a candle waiting for you. Light it every time before you make love. Then, when the candle runs out, or after two months, come and see me.”

She nodded and then was gone.

“So much talk about babies,” Eren groaned upstairs. “Babies are so gross.”

“Babies are the one thing that keep me in business,” Levi said, tucking his pipe away.

“So what is it?” Eren asked.

“What?” Levi said, joining him up in the loft where Eren was busy working on his scarf.

“What is the problem? Why can’t she—you know—even if they’ve…you know…”

“Fertility is complicated. It’s not as easy as some would have you believe.”

“School makes it sound like someone puts their dick in and BAM! Pregnant.”

Levi gave a sour laugh. “If that were the case then I would’ve had a brood of my own already.”

“Hm?” Eren asked, not fully paying attention. “This is stupid, Levi! Why do I have to knit? It’s not teaching me anything!”

He fixed Levi with a frustrated expression, fingers tangled in yarn. Levi sat next to him on the futon, bringing his feet up under him. Eren scowled. He attempted to place the needle through the next stitch and dropped it.

“You ever find yourself doing something and you lose all track of time and place?” Levi asked contemplatively. “You feel…in the zone? You feel like everything is moving around you, like you are the rock in the current. Like you are the one in charge. You feel alive, like electricity is flowing through you? But calm?”

Eren appeared taken aback by Levi’s question. Levi could see him pondering the words and trying to come up with a suitable answer. He didn’t say anything at first.

“Um…sortof,” he mumbled, the tips of his ears turning red.


“You’ll make fun of me.”

“I won’t.”

“Promise?”

“Promise.”

“When I play football?” Eren said, wincing as if predicting a barb from Levi. “Or…sometimes when I’m riding my bike. When Dad and I go out on the lake to fish.”

“Knitting is my…football,” Levi said. “Or dancing. Or spinning. Weaving. Pottery. I have a lot of
hobbies.”

“I’ve noticed,” Eren said wryly.

Levi chuckled to himself and Eren did that grin he had where he put his tongue between his teeth. Cute kid.

“When you work a spell—hrm how to put this…you can’t get something from nothing. And casting a spell takes energy. A lot of energy. So I put on music to pump myself up.”

“That explains the playlist,” Eren said with a look of teenage snobbery.

Good kid, but such a little shit.

“Here, come here,” Levi said, grabbing Eren’s hands.

Levi took Eren’s wide palms—the kid had such big hands already—and placed them over his own calloused palms, hovering just slightly over the skin so that with every breath they would gently touch.

“Do you feel that?” Levi asked.

“…No.”


“You’re not gonna put something down the back of my shirt are you?” Eren asked, wrinkling his nose.

“No, shush. Quiet. Listen. What do you hear?”

Eren closed his eyes, furrowing his brows in concentration. It was amazing how Levi could read every emotion on his young face.

“I only hear myself breathing. I can hear my heartbeat in my ears,” Eren complained.

“Exactly,” Levi said and Eren wiggled in his seat. “You breathe in, where does the air go?”

“Lungs,” Eren said with his eyes closed.

“Your lungs put the oxygen into your blood and your heart pumps that blood throughout your entire body so each breath you take, that’s energy, that’s life. So take deep even breaths. Imagine the entire air around you is full of dormant power.”

“Dormant? Like a seed?”

“Exactly like a seed. Take it into your body, and what does it become?”

“A tree,” Eren exhaled.

“A tree has roots and branches. Let it plant in you and grow roots. It moves through the bronchium, flows through your arteries to the tips of your finger to the capillaries. Do you feel it in your fingers? It relays across every nerve in your body until it’s in your brain. It’s like a map, a map of you, you are no longer just one tree, you are a forest and your reach is great. Do you feel that?”

Levi tapped Eren’s palm and a jolt of static electricity startled Eren from his meditation and he
yelped.

“Ouch Levi! That hurt!” he complained, rubbing his palm.

Levi laughed and showed off his wool socks.

“I got you good,” Levi chuckled, giving Eren another static shock to the ribs.

“You jerk!” Eren said slapping him away, cracking into a laugh of his own.

Eren was the only one who laughed at Levi’s jokes, Levi liked that about him.

“I think that’s it for witching hour tonight,” Levi said, shrugging. “Lemme drive you home.”

Eren gave a wave from the big window as he stepped into his home and Levi drove off down the road. Driving, Levi mused, was another one of those meditative activities. The route to home from work was past several large fields all with a heavy dusting of snow. Levi cracked the window and blew cigarette smoke out into the icy air. Just miles and miles of nothing. In the winter it had him itching. To just board up the shop, sell off all inventory and get the fuck out of dodge. Just sell everything and leave this place. Move to a city where there were blocks and blocks of interesting people and places not just cold and blue and dark. Somewhere where his jeans wouldn’t be stained up to the knee with salt. Levi was never one for daydreaming, but sometimes an idea or two would pop in his head and it would be hard to lose, like the catchy jingle of a radio ad. He put the clove cigarette to his lips in thought and blew out the window.

“You stuck?”

Levi jumped as the man tapped on his window. He rolled it down further in confusion.

“Are you stuck?” the truck driver repeated.

He had pulled up behind Levi, the lights pouring into the car, illuminating the dark interior and somehow Levi had never noticed. He was sitting in the car, with the ignition off, pulled to the side of the road. Levi put his hands on the wheel, fingers shaking slightly. When had he done that?

“Looks like you stalled. Why don’t you start ‘er up. I’ve got jumper cables or I can tow you if you need it!”

Levi switched on the engine and the car sputtered to life.

“Sounds good, want me to follow you into town?”

“No. I’m good thanks,” Levi said.

The man got back in his truck and drove off. Levi was left in darkness. Save for the blinking light over the Crossroads. It was past midnight. He’d dropped Eren off at just after eleven. How long had he been sitting there on the side of the road staring into nothingness? He put the car in gear and drove past the little white crosses.

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“Leeeeeve!!” Eren called, breezing into the shop the next day. “Oh hi Petra!”

“Eren, Eren guess what?” she squealed excitedly, bouncing up and down.

“What?” Eren asked, his face splitting into a grin at Petra’s excited expression.
“Davey said he doesn’t want to wait for a summer wedding. He wants us to get married as soon as possible. We’re going to have a Christmas wedding! Well it’s the 21st of December, but still! A wedding at Christmas…how romantic.” She sighed wistfully. “Of course that means I’ll have to scrap this dress, which is so sad, but the fabric is much too thin for winter. I’ll have to make something with sleeves. Plus it’ll be in the church instead of outside so it needs to be tasteful. I have just the idea too.”

Eren lost interest when she started talking about sleeve caps and looked for a way to escape, claiming he needed to check in with Levi. He climbed the ladder to the loft and shuffled his way to Levi.

“Heyo Boss!” Eren said, greeting Levi with a staticky shock to the shoulder.

“Ow Eren, what the hell!?” Levi said, slapping Eren’s finger away and standing up from the computer.

“I…sorry,” Eren mumbled.

It looked like he was getting grumpy Levi today. Eren could weather grumpy Levi since that seemed to be his default mood, but it always took some getting used to. It felt like he would get close to Levi and then he’d be pushed right back out again. Eren didn’t know how to deal with that. None of his friends acted this way. But again, Levi was older and probably thought Eren was immature.

“Here, get started on inventory now because we’re closing up shop early tonight,” Levi said, dumping the clipboard and papers into Eren’s hands.

Eren sighed, but set to work.

“I found everything out on the floor, except for the “rose gold 10/0 beads” I don’t know what those are.”

“They’re right here by the register,” Levi said and Eren checked them off.

“I also noticed the buttons were looking a little empty so I restocked them,” Eren said.

“What, you want a cookie?” Levi said, snorting and not looking over at him.

Eren put the clipboard behind his back and rocked back and forth on his heels.

“…What?” Levi asked after a few moments. “Eren we have a lot to do today and we’re closing up in…an hour—Christ. What?”

“So…like…all the seniors on the varsity team were suspended because they’re a bunch of stoners and the big game for regionals is coming up and if we win we can go to states, but the team is half gone so Coach is pulling sophomores to be on the team.”

“So?”

“I get to play! The game is this Friday!”

“Wee,” Levi said, dusting frantically.

“Eren! That’s really big news! Congratulations!” Petra praised him.
“Thanks! And so I was wondering if you maybe wanted to come to the game and cheer me on!”

“Of course!” Petra exclaimed. “I haven’t been to a game in ages! I’ve missed it.”

“Eren I’m already closing up the shop early two days this week. I have people who expect the shop to be open Friday night.”

“Oh…okay, that’s fine. I just thought I’d ask.”

Eren tried to hide the lump in his throat. He knew Levi didn’t care about football, or the school, he just wanted Levi there in the stands cheering for him. Okay, now even in his head it seemed like a silly idea. Levi wasn’t exactly the cheering type. It was just that…he didn’t think Dad was going to be able to make it to the game. He knew Armin and Mikasa would be there for him, but…that didn’t feel like enough.

“Really Levi?” Petra asked in a low voice and Eren pretended not to hear her as he gathered the garbage.

“I’m sorry I have a business to run,” Levi countered waspishly.

“The whole town is going to be there, you won’t have any customers,” Petra pointed out.

That appeared to work.

“Hey, kid!” Levi snapped and Eren paused in the doorway with the cardboard boxes. “I’ll try, okay?”

Eren felt a happy flutter in his belly. “Really?”

“I said I’ll try. No promises.”

Petra left, Levi practically shoving her out the door and then, he locked it and stood outside with all of his gear.

“Your Dad coming?” Levi asked, sitting on the bench and putting on his rollerblades. The snow had mostly faded away, sticking only to the grass and the cracks of the sidewalks, but Eren looked up as a few small flakes began to fall.

“Yeah, at least he promised he would. I told him the right time.”

Levi hovered, torn between wanting to be on time (and Mike waving him over) and not wanting to leave Eren alone. Eren watched him strap on kneepads.

“What’re you? Goalie?” Eren asked, with a small grin on his face.

“Forward. Mike is goalie.”

“Mike? He’s so big he’ll take up the entire net!” Eren protested.

“That is exactly why he’s goalie,” Levi said, pulling on his gloves.

Eren’s father honked the horn and Eren clambered in. Levi waved and took off, skating down the sidewalk.

“I have to drop something off at the post office and then we can head on home,” Grisha said handing a few bills to Eren.
Eren pushed the letters into the mailbox slots and then Grisha took them home. They passed by the empty parking lot of the Methodist church and as they did Grisha slowed to allow a car to pull out. Through the muffled window, Eren could hear Levi calling out commands, slapping his stick on the pavement. Nile passed him the round ball they were using instead of a puck and Levi artfully skated around it, cradling it next to him. Someone shouted something back and Levi tossed back his sweaty hair and laughed, the wind and the snow pushing the strands off his face. He looked happy. He looked focused. Eren wanted to shout something out the window at Levi, but just as he had the idea, Grisha was already pulling away.

Chapter End Notes

oho! we're starting to see Eren is looking at Levi in a different light now.

NEXT CHAPTER: THE BIG GAME HAS SOME SURPRISES! :O

If you liked this chapter please leave kudos and comments! Your comments keep me motivated! Or come bug me at my tumblr perksofbeingawaifu.
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

Levi has a premonition. Eren gets his shot to play in the big game!

Chapter Notes

My tumblr is perksofbeingawaifu.

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TW: mention of previous character death (Grisha tells Levi about Carla).

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Happy Reading!~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Witch of November. That’s what they called it. Levi secretly called it Bitch of November. The waves beat the pier mercilessly, the whitecaps cresting over and spilling around the lighthouse. The wind was bitter and cracked at his cheeks as he pulled the awning in. Levi had an itch today. He often got this itch. To go for a stroll with his cigarette. He’d had it earlier in the week, but today it was strong and he kept tapping his toes in frustration.

“I’m closing up for lunch,” Levi said to nobody in particular. The store was empty. Maybe he thought he was talking to Eren, but it was far too early for Eren to show up. It took Levi a few more minutes to remember Eren wasn’t coming at all today and the reason why.

He flipped the sign (“Out for lunch, back at 1:30!”), put on his winter coat and lit up a cigarette. Following that itch in his feet he paced in front of the store, before heading toward the bridge.

“Levi has that look again,” Nanaba said, sitting in the store front window. “Did you see it, Mike?”

Mike only grunted in response, keeping a hazel eye trained outside at the bay.

Levi paced on the bridge, but the itch on the bottoms of his feet steered him away, down the street as it tilted toward the harbor. He shuffled over an icy patch, taking it slow and then grabbed onto the handrail as he tripped down the steps to the harbor.

Levi made it nearly to the beginning of the pier before he stopped.

“I wouldn’t go out there,” cautioned a man, taking pictures of the powerful waves and the icy lighthouse. “Those waves will sweep you off your feet and drag you out. You’ll freeze to death.”

Levi blinked at him and just like that he turned on the spot and walked back.
“Looks like he didn’t make it to the edge,” Nanaba observed.

“Good,” Mike said with a curt nod. “That’s good.”

<>

It was freezing, with temperatures in the teens and Levi didn’t know what he was doing. He couldn’t linger in the store any longer, not with that itch in his step, so he booked it over to Reiss Field. Then it started snowing heavily and he knew he shouldn’t have come out. He was debating on kissing goodbye to the $3 entrance fee and heading out when he saw Petra waving at him.

“I saved you a seat!” she said bouncing eagerly.

She pulled back the blanket on her lap to show him a cushion on the steel benches.

“So your butt doesn’t get wet or dirty,” she winked.

Sometimes Levi forgot why he was friends with Petra and then other times he remembered with a loud bang in his chest. He took his seat and she flung the blanket around him, tucking it close to him.

“Our boy hasn’t had much to do I’m afraid,” Petra said ruefully.

“Yeah, I think I traded a week of being on call just to watch my son sit on the bench,” Dr. Jaeger agreed, leaning over Petra to greet Levi.

Levi was surprised Eren’s father was here, but he gave a nod of recognition.

“But what’re you gonna do?” Grisha smiled. Then barked, “Keep it warm, son!”

Eren was on the sidelines, cheering on his team and jogging in place to keep his muscles warm. Jean had parked butt on a bench and had his chin in his hand. At Dr. Jaeger’s shout, Jean looked around with a bored expression. Levi pointed his fingers at his eyes and then at Jean. Jean turned around quickly and put his hoodie up over his head, drawing the strings tight.

Petra knew every single cheer as a former cheerleader and shouted every call back with enthusiastic glee. Armin and Dr. Jaeger were chatting animatedly back and forth about the rules of football and Mikasa held an artfully designed glitter sign with a bored look on her face.

“I’m gonna go get us hot cocoa before halftime,” Levi said, blowing hot air into his hands. “You want anything?”

“A hot dog with extra relish,” Petra said, her cheeks pink and attractive in the cold night.

“One order of acid reflux coming up,” Levi said.

“Is Levi your boyfriend?” Grisha asked.

“Oh, no! No. Definitely not. I’m engaged actually!” Petra started and Levi escaped that awkward conversation.

Levi grabbed a cigarette and ignoring the signs, lit up under the bleachers. It was odd. He never went to these back in the day. And now here he was in the same place you would find him after school. Smoking under the bleachers. Maybe he’d never leave this town. Maybe he’d peaked in high school just like all of these muscled up jocks. He watched the smoke curl in the air above him.
“Hi!” Eren said in a small voice on the other side of the bleachers.

Levi could barely hear him over the noise of the crowd and the marching band. Several rusting metal bars separated the two of them, but they were the only people there. Levi had to duck his head as he stepped closer to hear Eren, blinking through the wet flakes melting on his eyelashes.

Eren did the same, white gloved hands getting a little rust on the fingers as he held onto one of the bars to get closer. He clapped, trying to clean them as he spoke.

“I’m not supposed to be here, I could get in trouble if Coach caught me, but he’s a little busy,”

Coach Shadis and Coach Hannes were both pacing the sidelines and barking out orders, paying little attention to the two sophomores on the bench.

“Yeah, you guys are losing pretty hard. Sorry.”

The score was 7-13 and with a loud cheer Levi realized the other team had probably missed their field goal (why anyone expected high school students to get a field goal was beyond him).

“I gotta get back,” Eren said with a little wave. “Thanks for, uh, making it. Out in the cold. For me.”

Levi watched him run around the bleachers, smacking his head on one of the supporting bars. Thank god he has that helmet, Levi thought, squashing his cigarette.

“Thank you for the hot cocoa!” Petra said, accepting hers from Levi when he returned from the concession stand. Then in a whisper, “Dr. Jaeger thought we were a couple. How embarrassing. I hope other people don’t think that.”

“How awful would it really be if I was your date?” Levi asked and she gave him a punch in the shoulder.

“You know what I mean, I just don’t want people to get the wrong idea.”

After the third quarter, Mikasa’s sign was flagging in defeat. Jean was napping on the bench. The rest of the team was tired and cold and miserable. Only Eren was alert and active, racing up and down the sidelines, shouting at his team.

“Eren, Jean, switch for Samuel and Curtis.”

Eren froze. “…Really Coach?”

“Get your butts out there!” he barked and they hurried to the field.

“Not much left in the quarter,” Armin said, looking at the clock. “Sure we’re on offensive but… we’d need another touchdown and I just don’t see that happening.”

First two downs went nowhere. Levi could see the quarterback growing frustrated.

“GO REINER!” shouted a group of teens sitting below them, shaking their banners.

The ball was up and the quarterback searching around for a free man. Eren ran around and around, too fast to be caught by the opposing team’s defense. Levi saw the QB catch sight of Eren and pause. He instead threw it to a different player who was immediately tackled to the ground.

“Oh come on, he was open!” Grisha grumbled, reaching over and grabbing some of Levi’s popcorn.
Eren kicked at the field dejectedly as they set up. The ball was up. Once again Eren dodged his shadow, waving at Reiner. A quick look at Coach as if apologizing and Reiner threw a perfect spiral for Eren.

He caught it. Eren caught it!

Eren appeared so shocked that Reiner had actually thrown it and that he’d actually caught it he didn’t know what to do. He hesitated. The crowd, thinned from the weather and low score all went quiet in surprise, not quite sure what was happening.

“GET THE LEAD OUT!” Mikasa hollered jumping to her feet breaking the silence.

“How!” shouted Levi cupping his hands together to be heard.

Eren ran. He was fast. Levi had the same image of Eren as he sprinted down Main Ave, running for the bridge. He made it past the ten, past the five, and then the world exploded around Levi as he made it into the endzone. A trumpet from the marching band sounded off near Levi’s ear and Eren turned around grinning, waving a little. Petra grabbed Levi’s arm and shook it, jumping up and down.

“He did it! He did it!” she chorused

The kid was so caught up in the moment he didn’t notice the large defenseman from the other team swipe him from the side. Eren went down. Hard. His helmet flew off. The crowd winced collectively. It was a shady tactic to tackle someone after they’d scored. The larger kid got up and sulked off over to his team, but Eren didn’t get up.

“That looked really rough,” Armin said with wide eyes, but Grisha Jaeger was already out of his seat and down the stands.

“Doctor! Move!” he said shoving people aside.

Someone asked if he was breathing, which was repeated as “He’s not breathing!” and then people began panicking and the entire stands stood up looking nervously. Mikasa chased after Dr. Jaeger, throwing down her sign and people took that as their opportunity to flood the field, everyone desperate to find out what was going on. The Coaches had a hard time keeping people at bay, Hannes asking for people to, “Back up y’hear!?”

“He’s not waking up,” Jean repeated, standing on the inner edge of the circle, holding his helmet in his hands, eyes wide and panicked.

“I can’t watch,” Petra said, clutching Levi’s sleeve and hiding her eyes.

Levi followed down at a distance, Petra hiding behind him. He looked at the chaotic scene, gut churning. An ambulance sounded in the distance and he turned to look for the flashing lights at the opposite endzone.

And there he was.

Standing there.

In the middle of the goddamn field. In his uniform. Just casually observing the scene. That little shit!
“Excuse me,” Levi said, pushing Petra onto a passing woman who was praying under her breath. “Eren!”

He approached the figure. “Eren!” he hissed again.

Eren didn’t appear to pay him much attention, too busy watching some girl crying.

Levi snapped his fingers in front of him and Eren looked at them for a moment and then turned around, walking towards the other endzone.

“Oh no you don’t,” Levi said, pushing back the cuffs of his sleeve. “Get your ass back here.”

He reached forward to grab Eren with his left hand but couldn’t grasp him. He reached out with his right and when his silver ring touched the shade, he felt Eren’s wrist firmly under his hands. He pulled him. It was a lot like pulling a balloon behind him during a hurricane. Levi was winded as if he were walking up a very steep hill, leaning so far forward he was afraid he’d pitch into the muddy field. Eren simply followed at his own pace, not too interested in where Levi was taking him.

“Well now that he had dragged Eren’s… whatever to Eren, Eren simply refused to go back in his body. Levi didn’t know much about this sort of thing, but he was pretty sure spirits were like blood and worked better on the inside. Levi held firm, but Eren was looking around the circle of people leaning over him. Feeling around inside his coat, Levi found what he was looking for. He always carried his mother’s antique repair kit with silver scissors and a pre-threaded needle. He stuck the needle into the back of the shade’s hand but it didn’t notice. Moving as surreptitiously as he could with all those eyes watching the scene, he stitched the hand to the corner of Eren’s green and gold jersey. The thread held. There, now he was stuck. Levi snipped the thread with his sharp incisors only to find Armin watching him.

“He had a little rip—er tear on his jersey,” Levi explained awkwardly.

“Because that’s what’s important right now,” Armin said, mouth agape.

“Eren, son, can you hear me?” Grisha asked, flashing a penlight in Eren’s eyes as Hannes finally made it back with smelling salts.

Eren suddenly shot upright. Levi turned back to him. There was only one Eren. He breathed a sigh of relief.

“He has a possible concussion,” Dr. Jaeger informed the EMS staff, jumping in the ambulance with them.

Mikasa and Armin watched helplessly.

“He’s fine,” Levi said, attempting to be reassuring, but Mikasa watched the ambulance with a dead look in her eyes. Not knowing what else to say, he started, “I walked here from the shop, but we can walk back and I can give you a ride if you—“
“Yes,” Mikasa cut him off, grabbing her sign and marching toward the shop.

They rode in silence. Armin nervously buckling into his seat. The entire team and the Coaches met them twenty minutes later. They sat in the hallway outside Eren’s examination room like a bunch of unwatered house plants, their team spirit wilting under the fluorescent lights. Eren waved at them through the small examination room window and Mikasa unclenched her hands. He pulled a few faces and the mood lightened. The team filtered out as their parents came for them. Jean’s mother showed up and tried to chat up Eren’s father, but he was too distracted to pretend to be polite this time. Armin’s grandfather came to collect them and said he’d take care of Mikasa. So then it was just Levi.

“He has the X-ray and nothing was broken. I’m insisting we do a CT before he can go home, but I’m probably being overcautious,” Doctor Jaeger said, taking a seat.

“Well he has a thick head I’m sure he’ll be okay.”

Dr. Jaeger nodded.

“In more ways than one,” Levi added, then regretted it immediately—why couldn’t he just leave it at that?—but Dr. Jaeger laughed.

“That’s true,” Dr. Jaeger said, sitting forward, messing with something in his pocket that looked like it could have been his wedding ring. “You know it means a lot to Eren, working in your shop. He’ll be sorry to go at the New Year.”

“Yeah I can’t really afford to keep any employees, but it’s been nice to have another pair of hands around. He’s gotten better at cleaning.”

“Really? He never cleans at home. Huh.”

There was an awkward pause. Levi didn’t know what to say. He never knew what to say in these situations. He was a problem solver. If people came to him with a sob story about their cheating husband, he never knew what to say, he was good at listening, people seemed to like that. But whenever they asked him, “What should I do?” unless they were asking for a spell, he had nothing. He’d just give generic common sense advice. But here, he was lost.

“Ah, I don’t know what to do,” Grisha said, taking off his glasses and wiping at his eyes tiredly.

Levi sat very still.

“Eren tells me your mother passed as well. Sorry to hear that. I think that’s been good for him, having someone to talk to about it. Someone who went through the same thing.”

Levi was beginning to regret ever telling Eren anything about himself.

“What she die from?”

“Ovarian cancer.”

“That’s a rough one,” Grisha said, clapping Levi on the back. “I’m sorry for your loss.”

He looked down the hallway, eyes unfocused, glasses dangling from his pinky, still messing with the gold ring.

“You know I never met my father-in-law, but my family always had stories about him. They said
he liked to ramble. You know, wander. He’d go out in the woods and get lost for hours and then come back. Often he’d go out at night and come back in the morning covered in dirt and pine sap. People all over town would see him. My wife always joked that it must skip a generation because it never touched her. And then we had Eren and one night I woke up and he wasn’t in the crib. (This was when we were in the old house, you know, we used to live downtown before we got the house on the lake.) I found him two blocks away. In his diaper. We had to start locking all the doors to the house to keep him from roaming at night. It was funny actually—despite the initial shock. He got in the pantry one night and was covered head to toe in flour. He looked like a little ghost. But he didn’t sleep well. And one night he went to a sleepover at some friend’s house—you know, ten year old boys staying up late and playing video games—and he got into a fight and wanted to leave in the middle of the night. I was on call so Carla went to get him…and uh…”

He paused, running a hand through his salt and pepper hair.

“When they brought the first man in, I could smell the booze, but it was just another night, you know? Then they said there were more on their way, they said it was a really horrible car accident. I was washing up for surgery and I was in this hallway and I looked. And there she was. Standing there. She gave me this little wave and I waved back. And I think I knew right then. She was gone. I…saved the life of the man who killed my wife and Mikasa’s parents. Then they brought Eren in and he had hit his head pretty hard on the window and I did the exact same thing that I’m doing now. Just waiting and watching. He doesn’t sleepwalk anymore.”

Grisha sighed, pulling his glasses back on and fixing Levi with an intent look. “But you still see him don’t you?”

Chapter End Notes

Flashback to Chapter 3: August 1998, Levi is seen out on the pier again, smoking a cigarette. That night a truck driver, drunk behind the wheel jackknifes in the middle of the Old Crossroads for no reason, slamming into a sedan and killing the woman behind the wheel and simultaneously flipping another vehicle resulting in the deaths of two others. The trucker survives...

Wait, so does that mean Grisha knows about Eren's night time wandering? :O What does it all mean??? :OOO

My tumblr is perksofbeingawaifu.

If you enjoyed, please leave kudos and/or comments! They keep me motivated!
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

Levi sells spells for hunting season. Eren and friends go to deer camp. Pixis and Sasha tell campfire tales.

Chapter Notes

My tumblr is perksofbeingawaifu.

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TW: gun use (Eren goes hunting), talk of gun violence and murder (Pixis the sherriff's story about the only murder in Shiganshina)

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Since Hannes doesn't have a first name (i've never been able to figure out if Hans is his first name or last name) I gave him and his wife names and also named Sasha's father like so:

Verne Hannes
Doris Hannes
Gerald “Gerry” Braus

I thought I'd list them here so you aren't confused.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It turned out that catching the winning ball and getting a minor concussion meant that teachers went easy on you. Well, all except Mr. Woerman. They gave him extra time to complete assignments, they asked him how he was feeling. All it took was for Eren to say he had a headache and they would put him in the teacher’s lounge to rest on a bean bag with the lights off. Truly, the life.

And his friends barely complained about it! Jean complained some, but Eren honestly expected more griping from him. Instead Jean was being unusually nice. Eren would have suspected he was up to something, but Marco told him that Jean was really freaked out about the whole thing.

“You didn’t look like you were breathing, it was scary,” Armin agreed. “It’s a good thing your dad was there.”

“And Levi,” Eren said, digging into his lunch.

“How did you know Levi was there? You were unconscious,” Armin pointed out.

“Well he was in the stands, wasn’t he?” Eren said rolling his eyes. He stood up to see if he could sneak an extra grilled cheese sandwich, but Mikasa grabbed his arm.
“Don’t do that again,” she said seriously. “You scared us.”

“I’ll try not to be super awesome at football ever again,” Eren said in a not-so-reassuring tone, patting her hand condescendingly.

Levi had given Eren the week off, but since he wasn’t allowed to play with the team following his head injury, he was bored. He left practice early with a nod from Coach and tripped down to the shop.

“Whoa,” said Eren.

Christmas had come early to Stitchcraft. Levi had several impressive trees, one reaching the top step of the spiral staircase. Each one was festooned with hand knit items and a yarn garland. Levi appeared to be making up for his lack of Halloween decorations by plastering the entire store from top to bottom in every kind of tinsel and bauble. Not only did every corner glitter and shine, but the store was packed! And weirdly most of the patrons were men. It wasn’t that men didn’t come into the knitting shop, it was that it was a much rarer occasion. Usually they came in with their wives or girlfriends and sat on what Eren called “the boyfriend chair.” Or they would come in with a list from their partner and look absolutely sick with fear that they might bring home the wrong type of needle. These men didn’t look like they were here for their partners. Or for knitting. Each one of them stepped up with crisp bank notes and handed Levi cash. He in turn, handed them a mason jar full of a questionably yellow liquid.

“Happy hunting!” Levi said curtly. “Next! Eren, recyclables. The cardboard is—“

“Oh it!” Eren cheered.

There were more boxes than normal. Levi must have spent all weekend doubling store stock in preparation for the holidays. Humming, Eren dragged the cardboard to the alleyway. Oluo grabbed the door right before it closed, following Eren in.

“Oluo, Levi says you have to use the front door,” Eren complained.

“I need to get in before the weekend,” Oluo said, bouncing around Eren. “Hey, I heard you was dead for a full minute at the game.”

“Rumors of my death have been greatly exaggerated,” Eren said with a grin. “I only blacked out for like a minute or two.”

“Well it sounded like a good one. Sorry I couldn’t make it. Work.”

“That’s fine. Petra and Levi were there.”

“Petra was there?” Oluo said, suddenly interested. “Wait…was Davey there too?”

“No,” Eren said, rolling his eyes.

“Interesting. When’s the next game?”

“Downstate. Two weeks from now. And that’s the last one of the season. I doubt Petra will be there.”

Oluo wrinkled his nose. “Don’t know that I can make that one. Ah man, this line is out of control. Does he even still have any of the good ones?”
“Sorry, what? What is going on?”

“First day of huntin’ season is tomorrow! Don’t tell me you forgot!”

Eren had not forgotten. In fact, every year, he, Armin, and Mikasa were invited to deer camp with Coach Hannes and his wife. Grisha rarely came with them. And if he did, he spent most of his time in the cabin drinking strong smelling hot cocoa that Eren suspected was spiked with peppermint Schnapps. Before Coach had invited Armin and Mikasa it had just been Eren and Sasha. Sasha’s father took her every year. It was their big father-daughter trip. Eren didn’t know all of the details, but he knew Sasha’s parents were divorced and Sasha’s mother had remarried to Connie’s father. Connie lived with his mom, but every other month or so Connie and Sasha would show up at school together in the same minivan. Jean made some joke once about how Connie was hot for his step-sister and that was the only time Eren had ever seen Connie lose his temper. Sasha complained that her best friend and step brother couldn’t come on these trips so now Connie joined them. This year, to make up for socking him in the arm, Connie invited Jean. Eren was not looking forward to Jean ruining his time at camp.

Still. Hunting season did not explain the line of men impatiently making their purchases at Levi’s shop.

“Of course I didn’t forget, but what’s that have to do with Levi?”

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“Of course I didn’t forget, but what’s that have to do with Levi?”

“Oh, Levi makes spells every year for the hunters. He makes them in advance though, so you need to get ahead of the rush before he runs out.”

“Does it work?” Eren asked.

“Oh yeah!” Oluo said excitedly. “Last year I couldn’t afford a good one so I bought a small package. I didn’t shoot nothing, but on my drive home I hit a big one! Venison all winter! This year I saved up enough for a good one. $200 is steep, but it’s worth it.”

$200? Eren squinted at Oluo. Sometimes, he was just too gullible. Still…Levi had a line that was nearly out the door. He frowned in thought.

Oluo picked up the small jar (which Levi had wrapped with a small red tulle bow on it that could not be appreciated by these men) and stepped out the backdoor with a skip in his step.

The crowd thinned and then it was just the two of them.

“So then Jean made some gross remark about how if he had a step-sister who looked like Sasha it would be incest. I don’t remember quite how it went, but Connie actually punched him. Like he never gets mad. Mind you, if I had a sister or a step sister and Jean said something like that about them I’d probably punch him too. But I always want to punch Jean. He’s an ass. Anyway. Since Sasha knows everyone there, Connie feels kindof left out so Sasha’s dad lets him bring a friend to camp. Usually it’s Reiner or Bert, but this year Reiner is in trouble with his dad for some reason or another. Reiner’s dad is kindof an asshole. Like he comes to practice and just shouts and shouts until the Coaches ban him. He told me I needed to work on my spiral and that I shouldn’t even have a ball until I could learn to throw it properly. He’s obnoxious. But their house is so cool! Yeah, so Reiner isn’t coming to deer camp this year. And Connie feels bad for his fight with Jean so this is their chance to make up. So now Jean is coming to deer camp! And it’s the worst! I used to like camp as a kid, but now it sucks. First of all, Sasha always gets like a 12 point buck. And Mikasa also always manages to shoot something. I never hit anything! I never see anything! It sucks! The girls always outperform us and that is so the opposite of how things should be. You know?”
Levi didn’t say anything for a few moments, too busy counting stitches.

“Levi.”

“Twenty-one, twenty-two—“

“Levi.”

Levi held his hand up. “Twenty-eight, twenty-nine, thirty. Yes I heard you. Well that sucks, but Jean is Connie’s guest.”

“But he’s awful! Watch, he’s going to come to camp and complain about everything. And then he’ll be the first boy to shoot something! He said he’s never even shot a gun before!”

“What row was I supposed to start the increases? This pattern is not very clear.”

“And…I was wondering…I have $50 is that enough?”

“For what?”

“To buy a good luck charm? So I can shoot my first buck! It will work… won’t it?”

“It depends.”

“Depends! I’m handing you $50 bucks! Oh…you should call it ‘Bucks for Bucks.’ That’s catchy.”

“Here, come here;” Levi said, fixing Eren’s dropped stitches and resting his chin on Eren’s head. “I don’t do anything really. It’s a spell I cast, but the magic takes its own form. And a spell like that, is more for luck. Remember we talked about tipping the scales?”

He made a gun with his hand and placed it in front of Eren’s nose, lining up an imaginary shot.

“So if I do a spell like that for someone who is a crackshot, chances are, it’s going to benefit them greater. But if it’s for someone who couldn’t hit the broadside of a barn like Oluo, then I’m afraid, he’ll need a stronger spell. All I can do is help make sure everything falls into place at once. I ask the universe to put everything in alignment. Blow the wind in your favor, get the sun out of your eyes, and have that deer step right in front of you. But if you never take the shot, none of that matters. So, I don’t do anything, I just help facilitate that moment. The moment when everything falls into place at once. A crossroads of all things happening at just the right time, for the entire world to turn only to land at your feet. There’s only so many moments like that in one’s lifetime. Your birth was one. All of the things that needed to happen for your father to meet your mother, for them to marry, for them to conceive you and then, that perfect second when you took your first breath. You need to ask yourself is $50 really worth that moment?”

Eren was silent for a moment.

“It’s a deer, Levi,” Eren said, slapping $50 on the table.

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There is nothing like the feeling of a three day weekend with the promise of an exciting time with friends. Eren had his sleeping bag and clothes packed and Hannes picked them up after school in the van his wife used to bus the elderly to church.

“Did you remember to pack plenty of layers?” Mrs. Hannes asked turning around.
“Yes!” Eren said.

“Yup! And I have hand warmers,” Armin said.

“And Mikasa, my niece gave me her long johns for you to wear. I hope you don’t mind the color.”

Eren snorted when he saw the pale pink bunny print. Mikasa took them with a quiet thank you.

“I have plenty of hot cocoa for the ride!” Mrs. Hannes said, passing back several travel thermoses for them.

“Thank you!” they chorused.

“I’m so glad we don’t have to drive down with Jean,” Eren said, taking a sip, thankful to find that Mrs. Hannes remembered he loved extra marshmallows.

“Well, you’re sharing a room with him,” Hannes told him.


“All the boys are in one room, the girls are in another. Camp is only so big.”

“It won’t be that bad,” Armin said, patting Eren on the shoulder.

It was.

“When do we get a gun? I want a gun,” Jean said, bouncing around.

“Never? Because we actually went to gun safety classes to get our hunting license. You didn’t,” Eren said. He was frustrated to learn that his fears of Jean beating him and shooting a buck first were for naught. Jean couldn’t even hold a gun. Eren spent $50 just to sit freezing in the blind.

“I can shoot at targets though, right? C’mon I just want to shoot one thing, this is boring already.”

“You can hold a gun, only when you learn to sit tight and listen,” Sasha’s dad said suddenly.

Eren and Jean went dead silent. Well now they knew why Connie wasn’t as animated as usual. Sasha’s father was scary. He had a too serious haggard face and of all the teenagers, only Sasha talked to him. They usually directed any questions they had for him at Sasha instead. Gerry Braus put a heavy hand on Connie’s shoulder. Connie paled.

“You want to show Jean how it’s done?” Gerry asked him.

“I…no?” Connie said, not making eye contact.

“Eren?” Gerry asked him.

Eren gulped. None of them wanted to do anything wrong in front of Sasha’s father. He picked up the hunting rifle Hannes lent him and walked forward.

“Stop.”

Eren froze.

“What’re you doing wrong?”

“I don’t know?” Eren said, too afraid to move.
“Keep aiming it at your feet like that and you’re likely to trip and lose a toe. That’s how draft
dodgers operate.”

Sasha’s father had a face that looked like it had been dropped from a high branch, and he had
served in “the war.” Eren was always too afraid to ask which war, because the only ones he could
remember were far too early for him to have served. He would have to ask Armin. Eren readjusted
his grip and walked towards the fake deer they were using. He put the butt against his chest,
pausing as Gerry readjusted it higher.

“Finger off the trigger until you’re ready to shoot. Good. Okay, aim. Live range!” he called.

They were in the middle of nowhere, the entire property for the next several acres was owned by
Sasha’s family. Still Gerry didn’t joke around with safety.

Careful not to squeeze or you’ll pinch the meaty part of your finger. Be ready for the kickback.
Good. Fire.”

Eren pulled the trigger and fired.

“Oh no!” he gasped.

“I hit it!” he said excitedly.

“Yeah, perfect shot right in the butthole,” Jean said in a bored voice.

Eren’s glee was cut short as Sasha’s arrow struck the fake deer in the neck. They turned around to
see her popping bubblegum and looking far too proud of herself. Sasha was clearly in her element
and the boys were not. Eren scowled and kicked at the frozen turf.

“When do I get to use that?” Jean asked wide-eyed.

Gerry rounded on Jean. “You think you can kill a deer in one shot? Because if you carry that then
you also carry this and you be prepared to use it,” Gerry said, pulling out a large hunting knife.
They all eyed it warily. “Because if you shoot a creature, you better be ready to kill it and put it out
of its misery. You hit it in the ass with an arrow, you need to be ready for it to thrash around,
getting blood everywhere. You need to chase it. Do you know where to cut it, to give it a proper
death?”

“So…” Jean said after a few moments of awkward silence. “I don’t get to hold the bow?”

Connie elbowed Jean hard. “Shut it,” Connie squeaked out of the corner of his mouth.

“Bow season is over until after the New Year,” Gerald answered, turning on his heel.

<>

At night the adults had far too much beer. Hannes was busy singing with his wife’s brother, Dot
Pixis. Sherriff Pixis was something of a legend to the teenagers. He was the only officer in the past
25 years of their hometown to have shot someone. Sherriff Pixis didn’t spend much time hunting.
He and Hannes plunked down with a couple of beers and told stories until they grew red faced and
started wheezing so hard Eren was worried one of them was having a heart attack. In fact, most of
the adults seemed to spend more time drinking than hunting. Eren didn’t get it.

“You’re Grisha’s kid right?” Pixis called over.

“Yes, sir,” Eren said, sitting upright.
“Sir,” Pixis chuckled and Eren’s ears burned and he was thankful for the warm wool hat Levi had given him earlier that week. “When’s your old man gonna come out here and join us?”

“I dunno, he’s at the hospital all week so…” Eren trailed off.

“I caught your game. You were pretty speedy there, slick. And that tackle, what was that sound —crunch!”

He and Hannes burst out laughing.

“Yeah Dad says he might not let me play next year,” Eren said toeing the snow, nestled into the canvas picnic chair.

“Oh you have to!” Pixis said. “Fast kid like you? Could get a scholarship! What college you thinking of?”

“Dad wants me to go to Michigan, but I’m not sure I have the grades for it. And MSU is right out —“

“Watch it, Verne over here is a Spartans man,” Pixis nudged Hannes and they roared again. “Keith!”

Coach Shadis waved from his ancient red and silver Suburban.

“He made it!” Pixis shouted.

“Probably had to stop at every pothole to drain the lizard,” Hannes muttered.

“How’s your prostate Keith?!” Pixis roared and the adults broke out into uncontained laughter again.

“Stop it you two,” Mrs. Hannes said, slapping them. “Girls, I want you to look at this and remember that men grow older but they don’t grow up.”

“What’s a prostate?” Jean mouthed to Connie.

Connie shrugged.

“Did you really shoot someone?” Eren asked.

The loud chatter died. Pixis looked over at the group of wide-eyed teens.

“Would you look at that, my drink is empty, so I guess it’s about that time,” Pixis said, setting aside his whiskey. “Doris, could you get me another?”

“Don’t go telling that awful story again,” she said shaking her head. “And if you want some old man, you get it yourself.”

“Old man, she call you that, Verne?”

“Every darn day.”

Eren was still looking at Pixis eagerly. The firelight reflected off of Pixis’ watery blue eyes.

“Shiganshina, in the past fifty years, has only had one recorded murder,” Pixis started, putting up his finger. “We’ve had plenty o’ domestics, and some brutal murders on the township border that
state ended up catching, but only one within the city limits. And that was the night Joe Belmer and his brother—they got drunk—they were sitting around, much like we were, shootin’ the shit—and Joe says something and his brother Nate says something back—and, just like most stories with hot tempers and drink, an argument starts.

“See kids, drinking and a temper don’t mix. You can have one or the other but you can’t have both. So Joe and Nate they get to brawlin’ and Joe gets pissed and leaves. He goes to his truck where he keeps his huntin’ rifle in the cab. He grabs it and walks back in the house and shoots his brother in the head. Maybe he was just going in there to threaten him, maybe it just went off, but we’ll never know because Nate died. Neighbor heard the shot, it was winter and Nate lives in town, so they knew it wasn’t a couple of kids popping bottles and it wasn’t fireworks.

“I get there and everyone on scene says, ‘Oh that Joe well he got a temper, he likes to argue when he’s drinking, and I see all these bottles everywhere and I put two and two together. First thing we do is go to Joe’s house, but he hasn’t returned. We go to his Ma’s house to break the news and Joe’s not there either, but she tells us Joe has a chippy—err, he has a woman out by Reiss Lake. We go to her place and Joe takes off straight into the woods with his rifle in hand. It’s dark and I can see him running out there. He stops and he looks like he’s about to fire off a shot. And I just—“

Pixis aimed with his finger.

“I heard him yelp and I thought I must have caught an animal by mistake, but then I came up on him and he was on the ground. And that’s Shiganshina’s first and only murder solved and buried,” Pixis said as Mrs. Hannes handed him another drink. “Thank you Doris, dear.”

The teenagers digested this information, all except Sasha who was busy eating a burnt hot dog.

“That’s kindof boring,” Eren said, wrinkling his nose.

Pixis burst out in raucous laughter.

“I have a story!” Sasha said, when they quieted a little, she insisted. “I have a good one my grandma told me!”

“Go ahead Sasha, doll,” her father said as she clung to him.

“A long time ago there was a small village,” Sasha said, scrunching her nose to remember all the details. She spoke more like someone reciting a tale word for word than her usual self. “The village was full of hunters, old and young. But there was one hunter who was the best of them all. He could catch anything. He could snatch a finch out of the air with his hands. He fished with his hands in the summer and in the winter, his lures were the most beautiful, made from the pheasant he trapped. They danced and twisted in the water and looked so real, he would tease the girls by sneaking one down their necks. He could catch anything that ran on four legs with his bow. His eye was keen and his draw fast.

“One of the women in the village was by far the most beautiful of all the lands. Her eyes and hair were dark like coal, her shape was lovely, and her voice was like the songbirds. Many suitors had asked for her hand in marriage but she refused. And her refusal was always the same, ‘You must bring me the longest feather from the eagle that soars the highest, the shell of the largest painted turtle, the claws of the black bear that doesn’t sleep in winter, and the hide of the fastest deer. All this I will have for my wedding dress or I will not marry you.’

“Our hunter was very smart. He knew the best way to catch his prey was to think just like it. He thought, where would the eagle go, but to its eyrie? He climbed up the tallest tree and found its
nest. There he found his feather. He went to the lake, but the water was so wide and vast so he found the bass. He said to the bass, ‘I need to find the large turtle who lives at the bottom of the lake.’ The bass agreed to help him if he would give him one of his shiny lures and with one big gulp he swallowed all of the water of the lake. Fish flopped on dry land and the hunter found his turtle and killed him in one swift motion, carrying the shell on his back. To find a bear that never hibernates in winter, he told the bees, “This bear does nothing but eat your hard work. Next time he comes to your hive, hold fast.” Then when the bear came for his honey, the bees held fast and pop! off came his claws! Finally there was only but one creature left. The deer.

“The deer was female but had two tall golden antlers. Her hooves were of brass. And she was fast. She could outpace any arrow fired from a bow. Her figure was a blur as she sped by. Many had tried to trap her and failed. The hunter asked the goddess, ‘How do I hunt that which I cannot trap?’ She told him that the deer was not meant to be caught, but the hunter explained his dire situation and so the goddess agreed to help him. She gave him an arrow with a golden tip and told him to wait at the lake when the deer goes to drink water. He waited for three days and three nights and when the moon was full and hanging low, he saw the antlers of the deer glinting in the moonlight. He crept silently forward and aimed his bow. The fast deer never heard the golden tip whistle through the air before it struck her in the heart. She fell to the earth dead. And there the hunter saw his beloved, sprawled on the grass. Her ink-black hair spilled around her, the arrow having pierced her breast. She died in his arms.”

Sasha finished and then went immediately back to eating her hotdog.

“Is…is that the end of the story?” Eren asked after a moment.

“Yeah,” Sasha nodded.

“I don’t get it,” said Jean.

“I think it’s sort of an allegory, that maybe the things we chase are ultimately our undoing, or that we lose the people we love along the way,” Armin said, musing it over, trying to make sense of the whole story.

“No, it’s if you wanna marry a girl make sure she’s not a deer first,” Connie said, nudging him.

“Yeah, what he said,” Sasha agreed.

“That’s stupid,” Eren said, squinting at her.

“I thought it was lovely,” Mikasa said in a quiet voice.

Alright kids, that’s enough out of you, time for you all to head for bed!” Hannes said. “Boys to the left, girls to the right!”

They grumbled and complained and pleaded to stay up later, but secretly they were glad to get out of the freezing cold and raced to beat each other to the cabin.

Chapter End Notes

The murder was based on something that happened in my quiet hometown! And Sasha’s tale is a mashup of the Ceryneian Hind and a mashup of various Ojibwe and
Odawa tales I heard growing up (I barely remember them as I was quite young).

This next chapter is very important. I call it the "title chapter" since you finally get an inkling of what the story is all about.
Knock knock.

“There’s someone at the door!” Sasha said, racing to the window of the cabin.

“Who is it?” Mikasa said, sitting upright in her sleeping bag.

“Hello? Anybody there?” Christa asked, rubbing her shoulders for warmth.

“Christa!” Sasha exclaimed. “And Annie!”

“We are on our way back from my cheerleading competition,” Christa said, still in her uniform, crossing her arms over her chest. “And Annie was driving us but then the car broke down and we were stuck.”

“Oh no! You poor things! Let us heat you up!” Sasha said, stripping off her fuzzy pink sweater.

“Good idea,” said Christa. “It’s best if we do this naked.”

“We should all sleep in one sleeping bag,” Annie said, top and bra already off.

“OH MY GOD SHUT UP JEAN!” Eren roared, smacking him with a pillow.

“That’s what they’re doing, I’m telling you. That’s what girls do at sleepovers,” Jean said in a smug voice.
“Dude, that’s totally not what they do,” Connie said. “I have one step-sister and two younger sisters. It’s mainly just Sasha eating an entire tub of Häagen Dazs.”

“Okay, but think. Just think. What do you think Mikasa and Sasha are doing right now?” Jean asked, pointing to the other side of the wall.

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“Hey. Mikasa,” Sasha said, gnawing on beef jerky.

“What?” Mikasa asked flipping through a magazine.

Five seconds of silence passed and then…

“Goddamnit Sasha,” Mikasa said pulling her shirt neckline over her nose as Sasha tittered to herself. “That is rank. Light a match.”

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“Who cares what they’re doing?” Eren said in annoyance. “I’m going to bed.”

An hour later and Eren was fast asleep, but Jean and Connie were whispering conspiratorially to one another. Jean left for the bathroom and came back with a bowl filled with water.

“Jean…” Armin sighed. “You promised you wouldn’t mess with him this time.”

“It’s his fault for falling asleep first,” Jean said, trying to pick up Eren’s arm without him waking.

“…’s someone at the door,” Eren muttered rolling over.

“Oh my god, is he talking? He’s talking in his sleep!” Jean hissed in glee, punching Connie’s shoulder.

“Stop, hold on, I got this,” Connie said, taking the bowl from Jean. “Eren…Eren…”

Eren let out a little grunt in his sleep as Connie sprinkled water on his face. “Eren…the tent is leaking. Eren. There’s water in the tent.”

“…the door,” Eren mumbled into his pillow.

“Eren, we’re at the McDonald’s drive-thru, what do you want to eat?” Connie asked.

Eren only whined.

“Aw, he’s boring. Sasha once at an entire pack of Oreo’s in her sleep once.”

“Are you sure she was sleeping?” Armin asked with a raised brow.

<*> 

Eren had the vague feeling that there was something he should be looking for. Or someone he should be talking to. He had that untethered feeling, a sort of disconnect. His alarm wasn’t going off and he needed to wake from school. No, he was at the cabin, there was no cabin. There was something…someone.

Knock knock.
The sound was coming from his sleeping bag. Eren picked up the down cover and looked underneath into the black.

“Hi Eren!” Christa said, resting her chin on his sternum.

“Oh…hi Christa.”

“Hey. Eren,” said Annie, propping her elbow on his stomach.

“Oh…hey guys. Why are you naked?”

“Eren,” greeted Mikasa, wedging herself between the two of them.

“Oh…are there more of you down there?” Eren asked.

“Oh yes! Come and see!” Christa said and one by one they disappeared into the dark.

Eren sat up a bit and leaned forward, peering into the emptiness. “Erennn,” someone called and Eren could have sworn the musical voice belonged to Petra. He moved an inch further. There was something out there! Something in the dark. A figure crawled out from the black and Eren’s head nearly hit the floor.


“Obviously. Where else would I be?” Levi said in a bored voice, his entire body pressing heavily onto Eren’s own, crushing Eren’s chest.

“You’re naked too.”

“That’s the whole point,” Levi said arching his eyebrow, and Eren felt stupid for not realizing that already.

“Oh,” said Eren and then he realized that Levi was very close.

“I need to tell you something,” said Levi.

Eren made to ask but Levi instead leaned over him and placed his lips against Eren’s ear. His hair fell forward and brushed against Eren’s cheek, soft and silky. Eren could smell the clove cigarettes and peppermint tea. Levi opened his mouth and Eren’s eyes grew wide as he listened to the words.

Eren sat upright panting heavily. It was finally dark, the lantern they’d arranged their bags around finally switched off. He looked down at his long johns and then at the bowl of water his hand had knocked over. He gave a frustrated sigh and walked to the bathroom.

“What’s the matter, Eren?” Jean asked sleepily, although still gloating. “Did you have an accident?”

“Fuck off,” Eren grumbled, scratching his belly and stumbling to the toilet. It took him a few moments but he finally let loose a stream and then mopped up the rest of the mess with toilet paper.

He went back to sleep and just as he was drifting off tried to remember what it was that Levi had told him, but couldn’t.

<*>
Hannes woke them up early, far too early for a Saturday. They sat in the blind freezing, starving and nodding off. The grey sky was slowly turning into a pale yellow. Between the four of them, there was only one rifle and it was Eren’s turn to use it, but he kept drifting into sleep and pressing his fingers into the pocket warmer that was quickly losing its heat. He wanted a proper breakfast, he’d been too tired to eat much of anything. Armin was pressed against his side, lying on his belly as well. Jean and Connie were propped against the tree, Jean’s arms crossed over his chest. Every few moments Jean’s head would tilt forward and then he’d snap it back so fast Eren was afraid he’d get whiplash.

The weather had the promise of a bright and clear day, but at the moment, Eren was looking at nothing but snow covered trees, bleached white birches whose wild eyes followed him with their gaze. The evergreens creaked under the added weight. The only sound was snow falling from the leaves and onto the ground below. Several thick branches of dogwood arced in front of the blind, their limbs frozen and beaded with ice. Eren’s eyes trained on the only patch of color on the landscape, bright red berries encased in glass.

Eren felt as if he were being watched. Armin and the others presence did little to shake that sensation. Perhaps there were other hunters out there. Or maybe the wood itself was watching him, the entire forest sensing the presence of man the predator. The grey trees in the distance cast long shadows that stretched towards him, many fingered hands grasping at his coat. He attempted to shake off sleep and the whole world tilted on its axis. The shadows appeared to move and Eren thought of Armin’s book of ancient druids assembling. Men and women gathering here in the wood for some sacred ritual. Red drops in the snow. I heard him yelp and I thought I must have caught an animal by mistake.

Then something moved. Eren felt it before he heard it. He felt the change in the air. The cardinals and chickadees quieted their song. He heard the cautious step over the snow. And then he saw.

Levi.

Levi stepped through the wood. He was pale and naked, the early morning light illuminating his shape. The sun hit his head and crowned him with golden antlers. He took cautious steps, bare feet sinking into the hard snow. Eren heard Armin draw in a gasp and Levi paused, looking around for the sound. Levi stilled and sniffed at the air.

“Eren,” Armin whispered. “Shoot.”

Eren’s fingers were already at the safety, moving on automatic.

“Eren,” Armin urged him.

“Oh shit, Eren,” Jean whispered softly.

“Eren!” Connie insisted.

Levi looked straight at Eren, resting his arms at his side, chest heaving. Eren fired. He saw Levi’s body recoil from the shot and then fall to the ground. And there the hunter saw his beloved, sprawled on the grass. Her ink-black hair spilled around her, the arrow having pierced her breast. But he hadn’t fired with a bow, had he?

“You got him! You got him!” Connie said, shaking Eren’s shoulder.

The others heard the shot and came over to their blind. Jean was already talking animatedly, telling anyone who would listen about Eren’s shot.
“Oh that is a beauty,” Pixis said, giving a little whistle. “Son, that’s a damn right monster. What a buck, look at the size of that. You’re gonna want to get that one mounted. Never in my life have I ever seen one that size.”

“Excellent shot,” Gerry said. It wasn’t a compliment, more of a statement. “Alright, now we’re going to dress him. You ever done that before Eren?”

“No,” Eren said, not able to take his eyes away from Levi’s body.

“Eren,” Armin nudged him and Eren jumped.

When he looked back, Levi’s body was nowhere to be found, instead there was only the most beautiful creature he’d ever laid eyes on. And it was dead.

Sasha’s dad handed him the knife.

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After a very busy week, Levi looked forward to his Sunday off. He got up, worked out, went to church, and shoveled the driveway. After a hot bath, he had curled up on the couch with his knitting and some reruns of The Simple Life (no one needed to know about his guilty pleasure). He had just gotten comfy when someone knocked on the door.

“Eren,” Levi said in surprise, catching sight of a van pulling out of his driveway.

Eren was looking at the ground, holding his mittens in his hands, lower lips trembling.

Just as Levi was about to inquire further, Eren flung himself at Levi, catching him around the middle.

“I’m sorry! I’m sorry! I did it, I’m sorry!” Eren howled and Levi had no choice but to hold him.

“I’m sorry!”

“Eren, Eren calm down,” Levi said, as Eren nearly pulled him to the floor.

“I killed it. I shot it. It was so beautiful and I killed it,” Eren babbled incoherently. “I did it. She’s dead. She’s dead Levi! Why did she have to die?”

Levi stumbled back a few paces, with Eren clinging to him and managed to get them both to the couch. He didn’t know what to do. He did what he could, holding Eren close and rubbing his back. Levi didn’t have any soothing words for him. And slowly, through all of that noise, Levi was able to glean certain snippets of information. He’d told Hannes Levi was watching him until his dad was off work. He’d used Levi’s spell. He’d killed a deer. He had to field dress it and hang its carcass from a tree. And all of this somehow meant that Eren’s mother was dead. She was gone. Levi’s eyes stung when he said that.

She’s gone.

And she was really gone. Levi had stepped out for a smoke at the hospice and when he came back, she was gone. Levi’s grip on Eren tightened.

The sobbing slowing drifted off to heavy hiccupping breaths and Levi found a moment to extricate himself long enough to fix Eren a calming draught. His special chamomile blend with lemongrass and a pinch of lavender. Levi then looked at the cup in the kitchen and then to Eren who was wiping his nose on Levi’s blankets and decided to add some valerian and passionflower. There. That should do it. Eren sobbed into his cup and then when he finally drank the whole thing, he passed out into Levi’s lap.

Levi gave a sigh of relief. Eren still had tears drying on his cheek and so Levi plucked a kerchief
from his pocket and dried them. He stared off into space, letting Eren sleep, carding his fingers through his soft hair. He had wonderful chestnut hair, soft. Levi smoothed his thumb over Eren’s dark brows. Levi rested his head on the couch and closed his eyes for a moment. He fought against sleep, looking up at the ceiling.

Eren twitched in his lap, mumbling something to himself.

“…s…door,” Eren slurred.

He talked in his sleep. Adorable.

“Levi,” Eren said and Levi turned at his name. “There’s…someone at the door.”

“No there’s not, go back to sleep,” Levi reassured him.

“Now he’s inside the room,” Eren insisted.

Levi stilled.

“He’s standing right behind you.”

Levi felt the hairs on the back of his neck stand up and without turning his head he looked in his peripheral vision. The thing was, he felt like something was there. Like there was someone behind him.

“It’s an old man, he knows you. He’s smiling.”

Levi stopped breathing, listening for any sound.

“He’s reaching out his hand!” Eren whispered with growing urgency.

Levi whipped his head around.

Nothing. There was nothing.

Levi clutched at his heart which was beating furiously in his chest.

“Oh you’re an asshole even when you’re asleep,” Levi chastised Eren, looking back at the ceiling and collapsing.

“He. There’s someone at the dooooooooor,” Eren’s mouth hung open and the voice sounded guttural, unnatural and before Levi could wake Eren—

_Knock knock._

_Chapter End Notes_

This was the idea that made me decide I wanted to write this fic, this scene right here. The entire chapter is a dreamy mishmash of thoughts I’ve had while hiking through the Michigan wilderness in winter.

If you liked please leave kudos and/or comments!
My tumblr is perksofbeingawaifu.
Part 2

Chapter Summary

Eren’s time at Stitchcraft comes to an end. :( 

Chapter Notes

I think this is officially the start of Part 2. So I'm going to label it as such in the chapters. I think we're looking at 3-4ish parts. We'll see. I'm so excited to share what I have in store with you all!

ugh omg i am so sorry yall. i have been sick for months on this nasty medication my doctor put me on, but it worked because we got the results we wanted! So, sorry for the lack of chapters, but I hope there are more soon in the future!

My tumblr is perksofbeingawaifu.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There was someone at the door.

Levi leapt off the couch, throwing a blanket over Eren’s head and shielding him from view. He didn’t make it to the door before someone rattled the doorknob, before a jingle of keys. Someone was coming inside! He reached for his hockey stick from its place at the door and held it ready to attack.

“Hey Shortie.”

“Kenny! You asshole, I nearly killed you.”

“What with that little stick? I’ve taken a chair to the neck and gotten back up again,” Kenny said, pushing past Levi.

“What are you doing here, Kenny? And how’d you get a key?”

“My name’s on the deed, sonny-boy.”

“No, it’s not, it hasn’t been for some time now. Not since mom kicked you out over five years ago. This is my place.”

“You’re gonna throw out family?” Kenny asked in a pained voice, pushing forward into the kitchen.

He opened the fridge and pulled out two beers, drinking one as he searched for more food. Grabbing a few links of sausage, he placed a pan on the stove. The pilot clicked twice before the gas lit.
“No, I’m serious. Get out. Now,” Levi said, seizing the pan and dumping the links in the trash.

“Relax shortie. I just need a bed is all. I just came off of 16 hours haulin’ ass and I’m beat and I have to turn around and drive back in the morning.”

Levi glowered. “You have your own place. Stay there.”

Kenny owned the plot next to Levi’s and kept a rusting trailer on the far edge. He rarely stayed there, preferring instead to bum from cheap hotel room to cheap hotel room with money he won at poker.

At Levi’s expression, he relented.

“Fine, kiddo. Just let me grab some of my stuff.”

Levi concealed his sigh of relief, looking over to where Eren’s shape was hidden by the mass of blankets.

“Don’t frown like that sonny you’ll get wrinkles,” Kenny said, tapping between Levi’s eyes with his tobacco stained fingers.

Levi shook him off and Kenny ascended the stairs. He paused at the top. And…just above Kenny’s head…was Eren. He was lounging against the ceiling, casually examining the place.

“Which way did you put…” Kenny asked, pointing left and then right.

“I…” Levi opened his mouth and closed it. “Uh, in my old bedroom, there’s a box of your shit.”

Kenny turned to the left, heading into the Levi’s childhood room that housed all of the crap one accumulates in high school. The second he was out of sight, Levi looked back at the ceiling.

“Get down from there!” Levi mouthed, pointing at the ground.

“You say something, shortie?” Kenny asked, poking his head out and stuffing an envelope in his pocket.

Eren hovered mere inches from Kenny’s head and Levi gulped. He wasn’t completely clear on who all could see Eren, but he had a feeling, if anyone could, it would be Kenny. And he didn’t want Kenny to know about Eren. Not at all. He felt oddly protective of the kid.

“No, nothing.” Levi shook his head.

Kenny closed the door to the bathroom to do his business. Levi seized a broom and swatted the Eren on the ceiling to no avail. Kenny tripped back down the stairs and Levi tucked the broom under his arm.

“Take the box with the rest of your shit,” Levi said, when he noticed Kenny

“Nah, keep it here for safe keeping. The lock on my trailer is busted.”

“Then get it fixed,” Levi snapped.

“…Something on the ceiling?” Kenny asked, looking from the broom in Levi’s arms and then his eyes slowly rolled up.

Levi’s gut dropped and his body flushed as panic washed over him. They both looked at the ceiling
and Levi blinked as he realized the ceiling was bare.

“Cobwebs,” Levi explained.

“Hunting season here. You make a lot of those little jars?” Kenny asked, digging around for a cigarette.

“Yeah, sold out actually,” said Levi.

“Huh,” Kenny said, cigarette hanging from his lower lip and looking at Levi expectantly. “Couldn’t make any this year ‘cuz I was on the road…”

He waited. He wasn’t leaving.

“Unbelievable,” Levi said, digging out his wallet and slapping two hundred into Kenny’s palm.

“Thankee shortie,” Kenny said, tipping his hat and then he was out.

Levi shut and locked the door and for good measure grabbed a chair and put it against the knob. He sighed and took back his spot on the couch, peeking under the afghan. There was Eren sleeping peacefully. He looked up and there was Eren at the other end of the couch. The other Eren turned slowly on the spot and then walked through the patio doors, stepping out into the black to do and see god knows what.

“You are far more trouble than you’re worth,” Levi said weakly, sinking into the armchair.

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Levi was far nicer than people gave him credit for. Embarrassed over his meltdown, Eren expected Levi to yell at him for invading his personal time but instead Levi dropped him off at school without a single word about his crying. He even made him lunch.

There had been one uncomfortable moment.

“I had a dream about you last night!” Eren said, digging into toast with jam.

“Me?” Levi asked, sipping tea.

“Yeah, you were sweeping the ceiling,” Eren laughed. It was just like Levi to try and sweep a ceiling.

Levi stared, his face impossible to read, and Eren cringed at the awkwardness of it all.

“I just thought it was funny,” Eren mumbled.

The picture of him and his first buck showed up in the newspaper the next day. He’d forgotten about it until his dad stopped him the next morning.

“You’re in the paper!” Grisha said, nearly dropping his coffee cup.

“Oh, they printed it?” Eren asked, peering over Grisha’s shoulder.

It was too blurry to make out his face, but it was him. They misspelled Jaeger however. Yeager. Typical.

“You shot a 30 point buck?” Grisha asked, agog. “Eren, this thing is huge! It’s a goddamn monster.
The paper said it’s a ‘once in a lifetime’ game animal! You never mentioned it.”

Eren shrugged, shouldering his backpack.

“What did you do with it?” Grisha asked, still scanning the paper for more details since Eren wasn’t supplying them.

“Hannes took it to be mounted, he says it’s a gift. I don’t want it, so I said Sherriff Pixis could keep it,” Eren said, desperate to leave the conversation.

“Yeah, your mother would freak if I ever put an animal head in our living room,” Grisha said, chewing on his lip. “Still, I can’t believe you didn’t tell me.”

“Sorry, didn’t get much sleep.” Eren shrugged.

“I have the day off,” Grisha said suddenly.

That usually meant Grisha was going to surprise Eren with another culinary treat for dinner that he’d have to surreptitiously scrape into the trash.

“So?” Eren asked.

“Do you have any tests?” Grisha asked.

“No.”

“Quizzes? Presentations?”

“No…I mean I have stuff due Friday and next Tuesday before Thanksgiving break.”

“Let’s play hooky.”

“Dad…I just had Friday off for deer camp,” Eren pointed out.

“Since when are you more responsible than me? I’m the parent,” Grisha said.

So they skipped out. Grisha called Eren in sick and they went to a movie and the 50’s diner for hotdogs and milkshakes.

“How’s working at Levi’s uh…what’s the shop called again?”

“Stitchcraft,” Eren said shoving five fries in his mouth at once. “It’s fine. It’s nice. Levi likes stuff to be really clean.”

“So you’ve said. What’s the deal with that broom anyhow? You know the one you ran off with that caused this mess?”

“I don’t know,” Eren said, brow furrowed.

He’d honestly forgotten about it. What was the deal with that thing anyway?

“So now that I have your good favor with milkshakes, now it’s time to reveal my evil master plan,” Grisha said. “Where are you thinking of going for college?”

“Ugh! Dad! You’re ruining my food!” Eren complained, ketchup spread on his cheek.

“I’m just saying, Michigan is a good school!”
“Michigan is my first choice. I’m going to get a full ride football scholarship,” Eren said confidently.

“You think you’re going to get a full ride scholarship for football to the University of Michigan?” Grisha repeated, eyebrows raised.

“Uh…yeah,” Eren said.

“Okay, well…that’s a good plan but…let’s come up with a backup.”

For Thanksgiving, Levi made pumpkin pies and sold them at $25 a pop. Eren couldn’t see the big deal. Sure he ate three of them, but it wasn’t like they were the best pies he’d ever had. Still, they were pretty good. But for $25? Too much.

The team lost their first match for States. Eren went down to support them, but wasn’t allowed on the field due to his injury. It was a pretty frustrating end to it all.

When he came back, Levi had put out several homemade candles to sell. They smelled like pine and holly. Eren asked how much. Levi said $35. He didn’t get the candle. Eren was used to Levi’s penny pinching ways, his many ideas to generate revenue, and his absolute insistence that he do nearly everything himself. Which usually resulted with Levi crashing with exhaustion the second he flipped the sign.

“Why do you do this to yourself?” Eren asked, leaning over Levi. “Just hire someone. Or at least let me do more. I can ring people up—without supervision! I can help with questions. I don’t just have to take out the trash.”

“Yeah, like I’m going to let the kid I’m not paying handle money,” Levi grumbled.

“And what’s with the pies and candles? You work yourself to death here and then you go home and you do it again.”

“This may not make any sense to you, being a doctor’s son and all, but I have lots and lots of student loans for a degree I never got, a car payment for that death trap out there that doesn’t even have snow tires and over eighty thousand dollars my mother’s shitty health insurance is still trying to get me to pay for hospice.”

“…Is that a lot?” Eren asked carefully. It sounded like a lot. But adults always have more money.

Levi groaned and threw his arm over his eyes.

“I’m going to nap for twenty minutes. Don’t let me go over,” Levi said from the futon. “I have to drop you off and then get started on more of those mitten kits, they’re selling like hotcakes.”

Eren sat on the futon, nudging aside Levi’s legs. “I just don’t like seeing you overworking yourself. I mean, who is going to help out when I’m…”

Eren trailed off, not really sure how to phrase it.

“Gone,” he said finally.

“I’ll go back to how things were before. No spending twice as much money on gas being your chauffeur. No algebra questions when I’m trying to knit. The place will be quiet and neat.”
He turned on his side, facing the futon.

“You’re not even going to miss me?” Eren asked, rolling him over onto his back again.

“Look, kid. This was supposed to be a business transaction. You work to cover the cost of the bowls you broke. Having you working here any longer would be unethical. Also probably a violation of labor laws.”

Thursday December 19th, Petra had her final fitting for her dress. She stepped into the store bathroom in her heavy winter coat and then out in her white silk.

“Well?” she asked.

“You look beautiful,” Eren blurted out, face flushing. What he would have given to dream about Petra once in a while. He turned on the spot and pretended to dust the shelves, sneaking sideways glances at her.


“Hold still,” Levi said through the pins in his mouth.

He rolled up the sleeves of his button down over his sweater, pale forearms against white fabric as he adjusted the hem length.

“There,” Levi said, stepping back. “Just a little off to even it out. You’ll need to steam it once more before the event.”

“I know,” Petra said, shifting the dress. “You don’t think it’s too revealing for Church?”

“No, very tasteful,” Levi said, double checking the back.

This was the height of compliments from Levi and Petra sniffled.

“Please come to the wedding!” she pleaded.


“But you’re the boss, you can take the day off. Just flip the sign.”

“Right before Christmas?” Levi asked. “Ha. No. I’m not missing the largest capitalist event of the year.”

Not wanting to be caught up in this repeated conversation, Eren carried out the recyclables. Oluo caught the door again and just as Eren opened his mouth to complain—

“FRONT DOOR!” Levi barked, pointing to the bells just as a customer walked in with a bewildered look.

Oluo groaned and turned on the spot. A few moments later he reappeared in the front door.

“Got your birthday gift Levi—oh. Hi Petra.”

“Hello Oluo,” she said in irritation.

“You look…very nice,” Oluo said, swinging his arms at his sides.
“…Thanks,” Petra said with little enthusiasm.

“The seam here on the bust is a little wrinkled, here,” Levi said, tucking his fingers underneath and carefully pinning the spot.

Eren and Oluo stared as Levi’s fingers drifted further and further down the front of Petra’s dress. Nipple! Eren’s teenage brain screamed. Oluo suddenly became interested in the mitten kits. When he turned to see Eren still staring, standing on tiptoe and waiting for a glimpse, he smacked Eren hard in the arm.

“Ow!” Eren rubbed at his arm.

“There,” Levi said, smoothing the back.

“Thanks Levi. Now I just need to get out of this thing.”

She closed the bathroom door behind her and Eren snapped out of his spell.

“Here, come here,” Levi said motioning to Eren.

Eren stepped forward and then yelped as Levi seized him by the ear.

“No staring,” Levi growled, dragging Eren by his ear to the register.


“Hello!” Christa called, pushing open the front door as the bell tinkled merrily.

“Hey Christa,” Eren said, opening and closing his jaw and rubbing at his ear.

“I got early Christmas from my daddy so I’m here to get one of those mitten kits!” Christa announced triumphantly, holding a small envelope of cash. “You know…the soulmate kits.”

“The what?” Eren said, not paying attention.

“Oh well I thought you knew since you work here, it’s—“

“Here’s your receipt,” Levi said, shoving it into Christa’s hands in the hopes she wouldn’t linger.

“Are you going anywhere for Christmas, Eren?” Christa asked and Levi’s eye twitched.

“Naw, Dad is the only one on call for Christmas so—“

Their conversation was interrupted by the loud blaring of a car horn outside.

“Ah! That’s Davey! I’m off!” Petra said waving as her fiancé continued to lean on the horn, much to the annoyance of the shop occupants.

“A gentleman never honks, he always comes to the door,” Christa sniffed after Petra had left.

To Eren’s surprise, Levi grunted in agreement. Christa left, giving Eren a cheery wave.

“Here, Levi,” Oluo said, looking morose now that Petra had gone. “Birthday present.”

Levi opened it to find a DVD.
“It’s your birthday? Why didn’t you tell me?” Eren asked.

“It’s not until Christmas proper,” Levi waved dismissively. Then stopped when he saw Eren looking at him with a goofy smile. “What?”

“You’re a Christmas baby,” Eren said with a little laugh.

Levi clicked his tongue.

Eren expression changed quickly. “I didn’t get you anything,” Eren bemoaned as Levi swept the floor.

“Somehow I’ll live,” Levi said sardonically. “Right now your gift can be to work on inventory.”

Except Grisha showed up early to collect Eren. He said he had to run to the bank but let Eren know it was time to leave.

“This…this is it,” Eren said, only now struck with the finality.

“Yes.”

Eren wanted to say something cool, like, “Well I can’t say I’ll miss you,” but that was a lie because he would miss Levi very much. And he didn’t want to sound like a baby and ask Levi if Levi would miss him because well, guys don’t really miss guys like that. Still, he found his lip trembling. And his nose was runny. He had a brief thought of knocking over the display of yarn bowls again. Levi must have sensed this because he went and stood in front of them with his arms crossed.

“C’mon Eren!” Grisha waved outside the shop window.

Eren looked from the window to Levi’s face in panic.

“Bye Eren,” Levi said with some emphasis, opening the door to usher him out.

Eren stood in front of the window, watching Levi putter about and turn off all the lights. He didn’t look back.

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When Eren got home, he disappeared into his room and when Grisha came to sniff him out, he demanded a ride back to the shop.

“What is that?” Grisha asked.

“Levi’s birthday present and Christmas present. I didn’t have time or money to buy him anything so I made him something.”

Grisha looked at the still drying glue. “Can’t wait to see what you make me,” he said with some trepidation.

“Yours is finished, I just have to wrap it,” Eren waved off.

Grisha nearly missed a stop sign he was so surprised.

“Okay you get 10 minutes, go, go!” Grisha waved, cranking the heat in the car.

Eren pounded at the door to Stitchcraft. “LEVI! OPEN UP!”
“Did you forget something?” Levi asked, eye twitching.

“This is for you—“ Eren said shoving it into Levi’s hands.

Levi lifted one hand, a trail of still wet glue sticking to it.

“It’s a…it’s this thing my mom used to do. She would make a…I don’t know she called it a spell jar. Maybe that’s why I got the idea to make one for you. It’s not like a real spell. But you put things that you like, things that remind you of the person, of happy times or happy memories and…yeah that’s about it. So um. I put in a seashell, some beach glass, um this butterfly I found on the ground. It’s dead. I guess that sounds gross. Sand. Um, a robin’s egg I found. I put in some yarn because it’s for you. But yeah, it’s like a jar. Of things. For you. Like a…good feeling jar thing.”

This was the stupidest idea he’d ever had. He felt his cheeks heat up and resolved to look at the floor. He waited for the tongue lashing from Levi but it never came.

“Thank you for…this,” Levi said, holding up the jar.

Eren chanced to look up and nodded.

“You know I’ve been thinking. Now that I’ve sortof figured out Quicken, I may be able to hire a part time clerk. Just someone to come in every once in a while and help with inventory. I got kindof used to having you around. You were useless but at least I could give you the chores I hated.”

Eren lifted his head up hopefully. Levi immediately backtracked.

“I mean, if you wanted the job you’d have to apply like everyone else!” he barked because Eren was grinning from ear to ear.

“Thank you, Levi!” Eren shouted, throwing his arms around his neck.

“You’re covered in wet snow!” Levi protested, the glass jar digging into both of their chests.

“I will show up first day of school!” Eren waved as he got in the car.

“You have to fill out an application!” Levi barked.

That meant he could still work with Levi. And with luck, maybe learn a bit of magic while he was at it.

Chapter End Notes

If you liked please leave kudos and/or comments!

My tumblr is perksofbeingawaifu.
Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

Today’s after school special chapter is about toxic masculinity! Something odd is going on with Mikasa. Levi teaches Eren how to weave a spell into a knit item. What’re we? WARRIORS!

Chapter Notes

My tumblr is perksofbeingawaifu.

tw: boys being mocked by being called girls, toxic masculinity, verbal abuse(?)

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[insert "sorry i haven't updated in a while script" here] Sorry guys. Life has been stressful. I am currently helping to run the ereri big bang, modding for the ereri discord, and gestating a human being. Oh and I got norovirus so I was miserable. My laptop actually DIED over Christmas break with one and a half chapters on it (we think it got too cold LOL) but then a week later after loads of tests and both my dad and husband working on it, it suddenly decided to live again so...yay! We've rescued the fic!

and now i'm on a one woman mission to write as much of it as possible! enjoy! i've missed this fic and these babes and you babes!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

December brought dark velvet skies and fat white flakes. Grisha forgot about a Christmas tree until late on the 23rd. They trudged out to the tree farm and Grisha let Eren use the axe this time. It wasn’t the cleanest cut, but Eren thought it was pretty good considering. It didn’t look as pretty as when mom decorated it but somehow it made the place feel less lonely while Grisha was on call. They’d had better Christmases, like when Mom was around. But they’d also had worse.

Soon after New Year’s the snow turned from charming flakes to sharp stinging pellets. Eren was beginning to regret giving his only finished knit project to his father. He could use a scarf. But the look of surprise on the elder Jaeger’s face made it worth it.

January was dreary and Eren had to drag himself to school and see Jean who had just come from the Bahamas with his father and step-mom. He kept showing off his tan and the one very small braid with its one very lonely pony bead. Everyone felt sleepy at the start of a new year. Connie, unlucky sod that he was, broke his leg snowboarding on the moguls. He asked Eren to knit him a cover for his cast. Students dragged themselves back to school feeling like it hadn’t been nearly long enough. Grisha dropped Eren off at school before light and picked him back up after dark.
The only sun came on those biting cold days where the wind whistled in your ear as it zipped past. A half hour outside gave Mikasa two patches of frostbite on her cheeks.

February, the bay froze solid. The snowplows tossed the once pristine snow with dirt and suspicious yellow spots. The backs of Eren’s jeans were coated with salt and felt stiff to the touch. Football season was over but, claimed Reiner’s father Mr. Braun, that just meant they were in off-season. No rest when it came to football!

They ran out in the freezing wind, air so cold it would snatch your breath from you. Eren’s chest heaved and his cheeks were constantly red, but it felt good to be out on the road, slippery though it was. Eren wore spandex leggings under his gym shorts which led to Jean teasing him mercilessly until one especially cold day Jean came down with a case of “frozen grapes.” The next day he was sporting his own pair and all teasing stopped.

“C’mon boys, kick your feet up!” Mr. Braun shouted behind him.

Reiner’s father had been in the Marines—or something like that, Eren couldn’t quite remember. Reiner’s older brothers, Marcel and “Porco,” had played in high school but neither had much success in college. Coach Shadis and Coach Hannes didn’t officially have an off season program, but Mr. Reiner took it upon himself to make sure the team stayed in fighting shape. It was “optional,” but Jean and Eren wanted that varsity spot.

“What’re we?” Mr. Braun sounded off.

“WARRIORS!” they shouted back.

Eren looked at the digital watch his father had given him for Christmas. He’d be cutting it close for his shift at Levi’s.

“I gotta go back,” Eren said stopping. “I still have to change and grab my books if I want to get there on time.”

“Oh, okay,” Jean halted next to him.

“Where are you going?” Mr. Braun rounded on him.

Eren had figured it was the military background, but Mr. Braun always sounded angry as he paced the sidelines at the games, shouting at them to get their act together and throwing his hat on the ground when things went wrong.

“I have work…sir,” Eren added as a precaution.

“Oh, right, at the doily store. Well you go on and have fun making lace tea cozies, the real men here will keep going.”

Eren didn’t know what to say to that so he bit his lip and took off at a slow jog towards the school. Jean followed.

“Where are you going?” Mr. Braun asked Jean, who froze under the scrutiny.

“I have to go with him, Coach said,” Jean said, thumbing at Eren, which Eren thought was not quite accurate. Coach had said someone needed to stay with Eren, but that someone didn’t necessarily have to be Jean who was obviously trying to get out of running in the ten degree weather.

“Well go on then, hold your boyfriend’s hand if you have to,” Mr. Braun pointed at the school.
Eren’s face was bright red when they made it back to the school and it had nothing to do with the cold. He slammed his locker harder than was necessary. He shouldered his duffle and backpack and walked out to Jean’s locker to see the team running by.

“WHAT’RE WE?”

“WARRIORS!”

“WAVE AT THE LADIES! HELLO GIRLS!”

Eren cringed as the rest of the team gave him and Jean a jaunty wave. Jean put his hood up and distanced himself from Eren.

The girls’ basketball team finished their meeting and Mikasa and Ymir walked out, Christa following behind them. Mikasa was still wearing only her gym shorts and a shirt from Armin’s eighth grade mathematics competition.

“Where’s your coat?” Eren asked.

Mrs. Hannes had rescued an ugly looking tan coat from the church lost and found for Mikasa but she wasn’t wearing it over her bare legs.

“I’m not cold,” she said, crossing her arms over her chest.

Eren frowned.

“I’m so hungry,” Christa complained to Ymir, hanging off her middle. “I hope you have food at your house.”

“Mom made pakoras,” Ymir said and Christa hummed happily.

Eren still hadn’t moved from his spot, even as Jean shuffled past. Eren opened his mouth to speak but was interrupted by a long horn honk.

“MIKASA! MOVE IT!” a man leaned out of the window of a beat up van.

“I have to go,” Mikasa said.

The man in the passenger seat also smacked the horn.

“Bye.” She waved as she stepped down into the van.

Eren watched her go, his brows furrowed and frown deepening. He caught Christa’s eye and the slight way she tilted her head.

“Not really gentlemen are they?” she asked quietly.

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“You said whatever spell you do comes back to you times three, right?” Eren asked, lying down on the futon upstairs.

“I seem to recall saying something along those lines,” Levi said in a bored voice.

After Christmas the shop was nearly dead. The only things selling were the mitten kits. Levi took to clearing out all the glitter from Christmas and put up a few beaten up cardboard hearts for
Valentine’s Day. Eren had pointed out that Levi refused to decorate for Halloween and yet didn’t mind putting up decorations for an obviously bullcrap holiday. Levi had pinched him and told him to mind his business.

“So what would happen if you cast a curse on someone?” Eren asked casually.

“Uh, that curse would be rebounded onto you threefold,” Levi said, measuring a ribbon.

“Yeah but like, what if the person deserved it. Wouldn’t that technically be doing a good thing? Like all the karma would balance out or something?”

“…What are you talking about?”

“I’m just saying,” Eren said, pulling a People magazine off his face. “That there are some really bad people who deserve it, you know? They deserve to be punished.”

“And you think you’re the one to punish them?” Levi asked. “You think the entire universe came together and said yes, dear lord, please send us Eren Jaeger, 15 year old high school student, to be the arbiter of morality in our universe.”

“Well you don’t know these guys! They are not nice people Levi!”

“I don’t need to know them. I don’t cast curses, hexes, bad juju, whatever you want to call it. I don’t do it. I keep that shit far away from me.”

“I’m not asking you to do it. I want you to show me how to do it!”

“HA!” Levi barked, descending the staircase.

“Well what if they’re hurting someone?” Eren jumped up, following Levi down the stairs. Levi stopped.

“Someone you care about?” Eren fiddled with a button, thinking of that camel colored minivan.

“No,” Levi said firmly, but his voice was quiet.

Eren huffed and spent the next half hour rage cleaning the toilet. He accidentally knocked over the button display and took out an entire cubby of yarn.

“You know, now that you’re an actual employee I can fire you for these tantrums, right?” Levi asked calmly from the register.

Eren picked up the yarn and quickly stuffed it back in its place.

“Pick a color,” Levi told him, waving at the wall of yarn.

“Of what?” Eren asked, eyeing the silky cashmere yarn.

“Not that. Of the cheap wool. That wall over there. The bigger yarn. Bulky yarn, Eren.”

Eren looked around and then seized the red yarn. Levi handed him a pair of needles.

“Cast on about…hmm…thirty-four stitches? Yeah thirty-four. Lemme know when you’ve done that.”
Eren did and then Levi came around behind him.

“There are other ways to handle the evil things in this world without immediately resorting to curses or hex. I don’t know why everyone’s mind goes there. Here, try to clear your mind. Calm. Focus—“

“I don’t want to focus—“

“Focus,” Levi said in a growl and Eren cowed.

“Now for each knit stitch I want you to picture something happy. Something for the new owner of this scarf, whether it be for you, someone you care about, or a stranger. Something positive you want in their life. Maybe you want their pockets to be full of money. Maybe you want them to ace all their tests. Or get that job they’re trying for. Good health. And then for every purl stitch, you… take away something from their lives. Less stress. Less money problems. Each time you knit a stitch, you put that energy into the scarf. But it comes from you, you understand?” He tapped Eren’s chest with his bony fingers. “It starts with your heart and pumps out to your fingertips and then it flows right out in front of you. Suddenly several small steps, several small stitches, several small thoughts, make something strong. One thread breaks easily, two holds firm, and several knit together are stronger still. You’re giving them something of yourself. So if you wanted—“

Levi slipped his hands around Eren’s fingers deftly catching the yarn around his pointer finger. “Knit one—let them be safe. Purl one—make people who would hurt them disappear.”

He released Eren’s hands and then Eren was on his own.

The bell tinkled and their third customer of the night walked in. Christa.

“Eren’s busy,” Levi said, cutting her off.

“Actually I was looking for you,” Christa said, pulling her mitten out of her bag. “I got stuck on the thumb gusset on this and I was wondering if you could—“

“Sit,” Levi pointed to a chair.

“I don’t know what I’m doing wrong,” Christa said as he examined the mitten on the table.

Eren eyed them both out of the corner of his hand and tried not to laugh. Levi looked like a coroner presiding over a body. He picked it up and looked it over.

“Do I have to start from the beginning?” she asked nervously.

Levi pursed his lips. Christa began wringing her hands nervously.

“Looks like you missed an increase and when you went to pick up the stitches you didn’t twist them so you have gaps and are missing a stitch. So you can go to the beginning of the increase rows, where you missed the stitch, about twenty rows back—“

Christa opened her mouth to protest.

“Or you can just add another stitch here when you pick up your thumb.”

“And how do I do that?” she asked. “Won’t it look wrong? I made a mistake.”

“My mother used to always say it was an affront to the powers that be to have a perfect work. That
a knit item without a mistake is a vehicle for the evil and vile things of the world, a portal of godly perfection. So you must always include one mistake to protect yourself.”

“Even yours?” Eren asked, hiding a grin.

“The difference is that my mistakes are on purpose,” Levi sniffed.

Christa sat with them, working happily on her mitten and making small talk while Levi supervised her work.

“What pattern did you pick for the thumb?” Levi asked, picking up the kit instructions.

“A heart. Because the thumb is the most important part of the hand, right? It is symbolic of the hand as a whole. And I think love is the most important thing in a relationship, don’t you agree?”

“If you say so,” Levi grunted.

“…Love?” Eren asked.

“The soulmate kits,” Christa said dreamily. “You pick what design you want, it’s customizable. So you pick what you want most in the person—the person you want to hold your hand—and you knit a spell beckoning them to come to you.”

Eren struggled to keep a straight face and turned to Levi.

“…They sell very well,” Levi muttered.

“So I want someone who is handsome and cares for animals,” Christa said, leaning over to look at Eren.

“Uh huh,” said Eren, losing track of his stitches.

“Who is passionate.”

“Yeah,” Eren said, starting count again.

“And who loves me.”

“Right.”

“Although, it’s very important,” Levi said, somewhat loudly. “To not knit it with a specific person in mind. You are asking the universe to find the right person for you, not asking them to bend an individual’s will to your own.”

“Of course, of course,” Christa said, still gazing at Eren. She continued, “Then, when you’ve finished your mittens, you go to the bridge and throw one over the edge. Whoever brings the mitten back to you is your soulmate!”

“Off the bridge?” Eren repeated.

“I don’t know. That’s just how the spell works. Right Levi?”

“Yup.” Levi stood up to put his electric kettle on for tea.

“What’re you working on?” Christa asked Eren.
“Scarf,” Eren said. “If I could remember whether this was a knit or a purl stitch…”

“Knits are v’s, purls are bars,” Levi reminded him.

“Yeah? Who for?”

“Oh, same thing as yours basically,” Eren said, waving her off.

“It’s red,” Christa pointed out.

“Yeah.”

“Red is the color of love,” Christa said with a smile, dipping her fingers into the soft yarn.

“I guess,” Eren said with a shrug.

Christa looked around the shop. “Where’s Petra? How did her wedding go? I got to help the church set up for the wedding but didn’t get to see it. There’s nothing more magical than a wedding.”

“Don’t know, haven’t seen her,” Levi said his mouth turning into a thin line.

That was odd. Petra usually stopped by the shop a few times a week. She was an avid crafter and made many of her own clothes. She said she preferred the higher quality fabric Levi ordered to the stuff at the bigger hobby stores. But it was February and had been over a month since they’d last seen her.

“Maybe she’s on her honeymoon?” Christa suggested, her eyes growing misty at the mere thought.

Neither Eren nor Levi were particularly interested in this topic and Christa was forced to drop it.

“What’re we?”

“WARRIORS!” shouted the team.

“We aren’t actually warriors though?” Eren said out of the corner of his mouth. “We’re the Titans?”

“Don’t…talk…to me…right…now,” Jean gasped. “So cold!”

“If you have time for a tea party and a chat ladies then I must not be working you hard enough,” Reiner’s dad called back.

Easy enough for him to say, he was driving in the suburban while they trudged on the ice.

“I thought if it was below a certain temperature they cancelled practice?” Jean asked.

They might have called it off…if Mr. Braun was an actual coach and if this were official practice. Mr. Braun seemed to think if they weren’t suffering then they weren’t practicing hard enough.

“Eren are you leaving for the doily shop today?” Mr. Braun turned the bullhorn on Eren specifically.

“No sir!” Eren shouted back.

“Don’t want to go back to sewing your dress?”
If it were warmer Eren might have flushed in embarrassment. He looked at Reiner beating a pace ahead of him, completely focused.

“No sir!”

They made it back to the school, Daz collapsing on the ground and Jean claiming he might actually use the showers.

“Kirstein wants to give us all a show,” an upperclassman teased and Jean flushed.

Before Jean could retort angrily, Eren interrupted. “I don’t think the showers can even get that warm. See?”

Eren cranked up the hot tap and they watched as lukewarm water piddled onto the floor.

“No worth it,” they agreed.

Reiner had invited Eren and Jean to his house after. He had to take Connie and Bert with him anyway. Connie had the unfortunate luck of breaking his leg snowboarding over break. Connie always had the worst luck. It didn’t appear to hamper his mobility however, because Eren and many others had already been on the receiving end of CRUTCH FURY ATTACK! Which is what Connie called it when he chucked a crutch at them. You were either fast enough to catch it or you weren’t. That was the rule of crutch attack.

“Friggin’ freezing out here,” Connie moaned, bundled up on the steps of the school. “Mikasa aren’t you cold?”

She shrugged.

“Are they picking you up today?” Eren asked her quietly.

“Doesn’t look like it,” Mikasa squinted, looking out into the grey flurry. “I think I should start walking.”

Eren frowned as she put on her basketball hoodie and started the long journey.

“She’s only wearing jeans,” Jean said as Mikasa disappeared into the storm.

“Ah but that’s Mikasa. She’s tough. She never gets cold,” Connie shrugged.

Jean flicked his pom-pom in response.

“Hey Eren,” Connie said as Eren dug around in his bag for the scarf he was knitting.

“What?” Eren asked, finally pulling out the needles and starting on a new row while they waited for Mr. Braun to drive the suburban over.

“CRUTCH FURY ATTACK!”

Eren ducked just in time.

The crutch landed in a snowbank. Eren turned his head to look at it when one of the upperclassmen slapped the knitting needles out of his hand.

“Oops! Sorry ladybug!” he jeered as Eren fished it out of the slush.
“Asshole,” Eren grumbled, but out of earshot of the upperclassmen.

“He’s kindof right though,” Jean pointed out. “I mean if you keep up with that…” He indicated the scarf. “Guys are gonna think you’re…y’know.”

“What?” Eren asked.

“Well they already say that about Levi.”

“Levi is cool!” Eren rounded on Jean. “He went state for hockey.”

Jean opened his mouth to retort but Connie interrupted. “Guys I can’t get my cast wet but I can’t reach my other crutch, can you help?”

The same beat up camel colored minivan drove up just then and honked loudly as Eren pulled the crutch out of the bank.

“Where’s Mikasa?” the man driving asked, leaning out the window. Eren could see three other kids in the van, all breathing in the cigarette smoke the passenger was puffing out.

“You were late. Again,” Eren said, walking back with Connie’s crutch. “So she walked home.”

As he got closer to the car he could see the passenger wearing that ugly brown coat Mrs. Hannes had rescued from the lost and found and Eren’s face hardened.

“Fucking little bitch,” the driver muttered, putting the car in drive.

He sped off, slipping a little in the slush but before he’d gone far, the crutch connected with his back window, cracking the glass. Eren froze, shocked at his own doing. Then the driver slammed on the brakes and Eren took off running. Jean took one look at the expression on the man’s face and booked it close on Eren’s heels, leaving poor Connie missing a crutch with no means of escape.

“Uh guys?” Connie asked as the man marched at him, holding the crutch out accusatorily. When he realized they had fled the scene of the crime, he sighed, “…I have the worst luck.”

<*> There rumor at school the next day that Eren was knitting a “love scarf” for a girl. Eren didn’t appear to be aware of it, but Mikasa overheard Mary Beth say that she was going to give him a cookie. This caused a great debate amongst the rest of the girls at school as it would put Mary Beth at an unfair advantage. Hannah said she was going to order a carnation at the carnation sale to send to her crush, but she refused to say whom. There was a bit of a struggle after this revelation as many girls raced to be the first to send anonymous carnations to their crush.

Mikasa didn’t have the 50 cents needed for a carnation.

“Who do you think it could be for?” they asked in a hushed voice in the bathroom. “I mean he’s been working on it since the start of February. It’s clearly for a girl.”

“Probably Annie, her boobs are just…ugh! I have such pancakes!”

“I bet it’s Mikasa,” said Ymir, sitting on the counter in the bathroom. “She’s always so pathetic following him around.”

“Stop it. I think she’s nice,” said Christa, adjusting her bangs in the mirror.
“Eren!” Ymir mimicked in a cruel voice.

“Knock it off, Ymir,” Christa said, smacking her.

Mikasa pulled up her tights and flushed the toilet. The talk quieted and she opened the door. At least Ymir didn’t have the temerity to look ashamed. She simply continued munching on carrot sticks as Mikasa washed her hands and then approached Christa.

“Can I talk to you?” Mikasa asked her.

Christa blinked, surprised, but nodded anyway.

Mikasa leaned over and whispered in her ear. Christa listened intently and shook her head.

“No I don’t I’m sorry. Hold on.”

She walked over to Ymir in what Mikasa thought was an embarrassing game of telephone and whispered to her while Mikasa folded her arms at her sides and examined the tiles in the bathroom. They were off-center.

“Yeah I’ve got one, but it’s in my backpack in the lunchroom, hold on,” Ymir said, hopping off the sink countertop.

The boys were acting even rowdier than usual, which is why many of the girls had taken refuge in the bathroom. The lunch monitor wouldn’t let them into the hallway so it was the bathroom or cafeteria where Connie had two straws up his nose and was attempting to bubble up his chocolate milk that way.

Eren sat in the center of the storm, working at his scarf.

“Do you really have to do that here?” Jean asked, putting his chin on his arm.

“I need to finish it.”

“This is why Mr. Braun calls you fairy boy,” Jean said with a sigh. “Just put it down.”

“No.”

There was a bit of a scuffle, some stitches were lost, some shins were kicked. Eren picked his knitting back up and tried to find the stitches, Jean picked himself up off the floor and took his seat again. Connie got up and hobbled to get more chocolate milk.

“You know, knitting was traditionally a men’s profession,” Armin said, still flipping through their history textbook.

“Who cares?” Jean said, returning his chin to his hand.

Mikasa and Christa and a few other girls watched Ymir’s progress from the door of the cafeteria. She sauntered in like normal, dug through her backpack, then…the tricky part. She palmed something into her hand and then spun on the spot as she tucked it into her back pocket. It was good work, Mikasa had to say.

“What’re you doing?” Jean asked.

Apparently not good enough.
“None of your business, horse-face,” Ymir coolly dismissed him, continuing toward the cafeteria doors.

Christa and the other girls waved Ymir back, urging her to hurry.

“Why are you always such a bitch,” Jean mumbled. “Are you always on your period?” And then the idea struck him. “Oh my god you are, aren’t you? What’re you getting, a tampon?”

The way he said it was with pure glee, delight that he had found her out.

Ymir froze and then turned on the spot. This is where some girls might have given Mikasa up, turned their friend in so they wouldn’t look bad in public, but Ymir held her ground.

“Seriously Ymir, what do you have in your pocket?” Jean jeered.

Now others were staring.

“What is it?” someone from the other table asked.

“What can I say Jean, you got me,” Ymir deadpanned. “It’s a tampon.”

Then, Mikasa would never forget what she did next because it was the first time she had seen any of the boys as terrified without threat of physical violence. Ymir pulled out the item from her back pocket and dropped it in the center of the table. It was like someone had set a bomb off. Jean flung himself from his chair. Franz fell on his ass. Armin shielded his face with his book. Boys were screaming and scrambling over each other. All except Eren, who was still intensely focused on his scarf.

And Christa couldn’t help it, she burst out laughing. She laughed so hard, Mikasa had to hold her upright. Ymir walked away victorious, hands in the air and then quickly slapped the tampon into Mikasa’s palm.

“I’ve got like a dozen more,” Ymir shrugged. “I’ll bring some pads tomorrow.”

“Thank you. But I won’t need them.”

“I’ll bring them anyway. If only to stick them to Kirstein’s weird shaped head,” Ymir cackled.

Connie came back with his two chocolate milk cartons, one balanced on his head and saw the carnage. “Dudes, it’s just a tampon, it’s still wrapped,” he said picking it up.

“Hey Mikasa,” Christa asked, sweetly, as the cafeteria doors closed and shut away the noise. “Are you getting Eren a carnation?”

“No,” Mikasa said quietly.

“Oh you should!” Christa insisted. “Since he means so much to you! Do you think he’s getting you one?”

Knowing Eren, he had probably ignored all of the many, many signs announcing the carnation sale and had no plans whatsoever to purchase any.

“I don’t have fifty cents,” Mikasa said, clenching her fist around the bit of charity Ymir had given her.

“Wait, here!” Christa dug around in her backpack and pulled out a little coin purse shaped like a
frog. “Here!”

She placed two quarters into Mikasa’s palm and beamed up at her.

“Thank you,” Mikasa murmured staring dumbly at the coins.

“Hope those weren’t your last two quarters,” Ymir muttered.

“No, I still have some because I need to get you a carnation,” Christa told her. “Are you…getting me one?”

“Of course! Only the best for my wife!” Ymir laughed loudly and threw her arm around Christa’s shoulders.

<*>

“What’re we?”

“WARRIORS!”

“Jean, kick up those heels, quit dragging them,” Mr. Braun shouted into the bullhorn. Or maybe you need to go take out your tampon?”

Jean’s expression soured as the rest of the group, Eren included, burst into laughter. Jean’s freakout to the tampon incident had become legendary at the school. Ymir kept leaving them everywhere, taping them to his locker and sticking them in his backpack.

“It’s just unsanitary,” Jean had said, kicking a pad down the hallway.

“They’re literally called sanitary napkins,” Armin pointed out.

“Whatever it’s still gross,” Jean huffed.

“I’ll ask Ymir if she’ll lay off,” Marco said, patting Jean’s back.

Now even Mr. Braun was in on the joke. Eren relished laughing at Jean because for once Mr. Braun’s eye was off of Eren.

“Quit laughing Jaeger, you know you two share the same tampon.”

Or maybe not.

When they made another lap past the school, Eren stepped out of the pack and stopped on the stairs.

“Jaeger, still three more laps to go!”

“I have work, sir,” Eren said. Then, “Jean?”

Jean shook his head and ignored Eren, continuing on ahead with the rest of the group. Eren sighed and looked up at the snowflakes.

“Say ‘Bye Princess!’” Mr. Braun waved.

“Bye Princess!” the group chorused.

Eren sighed.
“Ignore them,” Annie said coolly, walking up next to Eren and fitting her headphones over her ears. “Mr. Braun, Mr. Hoover, and my dad are friends. It’s ‘warrior’ this and ‘warrior’ that. They’ll come over and shout at the football game on the tv. It’s really annoying.”

“Yeah,” Eren said, unable to think of anything intelligent to say. He furrowed his brow, “Wait why are you still at school?”

“Detention,” Annie said.

Annie was so cool.

“Reiner’s mom is just as bad. She got on my case for not sitting ‘ladylike.’”

Eren snorted. He had a hard time imagining Annie sitting ladylike in any situation.

“Have you ever been over to Reiner’s house?” Annie asked, digging around in her bag. “His dad has this like…creepy ass secret room. He calls it his mancave but it has a padlock on the door to keep all the kids and his wife out. Like…what even is that?”

Eren had always been jealous of Jean’s “man cave” in his house (he had two tv’s and an xbox and a gamecube and a playstation), but Jean’s mom would never allow him to have a lock on the door.

“Yeah,” Eren agreed, not really knowing what he was agreeing to.

“Oh but Reiner knows where the key is so we totally snuck down there,” Annie confessed conspiratorially.

Eren didn’t really know why she was telling him this but he was riveted. This was the most he’d ever heard Annie speak before. Annie was possibly the coolest girl in school and for her to talk to him of all people, he didn’t know what to say.

“And it’s the creepiest shit. It’s full of all these dead animals. Like stuffed, y’know?” Annie found her cigarettes and slapped the pack into her palm before retrieving her lighter from her coat pocket.

Somewhere in the back of Eren’s mind hung a dead deer as its lifeblood drained into the snow —drip drip drip—and he shifted uncomfortably.

“Like his dad went on a safari and so it’s an honest to god lion’s head. It just stares at you with this vacant yawn. Gross. He has this little idol made of ivory—like from an elephant ivory. And there’s many more stuffed things like a mongoose and all these masks that he picked up. It’s so dark down there too. Murder basement.”

It did indeed sound unpleasant.

“It’s all just such bullshit, you know?” Annie asked, pursing her lips as she blew cigarette smoke out her nose.

“You’re not supposed to smoke on school grounds,” Eren pointed out.

She snorted and threw the butt into the snow. “Want a ride?” she asked, cocking her head to the side. “To work?”

“Yes,” Eren blurted out wide-eyed. “Uh, please.”

The girls’ basketball team finished their meeting and Mikasa and Ymir walked out. Mikasa froze when she saw Eren talking to Annie and narrowed her eyes.
Annie snorted and walked to her parked car. Eren froze stuck between the two of them.

“What were you talking to Annie about?” Mikasa asked.


He found what he was looking for, it was a little crumpled and he had accidentally crushed a packet of Saltine crackers on it, but he shook it off.

“Here, this is for you,” Eren said, looping the scarf around Mikasa’s neck. “Stay warm.”

He made another loop and tied it once in a loose knot. It looked nice, the bright red against her pale skin and dark hair. He’d only messed up the pattern a few times. She blinked at him.

“Jaeger!” Annie shouted out the driver’s side, giving a short beep on her horn.

He picked up his bag, not wanting to keep her waiting, waving at Mikasa who motioned back with a limp wave of her own.

The look on Jean’s face when Annie splashed them all with slush was totally worth it.

Chapter End Notes

So today’s chapter was inspired by one particular asshole. Our school didn’t have a winter program for cross country so one of the dad’s took it upon himself to “Coach” the boy runners. And how he did that was by belittling them and mocking them and calling them pussies and girls. He was merciless to my brother and for that he can get a big ole fuck you from me. I asked husband when writing this if I had gone overboard with the insults, I didn’t want it to be too upsetting. He told me it wasn’t even close to the amount he heard from that coach. Makes me sad. It’s sexist and insulting to women and transphobic AF. And yet it is all too common.

When writing this I wanted to show how Eren, desperate for a male figure in his life (Grisha is horribly absent atm), wants to BE like Reiner and Mr. Braun. And when Eren is mocked, he turns to violence to re-establish that he is in fact a man. Which is scary because he already has a temper and does impulsive destructive things. Jean is a bit of a sensitive baby so I think he’s super upset by the whole thing and just sulks. Eren doesn’t find it belittling, he actually thinks it’s encouraging. I wanted to contrast a male figure like Reiner’s dad who disparages them with Levi who tries to show Eren constructive things to do with his anger. Levi tries to re-channel Eren’s energy into creating things. I think creating something is the most beautiful thing someone can do. Imagine if every time someone was angry they created art instead.

Anywho, that was the goal, but I’m not sure if I got there in the end. ^_^;;; I tried!

If you like please leave kudos and/or comments! And thank you to all of you who supported and encouraged me when I was down. You guys keep me strong.

My tumblr is perksofbeingawaifu.
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

The girls in school are dedicated to their "soulmate" mittens! Eren has his own first spell seeking client! Gil Grissom is the ultimate heart throb. Don't deny it. What idiot spent $20 on carnations for Mikasa?

Chapter Notes

I wanted to post this for Valentine's Day but I had too much to do with baby appointments and doing stuff for the EBB so OOPS! Hope you're still in the V-Day mood!

My tumblr is perksofbeingawaifu.

Note on Christa's characterization: I'm writing Christa as someone who hasn't realized her bi-ness yet. She has crushes on boys and girls but hasn't really admitted the girl part to herself. She also has a pretty unhappy home life. She lives with her mother who is not a nice woman in a trailer on her grandparent's property. Her dad owns the largest hotel in town and lives with his wife (who he cheated on with Christa's mother) in the rich part of town. She participates in pageants in the hope that she can get a college scholarship. She sews all her own dresses for the pageants. Anything nice she owns was a gift from her father whose affection she's desperate for. So she romanticizes things like weddings and Valentine's Day. She has a crush on an oblivious Eren atm (YOU CAN DO BETTER CHRISTA!!!). Don't worry, post time skip she realizes the gay. I'm not trying to erase her and Ymir's relationship, just build a story for it. *peace sign* Atm I think Ymir is quietly pining for her best friend. T_T

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Eren didn’t know what it was about Valentine’s Day that made girls crazy. Nearly every single one of them was talking about the carnation sale. Eren hadn’t even realized it was happening until it was the last day.

“Who are you going to send a carnation?” Hannah asked Eren, the other girls looking shocked by her boldness.

“Uh,” Eren said, not ready for this question. “I wasn’t going to send any?”

This was met with disapproval. They all walked past him with their noses in the air. Mikasa sat down next to Eren and Armin.

“You’re not going with them?” Eren asked.

He didn’t quite know why but none of the girls were talking to Mikasa. Something to do with Christa. He overheard Mary Beth say, “Can you believe Mikasa did that to Christa?” while her best
friend clucked sympathetically. However, Christa didn’t appear to be too upset by the whole thing and was talking to Mikasa just fine.

“Christa is too nice,” Mary Beth sighed.

Her friend hummed in agreement.

Not only were the girls being extra secretive about things, but they were also everywhere. They had beaten him to Stitchcraft one day and were all sitting at the wooden table, gossiping and flipping their hair as they worked tirelessly on their “soulmate” kits.

“Hi Eren!” they greeted him as he walked in, sweating and covered in slush.

“Uh…hi?” he said, freezing on the spot.

He found Levi lurking behind the counter, pretending to read the local gazette with a sour expression on his face. For wanting money very badly, Levi didn’t like customers all that much.

“I hope I finish in time!” one girl bemoaned as Christa helped her with her thumb gusset. “I mean the spell is more powerful on Valentine’s Day, right Levi?”

“Sure,” Levi said, refusing to hop down off his stool.

“Or wait,” pointed out one of them. “We want to find our soulmates in time for Valentine’s Day right? So we have dates? So maybe we should do the spell the day before?”

“Oh! That’s a great idea! The day before then!” Christa said in a happy chirp as Ymir rolled her eyes and worked on her trig homework.

“But that’s the thirteenth!” someone else pointed out.

“Levi, is the thirteenth bad?” Christa asked, turning towards him.

“Nope,” Levi said, squinting far too intently at the Sudoku for Eren’s liking.

This appeared to satisfy the group and they went back to their intense discussion

“What’s going on?” Eren asked Levi in a conspiratorial whisper.

“Nothing. Your little blonde friend is good for business,” Levi said, pressing his thin lips together.

This appeared to satisfy the group and they went back to their intense discussion

“What’s going on?” Eren asked Levi in a conspiratorial whisper.

“Nothing. Your little blonde friend is good for business,” Levi said, pressing his thin lips together.

“Well that’s good isn’t it?” Eren asked.

Levi grumbled in agreement.

After they’d left and Eren cleaned up the many—many—cough drop wrappers left by Hannah, Levi set out his candle by the window.

“What’s the point?” Eren asked. “Those girls were the most customers we’ve had all month. It’s absolutely dead here.”

“Oh but February is my busiest month,” Levi said, now with a little hop in his step.

He pulled out his bottle of wine and drank straight from the bottle, swishing it in his mouth like he was gargling.
At Eren’s look of disapproval, Levi deadpanned, “Trust me, I need it.”

“It’s just, I need someone to kiss me, right now!” the woman at the table sobbed.

She put her hand on Levi’s and leaned forward, tears in her eyes. Levi leaned away with an uncomfortable expression on his face.

“Maryanne, I have a question for you,” he asked, even as she continued to creep into his personal space. “When was the last time you went out…anywhere?”

“What do you mean?”

“You wake up, go to work, slice meat at the deli counter, then go home. When was the last time you hung out with friends? Or went to church? Or to the library, literally anywhere but the back room of the deli and then home?”

That was rich, thought Eren. Levi never went anywhere either. But at least Levi appeared to like it, unlike poor, very snotty Maryanne.

“Oh I don’t really have any friends,” she said, shrugging. “And I need to be home to see my shows.”

“Right,” said Levi.

“I just don’t know why I can’t find anyone to kiss me!” she erupted into tears again.

“…Fifty dollars,” Levi sighed.

His next customer was the exact opposite.

“I need you to break his penis. Or a leg. Just make it so he stops…you know…doing it as much. He got into some…thing where he was reading about Sting and tantric sex and now he honestly expects me to spend four hours every single night on lovemaking. I get home from a ten hour shift as nurse at the hospital and then he expects me to crawl in bed and be his sexy little love bunny. I’m tired. I want to sleep. I want to be able to eat a meal without him…you know, just pounding away at it.”

“…Thirty-five dollars,” Levi said.

When she left, Levi tilted his head back and sighed. “Wish I got it that much,” he complained, cracking his neck.

“You could try going to the library?” Eren suggested innocently from his spot on the futon upstairs.

“Watch it,” Levi warned.

Then his regular customer was back, the one who was trying to conceive. Her visit was short. Nothing had improved since her last stay. She’d been lighting the candle and had steadfastly untied every knot in the house.

“Thank you, but I’ve already decided I’m going to go down to a specialist in Ann Arbor when he’s out of town,” she thanked Levi.
Levi nodded in understanding. “Let me know if I can help after.”

He sent her on her way with another candle, but even he did it halfheartedly as if they both knew it wasn’t going to be enough. She left quietly and Levi didn’t speak for a while after she had gone, still tapping the pipe against his bottom lip.

“What’s wrong with her?” Eren asked finally. “Why can’t they have a baby?”

“Couldn’t say,” Levi said, brow furrowed. “Some people just can’t.”

But it upset Levi, Eren could tell. A puzzle without a satisfactory answer. In the end, he shrugged and let it go.

Jessica Bollinger’s mother reappeared. She wanted a spell to ensure her daughter won the Miss Valentine’s Sweetheart pageant competition.

“I just want her to beat that little Lenz slut!” she hissed and Eren, offended that she dare insult his friend Christa, sat upright, ready to shout at her, but Levi cut her off.

“It’s $50.”

“I don’t have that, do you have any idea how much it costs to get these dresses made? Twenty-five.”

“Forty-five.”

“Thirty!”

“Thirty-five.”

“Fine!” she snapped, slapping it on the table and slamming the door on her way out.

Levi pocketed the cash with a sigh and waved in his next customer.

“He was supposed to propose by Christmas, but he didn’t. Now Valentine’s Day is right around the corner and he hasn’t done anything yet. I had to be the one to make the reservation and I had to be the one to pick the movie and I had to be the one to set up the horse drawn carriage ride in the snow! Can you believe that?”

“You want to marry this man?” Levi asked, brow raised.

“Obviously!”

“…Two hundred dollars.”

It was nearly 1am and Eren was falling asleep upstairs when he heard a familiar voice.

“I just want to apologize in advance,” Rico said quickly, holding out her hands.

Levi didn’t get a chance to ask why before Rico’s sister and her very loud bridesmaids all marched in.

“So Chad is scum—“

“Can you believe he told me he was allergic to latex?”
“He said he pulled out!”

“And now he’s claiming that this baby isn’t his—which—I was completely faithful to him for the first half of our relationship! He told all of us that he wasn’t going to pay a red cent in child support. So when this baby is born, that’s what I want!”

“…What?” Levi asked, not quite following the three different conversations.

“He did the crime now he needs to pay. I want my child support,” Rico’s bossy sister said, tapping the table forcefully.

“Me too!” said her maid of honor.

“Me too!” said her bridesmaid.

“I’ll handle this one for free, thank you ladies for coming in,” Levi said, looking very much like a cat who has gotten the cream.

When they left, Levi removed the candle and closed the shades. Eren packed up the tablecloth and the rest of the instruments that Levi had pulled out during his witching session.

“Hey, c’mere,” Levi said, as Eren went to pack a candle away. “Let’s go outside.”

Eren followed him, looking confused.

“I try to advise people against love spells for a specific person. Half the time, it’s not really love they’re feeling anyway—”

“What is it?” Eren interrupted.

Levi paused, not sure how to answer that question. “Dunno. Obsession I guess?”

“Isn’t that the same as love?”

Levi didn’t answer that. “Well it’s not good. So I try to steer people away from that. But if they are willing to pay extra I’ll do it anyway. It’s usually the same. Here, take a candle—careful don’t let the wax burn you. We’re going to help Little Miss Lonely Hearts Maryanne find someone.”

Eren wish he’d been able to write down exactly what Levi said, but he got the gist of it. This wasn’t so hard, this witching business.

<*>  

Levi’s nighttime customers then started coming into the store during the day.

“So I did the spell and then today I had three different men come talk to me!” Maryanne said, hopping around the counter and following Levi throughout the store.

“That’s good right?” Levi said, disinterested. “You got your money’s worth.”

“Yes, but none of them look like Gil.”

“…Who?”

“Gil Grissom,” she repeated reverently.
“…Who? Christ am I an owl? Who the fuck is Gil Grissom?” Levi threw up his hands in exasperation.

“CSI,” Eren said, around his peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

“Oh you’ve got to be…” Levi pressed the spine of a book into his forehead leaving a mark.

“William Petersen, he plays Gil Grissom on television,” Maryanne said, pulling out a framed photo of the man and handing it to Levi. “Do the spell again.”

“…$100,” Levi sighed, accepting the signed photo. “I’ll just put this…over here.”

“Eren,” Christa hissed from her seat at the table, surrounded by all of her friends who were actively knitting away at their mittens. “What was that?” she mouthed.

“Oh, someone wanted a love spell.”

Christa gave an audible gasp.

“A real spell?” she mouthed and all of her friends looked up at Eren.

Eren only shrugged. Now he could see why Levi was so coy with his answers. The mystery was far more fun.

All of the girls shared a look between themselves.

The rumor the next day was that Eren’s scarf was actually a love spell and that’s why Mikasa followed him around all the time.

“That’s stupid, you’re my friend,” Eren said, shaking his head as they walked down the steps.

“It doesn’t take much for rumors to take a foothold in this school,” Armin pointed out.

Like Mr. Woerman. The Wednesday before Valentine’s Day, Mr. Woerman called in sick. The rumor was that he had been arrested robbing a bank but that one was quickly dismissed as the flu had been going around for about three weeks now. Eren didn’t think the trigonometry teacher ever got sick. He was a man of such routine. Once Eren had made a list in his notebook of all the slacks Mr. Woerman wore. It turns out he wore exactly five pairs of khakis, one for each day of the school week. The Dockers were strictly a Monday pant, the ones from JC Penney were always Wednesday. For him to call in sick had the whole class, usually a tense and dreary lot, giddy with anticipation of a sub.

Their sub was a tired looking woman in her mid-40’s who looked as though she had rolled out of bed five minutes before class (which, she very well might have for all they knew, again, Mr. Woerman calling in sick was a very rare occurrence).

“We’re going to watch a movie,” she said, gripping her coffee mug tightly in her hands.

“SHREK!” someone shouted from the back and everyone broke out into giggles.

“Hold on, it’s over here somewhere…” she said, flipping through the stack of VHS tapes.

“Tamponnn,” Ymir whispered and they all lost it.

Even Jean couldn’t stay mad about it any longer. Now every time someone mentioned tampon the entire class couldn’t keep a straight face. This led to a chorus of tampon that either the sub ignored
or was too sleepy to acknowledge.

“Fifty bucks says it’s Stand and Deliver,” Jean said, nudging Marco with his elbow.

“I’m not going to take that bet,” Marco refused, shaking his head.

“It’s always Stand and Deliver,” Armin agreed.

“Okay we’re going to watch a very exciting and educational movie today class!” the substitute said, perking up now that she’d brushed dust off the VHS. “I hope you learn a lot! Today’s movie is starring Lou Diamond Philips as a high school calculus teacher.”

“Edward James Olmos is the teacher,” Marco corrected her kindly.

“The combover that inspired millions,” Jean said in a low voice.

“Oh, well I knew it was one of them,” the substitute waved her hands.

“Because there are only two Hispanic actors with three names apparently,” Marco muttered to Jean.

“And they’re both in this movie,” Jean agreed.

“And this movie is about Jay-me Escalate,” the sub continued.

“Hai-me,” Marco corrected again in the same helpful voice.

“Oh well, this is Algebra not Mexican class, so here we go—“

“Stand and Deliver!” the class finished for her.

Given that it was possibly the third time Eren had seen this movie this year alone, he didn’t pay the movie much attention. Instead he, Jean, Marco and Armin put their desks together and started a game of euchre. Armin was Eren’s partner and they were trouncing Jean and Marco, which made Jean increasingly grumpy to play with.

“Why don’t we switch partners?” Armin suggested as Jean flung his cards down.

“Whatever.”

“Switch up the teams so we aren’t playing with the same people?” Armin tried. “Marco and I can be on a team—“

“NO!” both Jean and Eren protested.

They didn’t want to partner with one another and also Armin and Marco were an impossible pair to beat. As they continued their attempts to appease Jean, Eren felt a tap on his shoulder.

“Can I talk to you?” asked Jessica Bollinger.

“Uh, yeah sure,” Eren said, exchanging a look with Armin before standing up.

He followed Jessica to a corner of the classroom, under the guise of sharpening his mechanical pencil.

“So I heard you like…can do spells?” Jessica asked.
“I mean Levi does spells but yeah I guess you could say I’m like his apprentice,” Eren shrugged off her words as if embarrassed by a compliment.

“Cool, so…can you do a spell for me?”

“Oh.” Eren hadn’t anticipated this. “Depends? I’m still kindof new at this.”

“So my mom is like…obsessed with pageants. She spends literally thousands of dollars on pageant dresses and hair appointments and accessories and I’m sick of it. My dad hates it, he says it costs too much money—they had to remortgage their house because of it. I’m tired of not having a single weekend to spend with my friends because I’m down in Detroit or Flint or Grand Rapids for another stupid pageant! I always lose and it’s so stupid. It’s like the 1950s. Just do a spell so I don’t have to go to this stupid pageant this weekend.”

“Uh…okay.”

“So how much is that?” Jessica said, digging around in her backpack.

“Um…I don’t know.”

Levi’s price list for spells had always seemed rather arbitrary to Eren. He pulled prices seemingly from thin air. But Levi clearly knew what he was doing and Eren…did not. He had a vague idea what kind of spell to cast, having watched Levi perform similar ones.

“I guess I don’t feel like I can charge you since I’m still an apprentice,” Eren said, adopting an air of nobility. “It just wouldn’t be right. But we can do this here, c’mon.”

“It doesn’t really look like he’s doing much of anything,” Armin said a few minutes later as Eren sat atop his desk, brow furrowed in concentration,

“Messing around with magic stuff is no good,” Marco said, fidgeting awkwardly as the class crowded around Eren, the movie seemingly forgotten.

“Can we go a day without this desperate grab for attention?” Jean huffed.

“I need silence!” Eren said, eyes closed and holding out a finger to Jean. “There…I think that should do it.”

The bell rang right at that moment and there was a scrabble to put the desks back in place and grab their backpacks.

He couldn’t say if it would work for sure but it was a good effort on his part. To be honest, he hadn’t attempted many spells since the one to postpone the test. He had assumed that was a failure, but it had actually worked, just…in a very inconvenient way. He should practice more if he wanted to get as good as Levi. That’s why he did the winter training for football right? To get better? This was no different.

Except he didn’t know many spells. He knew luck spells and how to prevent unwanted things (like tests and Jessica’s pageant) and love spells. Ugh. So many love spells.

He stopped in his tracks, Armin colliding into him.

“Eren!” he protested, dodging around him to his locker.

A love spell.
Yeah he could do that. But…who should the target be? He looked around the hallway at the many girls standing in groups, leaning on their lockers and giggling. He wanted it to be a test of his abilities. So he’d have to pick someone difficult to make it a challenge.

Mikasa? No…she was his friend he couldn’t use her as a guinea pig.

He caught sight of Annie and thought it over. No, if the spell backfired she’d kill him.

He could just pick a random girl, but that was harder than he thought. Which girl? Should he pick a freshman?

He’d have to think on this.

<*>  

The next day, Thursday the 13th, Mr. Woerman was still out sick. What luck! And they had a different substitute teacher who looked just as out of it as the previous.

“Okay we’re going to watch a movie—Stand—“

“Stand and Deliver,” the class finished in a bored voice.

“Do we have to?” someone in the back asked. “We watched it yesterday.”

“Okay…what do you guys want to watch?” he asked tiredly.

“SHREK!” called someone from the back.

“Nate really likes Shrek,” Eren muttered to Armin who snorted.

“Fine. Whatever.”

Surprisingly, his bid for Shrek worked and the entire class was in a good mood. The carnation drive stopped by class early, Eren hadn’t realized they were delivering flowers a day early, he figured it would happen on Valentine’s Day proper. Eren was surprised with a small number of carnations.

“To: Eren (Red Ranger), From: Blue Ranger…” Eren squinted at it.

“Christa is sophomore class vice president and she begged me to buy a carnation,” Armin explained, chin in his hand. “I didn’t know who else to give one to but you and Mikasa. Christa can be…very convincing.”

“Hell yeah Blue Ranger,” Eren said hi-fiving his best friend. “Oh…I didn’t get you one.”

“I know,” Armin said, waving it off.

“To: Eren, From: Mikasa. Thanks for the scarf. Cool. Oh! This one says it’s from Anonymous! It’s in pink glitter pen! This is from a girl! A girl sent this to me!” Eren said, jumping up.

“Let me see that!” Jean said, reaching for Eren’s pile of cards.

Eren extended the pink glitter card to him but Jean knocked it aside and picked up Mikasa’s instead. Squinting at it, he let out a frustrated noise.

“Yo! Carnation dude—“ Jean shouted
“Jean, my name is Chris. We have French together.”

“Yeah, whatever, where’s my flowers at?” Jean ranted.

“Don’t have any for you.”

“What?”

“Sorry dude,” Chris said, stepping out of the class.

“They’re probably still delivering them,” Marco said quickly because Jean looked furious. Jean crossed the room and then proceeded to rip all the heads off of Eren’s carnations.

“What the hell!!” Eren spat.

“Jean, c’mon,” Marco said, trying to calm him down.

Eren got out of his seat to retaliate but just then an idea occurred to him. He sat back down.

Jean would be the perfect person to test his love spell on. After all, what better way to test his prowess than on someone who hated him? He would cast it immediately after school.

<*>  

After school, the entire group of girls who had been working on their mittens all walked down to the bridge. An entire group gathered round for the event. All of the girls were carrying a carnation in their hair. Apparently someone had spent a whole $20 of carnations on Mikasa. She had so many she was giving them away.

“Here Eren,” she said, handing him one.

“Nah, you already gave me one.”

“Oh…yes,” she said, face pink in the wind. “What happened to it?”

“Ask Jean,” Eren rolled his eyes.

“So how’s this work?” Reiner asked.

“Okay, everyone!” Christa said. “These are the soulmate mittens!” She held hers up for everyone to see. “The instructions read…hold the LEFT mitten in your RIGHT hand over your heart.” She and the rest of the girls did so.

Ymir could be heard grumbling in the background. “Do you really need to do this? You spent so much time on it. Don’t throw it away.”

“And now you conjure up in your head what your perfect man looks like.”

“It says soulmate not man,” Ymir groused, crossing her arms over her chest.

“And then you im—imbue—imbue??”

“Imbue,” Ymir nodded, checking the instructions.

“Im…bue it with your love, willing that whoever finds this mitten, also finds its mate and the way back to your heart.”
“Aww,” said Hannah, clutching hers in her hand.

“Oh brother,” Ymir said, rolling her eyes.

_Imbue with your love?_ That didn’t sound like Levi. That sounded like someone else’s voice entirely.

“And then you stand, with your back to the water,” Christa said and all of the girls lined up along the bridge. “And you let fly!”

She flung the mitten behind her and the rest of the girls followed suit. Several brightly colored mittens with hearts and flowers and other colorful designs fluttered into the air like birds.

But February winds were brutal and many of them landed back onto the concrete.

“Did it go? Did it make it?” Christa asked, looking around giddily.

“Aw mine didn’t go anywhere,” complained Mary Beth.

“Whoops, that one is flying,” Franz said chasing after Hannah’s wayward mitten.

He darted into the street to rescue it from a passing car.

“I don’t see it,” Christa said, pouting a little and stamping her foot. “Did it make it into the water?”

“Got it!” Ymir said, struggling back up the hill. “It fell on the bank, but I got it!”

She handed it back triumphantly. Christa stared at the soggy mitten.

“…What?” asked Ymir.

“You were supposed to leave it!” Christa said, now in tears. “You weren’t supposed to go get it!”

“You spent so much time on this I can’t watch you throw it away for a stupid spell,” Ymir said, shaking off the slush from it and extending it back to Christa.

“You ruined it!” Christa said, wiping her eyes and running away.

It was an odd end to the entire thing, Eren thought. He turned to walk towards Stitchcraft and jolted when he realized Levi was watching the entire thing from his window, arms crossed over his chest and a deep frown.

Eren had to wait for cars to pass before he could cross the street, waving good-bye to Armin and Mikasa. By the time he made it into the shop, the bell tinkling behind him, Levi was nowhere to be seen. Eren was about to climb the stairs to the loft in search of him, but he heard voices coming from the fabric cutting room.

“No,” Levi was saying.

“Why not? You are more than fine taking all those miserable women’s money, what’s wrong with my money?”

“Petra…no.”

“Please? I just…I need something. You don’t understand. He needs—I need. I need to be better. For him. Because if I’m better then maybe I’ll be…deserving of his love. So please, give me this
There was more furtive talk and Levi sounded even more waspish than usual. Eren took another step towards the cutting room.

“Well you wouldn’t know, would you Levi? Because you’ve never been in love! You have no idea! You don’t know what it’s like at all!”

And with that Petra stormed out of the room, nearly colliding with Eren. She stopped short and readjusted her sunglasses.

“Hi Petra!” Eren said cheerily but his smile faltered halfway through. He had been about to ask her if she liked the carnation he had tucked into the brim of his hat, but didn’t.

She muttered hello and stormed out of the building.

“What was that about?” Eren asked.

“Nothing,” Levi said, mouth thin and Eren didn’t question him further.

Chapter End Notes

If you like please leave kudos and comments! They keep me motivated!

My tumblr is perksofbeingawaifu.

Lmao Jean and his bids to win Mikasa's affection. He's so ridic.
Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

Eren has a bad day. Mr. Woerman has an even worse one.

Chapter Notes

AHHH! You guys I am one week away from baby! SO CLOSE! I needed to get this chapter out now so you have something while I'm in recovery.

TW for this chapter! PLEASE READ!

-mentions for domestic violence (I added the domestic violence tag above as well). it's not "on screen" but Grisha mentions something about a patient to Eren that is upsetting so I thought it was time.
-Mr. Woerman makes a weird racist statement
-medical emergency

AH! I'm excited about this chapter!

My tumblr is perksofbeingawaifu.

All of that stress and panic from so many people over Valentine’s Day and the weather had other plans. Snow day! Grisha still had to trudge out in the terrible weather. Unfortunately, surgeons were in high demand during snowstorms. So many horrible car accidents. Eren sat on the couch eating Cheetos and watching TV—at least until the satellite dish filled up with snow. They couldn’t get cable out by the lake and so that was all he had. He brushed it off but the signal never returned. He tried to hop on the computer to do homework but gave up at the slow connection.

He texted Levi Friday night to inquire on if he was needed at work.

[Levi:] don’t worry about it

That meant he had all of Saturday free. He spent most of the time calling Armin but eventually Armin said his grandfather wanted him off the phone. Grisha stopped by to sleep Saturday during the day but then was back out again to work on-call for Sunday.

When the phone rang, Eren hoped against hope that it would be Mikasa. She told him never to call the house asking for her and the one time he had tried he had only gotten the usual, “We're sorry; you have reached a number that has been disconnected or is no longer in service. Please hang up and try again.”

But it wasn’t Mikasa.
“Hey Eren!” said Jean.

“Uh…hello?” Eren said, double checking the caller ID.

“What’re you up to?” Jean asked.

“…Not much, tv is out, so I’m just playing video games.”

“Ha! Yeah me too.”

This was weird.

“What games are you playing?” Jean asked.

“Call of Duty,” Eren said.

“Cool, me too! Wanna play?”

“Nah, I don’t have the LAN set up,” Eren bemoaned.

“Oh you should get online, dude, it’s the best.”

“Okay…”

Eren listened to Jean prattle off his kill score and then the conversation turned to Halo and his sniper kill count and every time Eren tried to make an excuse to get off the phone, he was sucked back in.

“Yeah, I gotta…go, Dad is home,” Eren lied.

He hung up and dropped the phone like it were a dirty gym sock. “What the hell.”

Grisha had promised he’d be back for dinner. Eren ordered a pizza and left his dad a respectable amount. Or he tried. He wound up eating most of Grisha’s slices too. He’d barely eaten anything all day. With the weather and Grisha’s work schedule no one had gone grocery shopping in a very long time. Eren was forced to subsist on ramen noodles and granola bars. He called Mikasa. The line wasn’t available again.

He went to bed late Sunday night, still waiting for his father to come home. At this point he was so bored he would even take Jean’s obnoxious phone calls. It was nearly 2AM before Eren fell asleep.

He woke up late for school. He’d slapped the snooze button five more times than was necessary and finally stumbled out of bed. He opened the fridge, hoping Grisha had stopped by the 24hr gas station for some cereal or milk, but found no such luck.

He found Grisha on the couch. An old bottle of whiskey that Grisha kept “hidden” away in the liquor cabinet sat opened on the coffee table next to his glasses.

“Dad,” he said.

Grisha didn’t move, he just kept snoring.

“Dad,” Eren tried again, nudging him.

“…What?” Grisha said, rubbing the bridge of his nose where the buttons on his glasses left marks.
“I missed the bus, you need to drive me.”

There was a lull as Eren waited and then Grisha started snoring again. “Dad!” he snapped, pulling at his shoulder.

“What Eren? Jesus!”

“You need to take me to school.”

“Take the bus.”

“The bus comes at 7:20, it’s 7:25, I missed it.”

Grisha squinted at his watch and then rolled back to the couch.

“Are you drunk?” Eren asked, growing upset.

“Eren,” Grisha said tiredly. “I spent nine hours in surgery last night, trying to relieve the swelling on a woman’s brain because her husband used a towel bar to beat her and then dragged her by her hair behind his car as he gunned it down the road. I am not taking you to school. You can go yourself.”

Eren didn’t even try to argue that it was six inches of snow out that he’d have to bicycle through. Instead he pulled on his snowpants and boots and trudged to school. He was late.

He stomped into English.

“Eren!” Jean waved, interrupting their teacher. “I saved you a seat!”

Eren exchanged a look with Armin and then sat down.

His day did not improve. Jean kept trying to get his attention. Mikasa showed up with greasy hair, looking like she hadn’t showered in days and nodding off in the middle of class like she hadn’t slept the entire weekend.

“Did you guys enjoy your snow day?” Armin asked cheerfully over lunch.

“No,” both Eren and Mikasa said at the same time.

“Armin didn’t bother to ask a follow up question. Eren picked at his food. His eyes went out of focus as he stared at his meal, the hum of the cafeteria buzzing in his ears like flies. Jean tried to give him his fruit rollup. Eren gave it to Mikasa who tore into it.

The room grew still, a hush falling over their area. Eren noticed the sudden change in volume and poked his head up. Jessica Bollinger was standing there, fists clenched, eyes red.

“Uh…hi?” Eren said.

She slapped him.

“Whoa!” Connie shouted, holding his crutches in front of his face defensively.

Armin and Ymir had to restrain Mikasa from decking her back. Eren simply stood there, dumb with shock.

“You! It’s all your fault! Because of your stupid spell my parents are getting a divorce! Are you
happy now?"

“I didn’t—“ Eren started.

“You’re a witch! And people like you should pay for what you do to others!”

Eren could only gape as she stormed away.

“…Dude,” Connie said sympathetically.

“I got you a cookie,” Jean said, sitting back down and offering the item to Eren.

Eren squinted at him before getting up and leaving. He managed to sneak past the hall monitor and sat with his back to his cold locker, sipping on a lemonade and waiting for class.

His hopes that Mr. Woerman would continue to be out were dashed when he saw that ugly mustache. Eren got into his seat and put his elbow on the desk, staring glumly off into space. Mr. Woerman grunted and let out a hacking cough, beating on his chest.

“Okay class, take out your pencils and paper, time for a quiz,” Mr. Woerman snapped, spitting into his handkerchief.

Some in the class tittered. “A quiz?” they asked.

He hacked a bunch, rubbing his chest and arm, not noticing the spittle he got on Armin’s desk. Armin backed away from it in disgust.

“We have a quiz every Monday, you should be prepared for this,” Mr. Woerman told them. “I assigned Chapter 21 on Tuesday.”

“Uh, we haven’t really learned anything yet,” Jean pointed out.

“I have here in my notes that the substitute assigned you homework for Chapter 21 so you should have completed that and be ready for the quiz.”

“Uh, Mr. Woerman, the sub never gave us any homework,” Marco pointed out.

“What did you do for three days then?” Mr. Woerman spat, his face growing redder as whispers of mutiny started in the classroom.

“We watched Stand and Deliver and then Friday was a snowday,” Ymir said.

“SHREK!” Nate shouted from the back and Jean turned around to shush him.

“I don’t appreciate being lied to. You all just didn’t do the work.”

“We never had any homework, sir!” Marco said, hand raised in the air to speak.

“Mr. Bodt, I would think someone of your heritage wouldn’t want to be seen as intentionally lazy.”

There was an uncomfortable silence as his words settled in and then. Marco put down his hand, his face burning, while the rest of the class stared open mouthed.

“What did you say?” Eren asked angrily.

Marco whipped his head around to look at Eren. Armin closed his eyes as if in pain.
“Mr. Jaeger—“

“Apologize!” Eren shouted, standing in his desk.

“Mr. Jaeger!” Mr. Woerman shouted back, his face growing that shade of purple again. “Sit down!”

“No! You’re a racist piece of shit.”

Marco tried to shrink away like he was invisible, Armin pinched the bridge of his nose, Ymir watched the scene enthralled, her gum nearly falling out of her mouth, and Jean simply looked anxiously back and forth.

“Principal’s office, now.”

“Not until you apologize!”

“Congratulations, Mr. Jaeger, you just earned yourself an expulsion.”

A few kids gasped, but Eren only grabbed his stuff and stormed out of the room, slamming the door behind him. He caught a brief glimpse of Armin’s face as he did so and only then did he suddenly feel a sharp stab of panic.

Expulsion.

Not suspension, not detention. Expulsion. That meant he wouldn’t get to sit with Armin and Mikasa at lunch ever again. That meant he couldn’t hang out with all of his friends. That meant he couldn’t ever be on the varsity team!

Mr. Woerman handed out the quiz and then marched Eren down to the principal’s office.

Spell! He needed a spell. He needed a really good one. He needed Levi. But there was no way he could get out a phone call to Levi before he was forced into the lion’s den.

Mr. Woerman explained in great detail Eren’s misbehavior over the past year. When he tallied them all up like that, Eren did sound like the bad egg Mr. Woerman thought him to be.

“I see,” said Principal Forrester, steepling his fingers. “I think we need to call your father, Eren.”

“He’s on call,” Eren said automatically. “You don’t want to bother him.”

Except they did want to bother him. He wasn’t actually on call. Eren had lied. In fact, Eren didn’t really know what his father did on his days off. He certainly didn’t clean or cook. They decided to keep Eren there in the hallway waiting until his father showed up. They called his cell phone. They called the house phone. They paged him at the hospital. Still Eren sat there.

Eventually the class let out. Everyone had already heard the news and ran down to look at Eren.

“Are you actually expelled?” Jean asked, ashen faced. Then he wailed, “It’s just not fair!”

Armin gave Jean a side eye and then opened his mouth to ask Eren a question but was interrupted.

“You shouldn’t have done that!” Marco told him.

Eren rarely saw Marco angry, so having him upset too made him fully realize the gravity of the situation.
“Dude that was hilarious,” Ymir cackled.

“She was thinking?” Reiner shook his head.

“He wasn’t,” Annie snorted.

“Now you’re going to have to go to the Montessori school,” Connie said sympathetically. “Like Davey Jacobsen.”

Mikasa just looked at him sadly with her dark eyes.

“Eren I think you just need to—” Armin started.

“Hey!” the school secretary tapped on the glass. “No. Don’t talk to him. Go to class. Go on!”

They skulked just out of sight. Armin pressed flat against the wall, just out of sight of the secretary.

“Bathroom,” he mouthed.

Eren scrunched up his face.

“Go!” Armin mouthed.

Eren shrugged, not understanding. Armin sighed and darted into the men’s restroom across the hall. Jean saw him and followed on his heels. So did everyone else, including the girls.

“Mrs. Prenor!” Eren shouted. “I have to go to the bathroom!”

“Make it quick,” she warned.

He quickly ran into the bathroom.

“Eren what are you going to do?” Mikasa asked.

“He needs to apologize. Say it’ll never happen again and agree to detention,” Armin advised.

“I need to cast a spell.”

“A spell? A spell!” Armin raised his voice.

Anyone have a lighter?” Eren asked, patting his pockets.

“Okay give me some space.”

“Hold on,” Annie said, sighing, motioning to Sasha.

Sasha climbed up on Reiner’s back to crack the bathroom window. Annie got a boost from Bert and placed her Doc Martin’s on the sides of the sink to disable the smoke detector.

“Okay, you’re good.” She flashed him a thumbs up.
“All I know is a luck spell. Which…I’m gonna need it,” Eren said mournfully, sparking the lighter.

“Good luck, Eren!” Christa cheered.

<*> At 2:30PM, nearly two hours after they initially called him, Grisha Jaeger finally showed up at the school. His clothes and hair were disheveled. His beard untrimmed. He looked exactly like how Eren had left him on the couch. And he was furious.

“What did you do?” he asked Eren.

“I didn’t do anything!” Eren protested.

“Eren!” Grisha readjusted his glasses.

“Oh my god, are you still drunk?” Eren asked, sniffing him.

“No, I’m hungover and there’s a difference,” Grisha snarked, picking up Eren’s backpack.

“What’s the difference?” Eren could be just as snippy back.

“I have a migraine and I’m pissed off is what. Go. C’mon let’s get this over with. You know, I am so glad your mother doesn’t have to be here to witness this.”

Eren stopped suddenly in his place and then hung his head and followed his father into the office.

“You see Dr. Jaeger, this is not the first incident we’ve had with Eren as you well know. There was the outburst last year. There was the incident where he and his friend were snooping in the gym lockers. There was the vandalism to a parent’s car just last week!” Mr. Forrester began.

“He—“ Mr. Woerman started but burst out coughing again, hacking into his disgusting handkerchief. When the cough continued, he beat and rubbed his chest.

“I didn’t hear about that one.”

Sensing he wasn’t able to continue, the principal clarified Mr. Woerman’s point. “He threw his friend’s crutch at a minivan window and broke it, then fled the scene.”

Eren slouched in his chair.

“And now we have students coming to the counselor’s office worried because they think he is going to put some kind of spell or curse on them.”

“That’s just a joke,” Dr. Jaeger brushed off.

“You think threatening people with witchcraft is funny?” the Mr. Forrester asked.

“It’s just a dumb phase he’s going through. You know how in our day it was all Black Sabbath and listening to Pink Floyd albums backwards and smoking pot?” Grisha said trying to lighten the mood.

“No,” the principal said, his mouth in a firm line.

“Mr. Jaeger—“
“Doctor,” Grisha corrected and Eren put his head in his hands.

Really he should have known better than to think his dad might come to his defense. So far he was only making it worse.

“Your son interrupted my class—“

“He was trying to give us a quiz on stuff he hadn’t actually taught us!” Eren interrupted.

“Accused me of racism!” Mr. Woerman boomed.

“He was being racist!” Eren insisted.

“Called me the ‘s’-word.”

“Which one is that?” Grisha looked baffled.

“And his behavior has only gotten worse!” Mr. Woerman started, the bloom rising in his face again. “There are only two places bad kids with Eren’s behavior wind up! A jail cell or a grave!”

He stopped dramatically as if having made a very important point. Grisha only stared.

“Your face is…very red,” Grisha pointed out.

There was a pause and Eren hid his face in embarrassment.

“Mr. Jaeger,” the principal sighed.

“No. I mean…you have that nasty cough,” Grisha said, looking at him interestedly. “You’re rubbing your chest, are you in pain?”

“Dr. Jaeger,” Mr. Woerman warned, but Grisha stood up.

“You have club fingers, did you know that?” Grisha asked, reaching for his hand to inspect it.

“That cough is really bad.”

“Dr. Jaeger we have no choice but to expel Eren—“

“Mr. Woerman… I think you’re having a myocardial infarction,” Grisha said, getting out of his chair, now looking very concerned. “A heart attack. I think you’ve been having a heart attack. How long have you been feeling like this?”

“It’s just this damn flu!”

Grisha got his penlight out of his breast pocket and attempted to flash it in Mr. Woerman’s eyes, but the teacher swatted it aside. “Have you ever been diagnosed with COPD or any kind of heart issues?” Grisha continued.

“You think—you—you!” Mr. Woerman sputtered.

Eren never found out exactly what he was going to say because at that moment Mr. Woerman collapsed. The next few minutes were chaos. So many things happened at once. Grisha took over the scene, giving orders and pointing. The principal called for an ambulance. The secretary ran out for the AED machine.

“It’s okay Kitts, we’ll get you through this,” Dr. Jaeger said soothingly, not looking upset or
distressed, rather adopting the air of someone who has done this hundreds of times before—which, he had. Sometimes Eren forgot that about his father, that he was not only a doctor, but a damn good one.

The principal made an announcement that everyone was to stay in their classes until the incident was over, but that just made everyone peer out the windows.

Finally, as Grisha closed up the ambulance, the teachers let kids out into the hallways.

“Eren!” Armin ran up to him out of breath. “What happened?”

“I think I killed Mr. Woerman,” Eren said in a shocked whisper.

Chapter End Notes

OH NO IS MR. WОERMAN OKAY?

(lmao no worries, he makes it)

Please leave kudos and comments! They keep me motivated!

My tumblr is perksofbeingawaifu.
Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

Levi has a perfect Valentine's Day. Grisha confronts Eren about his behavior. Eren reveals Mikasa's secret.

Chapter Notes

Babby has arrived so I am sleep deprived and exhausted! She is beautiful! I wrote this before I left but I am so nervous that it's okay because even though I've edited it a dozen times I'm worried that having baby has lessened my work somehow. AHHhhhh! Enjoy!

TW: mentions of domestic violence (Petra), mentions of substance abuse and needles, mild violence (LMAO HOCKEY IS A TRIP), uhhhh I can't think of anything else?

My tumblr is perksofbeingawaifu.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Of course the brat got a snow day. Levi didn’t have the luxury of snow days. Snow days just meant sometimes he was forced to sleep on the futon upstairs at the shop rather than drive home in the horrible weather.

Christa came in, looking for advice on her pageant dress. She sewed all of them herself from scratch. And always she fretted they didn’t have enough sequins. Levi would normally think an absence of sequins was a perfect number of sequins, but for pageants the opposite was true. He found her a box of cheaper, but still just as effective, crystal sequins. They weren’t Swarovski, but they’d do. Then he fixed a zipper pull for her at no cost.

She appeared upset, but then again teenage girls were always upset by something, weren’t they?

“Is Petra back from her honeymoon yet?” she asked.

“…Yes,” he answered, pinning the hem for her.

“Ahhh how romantic,” she sighed. Looking out the window, she added, “What an awful day for a Valentine’s Day.”

Is that what she was on about?

“Do you have any plans for Valentine’s Day?” she asked politely.

“Hockey game unless it’s cancelled.”

“Hockey? Hockey’s not romantic!” Christa pouted.
Levi begged to differ. There was plenty to find romantic about hockey. What else would you call several burly men slamming into one another on the ice?

Levi tore up the opposing team. He checked one of their defensemen into the wall. Heard him go down cursing the “midget” on the opposing team. Ran to Dok’s defense and grabbed a helmet. Earned himself a bit of time in the penalty box for that, during which time, the other team managed to score. C’mon. It’s like they didn’t even try if he wasn’t on the ice. The second he was out, he evened the score.

They won. Mike celebrated by lifting him up. Levi smacked him between his legs with his hockey stick, hard enough that he’d feel it through the cup.

“Hey short round!” the same opposing defenseman came up to him, removing his mouth guard and spitting on Levi’s jersey.

He should have kept that mouth guard in.

Twenty minutes later half the stands were on the ice, pulling the teams off one another.

“Nile, again?” Marie asked exasperatedly.

“Fuck you!” Nile continued shouting, kicking his blades out at the opposing team’s goalie as Sannes pulled him off.

Mike had put himself between Levi and his bloody opponent, looking bored as he shoved Levi’s face away.

A shower later and the fight was forgotten. The opposing team’s captain got into his red firetruck and Nile flashed the police sirens at them as a greeting. Games involving the police force versus the fire department were always that intense.

“You really want our son to think that’s an appropriate way to handle a disagreement?” Marie continued, supporting Nile under her arm.

Levi’s knuckles ached. He’d need to ice them. A perfect Friday night. A perfect Valentine’s Day.

No one came into the store on Saturday so he closed up early—or he was about to when Marie came in to visit. Levi took one look at her face and put the kettle on.

“It’s not like I expect much. But movie tickets? Seriously? He couldn’t even take me out to the movies himself? I even thought not celebrating on Valentine’s Day proper might take the pressure off, but…apparently not.” Marie sighed.

“Mm,” Levi agreed. “Nile’s not a romantic guy.”

“And work is stressful. I’ve been picking up extra shifts at hospice care, we’ll need the money when the new baby arrives and…it’s just very depressing there.”

Levi remembered. He didn’t have any desire to go back.

“Mrs. Petrie is there.”

“What for?” Levi asked. He knew the older woman from the days he used to attend church with his mother. One of the few people who was always decent to his mother. The rest of the congregation used to pretend they didn’t exist.
“Can’t say. HIPPA,” Marie shook her head, having said too much already.

“Ah,” Levi nodded. “Isn’t she fostering kids? What happens to them?”

“Oh, I don’t really know. I guess they’re put into new homes. Sad really.”

Levi hummed in agreement.

“Mike says Nanaba’s chemo is going well. She seems optimistic. Lost all her hair though, poor thing. Have you seen Petra lately?”

“Yes,” Levi said, mouth going thin.

It was Marie’s turn to hum in sympathy.

Levi closed up shop after she left, fighting that itch for a cigarette. He lit up and took a drag. It was a cold day, but the snow fall had stopped and now the fresh snow glittered on the sidewalks. A quiet and cozy blanket on the sleepy town. He needed a walk. He headed down to the pier, hands in his coat pocket and lips pursed around his cigarette. There, he looked out at the water.

“He’s heading down to the pier again,” Nanaba said, sitting in the hardware store window.

Mike only grunted in response.

Sunday, Levi spent the majority of the day shoveling out his driveway. He stopped by the shop to take down all of the Valentine’s Day decorations. On the way home, he stopped to fill up the car with gas and buy some more antifreeze. A nice sleepy quiet weekend was just what he wanted. He hummed to himself as he put the car in gear. Now that the roads were plowed and salted, he could admire the picture perfect setting. The trees in the distance dusted with light fluffy powder as the sunset behind them bathing everything in rosy gold light.

The next thing he remembered it was pitch black and he was sitting in an ice cold car, police and ambulance flashers waving in front of his eyes. He peeled his frozen fingers off of the steering wheel.

How had he gotten all the way out here? He was in a neighborhood he didn’t recognize full of pastel houses, many of which hadn’t bothered to take down their Christmas lights yet. He’d never visited this subdivision before. Levi got out of the car and headed towards all the flashing lights. The EMTs had someone on a stretcher and were loading them into the back of the truck.

“Wait,” he heard himself say, picking up speed. “Wait I know her! Wait!”

<>

Mom had always been the disciplinarian of the two. And that woman could yell. Dad had usually been keen to let Eren do what he wanted. “He’s just exploring his boundaries,” and “He’s just a daydreamer like his old man,” and, “Okay who of us hasn’t tried to eat dirt before?”

But now Grisha was mad. They had spent more than a few hours at the hospital after Mr. Woerman arrived and now they were driving home. They had stopped at Stitchcraft for Eren’s shift (“Don’t think you’re getting out of your responsibilities, Eren.”) but surprisingly, the one time Eren really wanted to work, the shop was closed! Levi never closed the shop! The sign read “CLOSED DUE TO FAMILY EMERGENCY.” And then in smaller print, “(Eren go home).”

Since when did Levi have any family? Levi wouldn’t close the shop unless he was dying or dead.
Eren really hoped he was still alive because he desperately needed help with spells. He had hoped he could buy a spell to combat Grisha’s anger, because he didn’t trust himself to do it. Watch, he’d try to deflect punishment from his father and wind up blinding him or something.

The drive was silent as Grisha fumed and Eren shrank away from him, even avoiding his reflection in the window and mirrors.

He came to a halt in the garage and there was tension building as they each took off their boots in the hallway. There was an awkward moment where Eren set down his backpack on a stool and it toppled noisily, bringing the whole stool down with him.

“Sorry. Sorry,” Eren said, righting it and setting up his backpack that then tipped over.

“I want to know,” Grisha said finally as Eren tucked the backpack under the dining table. “What the hell you were thinking?”

“I—"

“No, not just today—Eren what the hell are you doing? First you try to shoplift at a store! Then you throw a rock through Mrs. Laine’s window—no don’t even lie to me about it she has surveillance cameras Eren. You threw your friend’s crutch at a moving car? What the hell? Now you’re cussing out teachers. You know I thought football and working at that shop might be good for you, teach you some discipline but you are fucking out of control. You know you are lucky your mother isn’t here to see this—“

“Yeah well at least mom understands me! At least she was here!” Eren shouted. “You’re never here!”

“Eren, I have a very—“

“*A very demanding and stressful job,***” Eren recited, rolling his eyes. “So busy you can’t even get cereal.”

“And how do you think I pay for the cereal Eren? How do you think any of your football gear is paid for? How do you think I paid for your braces? You’re welcome, by the way, for the perfectly straight teeth!”

“See you don’t listen. You don’t listen about the cereal—“

“It’s just cereal, Eren!” Grisha exploded.

“You don’t listen to me! About my problems!” Eren sniffed, rubbing his nose.

“Your—your problems? What problems could Eren Jaeger, prince of this household possibly have? You are spoiled and selfish—you know this is why you don’t have more friends!”

“No you don’t, I try to talk to you and you don’t listen—“

“—I thought some of this was just normal teenage rebellion, but what is wrong with you? Is it that concussion? Do we need to get you looked at—”

“—and every time I try to tell you something, you aren’t here—“

“—because we’ve been over this in middle school with the counselor and now we’re dealing with the same bullshit—“
Eren screamed. He screwed up his whole face and screamed as hard and loud as he possibly could. All of that anger, all of that frustration, everything that had been building up for the past few months he let all of it out. Grisha jumped and put his hands over his ears.

There was a long and heavy pause.

“…Eren,” Grisha said, removing his glasses and pinching the bridge of his nose, trying to regain some of his usual calm.

“You’re still not listening,” Eren hiccupped, tears streaming down his face.

“Alright. Go ahead. I’m listening,” Grisha said, wiping at his eyes as he leaned over the kitchen counter.

Now that Eren finally had his attention, he didn’t know quite what to do with the spotlight. “Just… stuff,” Eren struggled. “Like…Mikasa.”

“What about Mikasa?”

“Things aren’t good…at her house. And now you said she can’t come over anymore.”

“Because you know it’s not appropriate Eren. And I’ve met Mrs. Petrie, she’s a very nice woman —”

“Mrs. Petrie had a stroke. She’s in the hospital.”

“Well then child services will know what to do, they’ve probably put her in a new home.”

“No, Mrs. Petrie’s nephew has taken over. And he’s not nice. And his friends aren’t nice.”

“Eren, if there was an issue, I’m sure CPS would have taken care of it—”

“They haven’t.”

“Eren, I’m sure Mikasa has talked to someone.”

“You’re not listening…” Eren wiped his nose on his hoodie.

“Eren, I’m not sure what you want! I am here! I am listening! Actually, you know what? Let’s prove it! Let’s go over to Mrs. Petrie’s house! Let’s go right now!”

“…What?” Eren asked in disbelief.

“C’mon get your coat, get your boots! Let’s go over there right now!” Grisha pulled his coat back on and Eren tugged at it.

“Dad—”

“No, Eren, you said I’m not listening, so we’re going to go over and we’re going to have a chat, okay?” Grisha said, just as stubborn as his son when he wanted.

“Dad, no.” Eren didn’t know what Mrs. Petrie’s nephew might do to Mikasa—or to his father—if Grisha showed up unannounced.

“Okay then you stay here and I’ll go, okay?” Grisha said, already opening the garage door.
Eren could do nothing but wait. He got out his phone.

[Eren:] r u there?

[Eren:] i saw the shop was closed. r u sick??

[Eren:] Levi?

Twenty minutes later…

[Levi:] every time you send me a text i have to spend 99c

[Eren:] sorry

He hit send on the last one before he realized what he was doing and smacked himself in the head with his Razr.

Dad wasn’t back yet so he paced. He tried turning on the tv but it made the churning in his gut feel weird. The phone rang and he jumped.

“Hey Eren!” Jean chorused. “Want to come over and play Xbox? You didn’t get expelled did you? I would really miss you!”

Eren didn’t even wait for Jean to finish, he hung up on him.

Finally he saw the car headlights reflect in the windows and he hopped up to his feet. Grisha entered through the garage door.

“Well?” Eren asked, but stopped when he saw a pale faced Mikasa step out of the car.

Grisha didn’t say anything, he walked past Eren and went into his study, slamming the door so hard it bounced back open.

“Am I in trouble?” Mikasa asked quietly.

“No, of course not!” Eren said, not knowing if that was the truth.

She had her beaten down backpack with her and was wearing the scarf Eren had knit her but had no other bag. Nothing else save a wary expression. And yet…they both felt hopeful. He didn’t know quite what to do.

When Eren started fifth grade, he didn’t want his mom to hug him. Jean, the new kid, made fun of him for it. So Carla had a solution. Instead of a hug good-bye, she squeezed his hand. Once was, ‘I’m here.’ Twice was, ‘You’re safe.’ And three times was, ‘I love you.’

Eren took Mikasa’s hand and gave two squeezes. They sat down on the couch and listened intently as Grisha shouted on the phone.

“There were needles and bottles everywhere! I want to speak to someone who is fucking in charge!” Grisha roared into the receiver.

“Were they mad you left?” Eren asked nervously, not wanting to send Mikasa back to a house full of angry people.

“No they were all passed out already. I think they took something that comes in a needle so they’re out of it.”
“I don’t care! Get Dot off the fucking shitter and get him to come to the phone!”

“He sounds really mad,” Mikasa said, chewing her lip and looking at the door.

Eren tiptoed over to the office and shut it closed. “There,” he said.

When the doorbell rang, Eren shuffled up to the window and squinted outside. It was Sheriff Pixis. He hesitantly opened the door.

“Here there, sport,” Sheriff Pixis said, tipping his hat. “Your dad around?”

Eren led him silently to the study. He and Mikasa waited for a moment and then they both hovered by the office door to listen.

“Yup, we’ve got them in custody.”

“I thought there were other kids in the house but I didn’t see any.”

“Temporary placements. Mikasa was the only one there long term. Or at least she was when Mrs. Petrie was there.”

“What did you do with them?”

“Oh we arrested the three men. They were all passed out so it made for an easy catch. Poor Mrs. Petrie, I don’t have the heart to break it to her. Not sure she’d understand what I’m saying anyway after the stroke.”

“What I want to know is why none of this was reported.”

Dot Pixis sighed. “Who can say, Doc? I’ve got someone from CPS coming to the house here and we’ll get some answers and then they can take the girl home.”

“No, she isn’t leaving my sight until I know she’s somewhere safe!” Grisha insisted.

“With all due respect Doc, taking her from the premises to begin with is custodial interference.”

“So arrest me.” Grisha’s voice grew urgent, “Dot…that’s Greg and Kim’s little girl in there.”

“Let Anya talk to the girl first?”

A half hour later there were two deputies and a social worker in their living room. The social worker took Mikasa into a separate room so it was just Eren and the deputies. He couldn’t stop staring at their belts. They had so much cool stuff on there. They were just sitting in the living room joking and Eren offered them some popcorn.

“Thanks dude,” Officer Dawk said, grabbing a handful.

They left, the social worker said she would be back the next day. She wasn’t. She didn’t return until the end of the week.

Eren wound up with an out of school suspension. All of his teachers gave him the course load ahead of time. He finished his homework on the first day. Grisha signed Mikasa out of school as well. The three of them went to visit Mrs. Petrie in hospice. She was happy to see Mikasa, but aside from that didn’t have much awareness of where she was. Then Grisha called out of work and took them all ice fishing.
Sitting out in the pop up tent on overturned buckets, freezing but eagerly waiting for a fish to come along, Eren suddenly felt like a weight had been lifted. The world felt a little lighter.

Mikasa carried their catch to the car, but Grisha held Eren back.

“She’s gonna be better okay?” Grisha said, pulling Eren into an unexpected hug. “I’m going to cut back at work, I’m going to be here more. We’re going to be better, okay?”

And for the first time in a long time, Eren actually believed it.

Chapter End Notes

The Foster Care to Success' Red Scarf Project is brilliant and I suggest you all go check it out!

I agonized over my characterization of Grisha here, but I figure 1) manga-Grisha has been a lot more passionate and expressive than anime-Grisha so I'm okay and 2) if there can be a million and one abusive Grisha tropes then I'm allowed just one "trying his best" Grisha.

Thank you for leaving kudos and comments! Y'all keep me motivated!

My tumblr is perksofbeingawaifu.
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

Eren faces the consequences of his "love spell" on Jean and gets a new substitute teacher.

Chapter Notes

Welp I hate posting on a Friday but I had company over and I'm sick so this is how it's gonna go down. I hope yall are excited!

My tumblr is perksofbeingawaifu.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Eren’s return to school was a mixed bag. Sasha tackled him in the hallway. Connie chucked his crutch at Eren out of respect. And Jean raced past Marco to throw his arms around Eren.

“I missed you so much!” Jean said, near to tears. “Don’t ever do that again.”

Eren couldn’t peel him off of his coat so he wound up half dragging Jean to his locker. He opened his locker and a pile of folded papers and sketches fell onto the ground.

“I wrote you a note each time I thought of you,” Jean explained. “Like, this one right here, was after Sasha farted and I had to tell you about it.”

Eren stared at the many brightly colored notes, complete with illustrations. “Uh. Thanks.”

“You’re welcome!” Jean beamed, still not leaving. “Hey do you want to come over to my place after and play video games? My mom made lemon cookies.”

Eren had nearly forgotten about the love spell he had cast on Jean. It felt like a lifetime ago. And now here was Jean, following him around like a lost puppy.

“What’s up with him?” Armin asked as Marco pulled Jean away.

“Dunno,” Eren said, walking quickly out of sight.

Mikasa was gone. The social worker had come for her Friday night and Eren didn’t get to say good-bye. Dad made him pancakes for dinner to make him feel better and spent the rest of the night looking up how he could gain custody of Mikasa in his office. Her seat at the cafeteria table was empty and Eren couldn’t help but sigh. No one sat in it. Jean chased off Flocke when he strode over, presumably to take her spot.

“I hate that guy,” Jean grumbled. “How did he even become student body president? I didn’t vote
for him.”

That was one of the few things Eren agreed with Jean about. “Yeah,” he said, sipping his Diet Coke.

“Yeah neither of you voted at all. That’s what happens when people don’t participate in the democratic process,” Armin said rolling his eyes. He was still bitter about losing class treasurer so Eren and Jean chose not to respond.

It didn’t even occur to Eren that Mr. Woerman wouldn’t be in class until he got there. His first thought was “Maybe we’ll get to watch another movie.” His second thought was, “I hope he’s not dead.” Then he felt guilty for that having been his second thought.

“Hello! I am Mr. Gin, just like gin rummy, that game your grandmas play!” said an overeager young man in what looked like his first button down and tie, writing his name on the whiteboard.

“Why wouldn’t you just say like the drink?” Eren asked, setting down his backpack and looking around the room to see if anything else had changed.

“Because frankly I don’t like gin, I’m more of a bourbon guy,” Mr. Gin said, clapping his hands. “C’mon, c’mon in guys, close the door, c’mon, in your seats.” He hopped up on the balls of his feet as they slowly settled in.

Jean took Armin’s seat next to Eren, leaving a confused Armin shuffling around awkwardly before sitting in Jean’s seat.

“Alright, so Mr. Woerman has here that you guys have completed Chapter 21, and Chapter 22 is all revision of that so we’re skipping on to—“ He scanned the class outline and flipped a few pages. “Chapter 23!”

“Uh sir,” Marco said timidly, raising his hand. “Actually we never completed Chapter 21?”

“Oh well. Clearly Mr. Woerman wasn’t feeling well when he wrote this. So… let’s pick up there, shall we? Ah! Radians! Oh this is going to be so exciting!”

He turned back to the chalkboard, scribbling down the example problem from the book.

“Oh, and just so you all know. Mr. Woerman is recovering but probably won’t be back this school year. So I’ll be taking over his classes until they get a proper replacement.”

“Why can’t you teach us?” Eren asked, already at ease with the new teacher.

“Because I’m not quite finished with my degree yet, I’m subbing until I get the proper credentials. We moved back up because my fiancé and I found a house we absolutely love—ah! Okay! Radians! Who can tell me about radians?”

<*> In between classes, Eren had Armin lock the door in the bathroom to escape from Jean. When the school bell let out, Jean scaled the brick wall and chased after him. Eren thought he would lose him when he entered Stitchcraft but to his dismay, Jean barreled into the store after him.

“No. Nope,” Levi said, pointing at the door. “The last time both of you were in here you caused so much damage I’m still paying for it. Out!”
Jean sulked, but went outside, sitting on the bench and looking through the window at Eren with a pleading expression.

“I need your help,” Eren said turning nervously to Levi.

“With what?” Levi sighed.

Eren paused. Now that he had a moment to look at Levi, he didn’t look that good. He rubbed tiredly at the bags under his eyes before picking up his mug of tea.

“You sick?” Eren asked. “I came by after school and you had a sign on the door.”


“Do you have the flu?”

“No.”

“The runs? I got that once after Taco Bell. Don’t go to the Taco Bell,” Eren said with a smirk on his face.

“Knock it off,” Levi said, slapping at Eren’s arm. “What did you need?”

“I…uh. A lot has happened.”

He didn’t know if he should tell Levi about Mr. Woerman (Levi might be mad about that) or Jessica Bollinger, so he started with the least of his problems.

“This is actually hilarious. So I sortof, maybe, kindof, accidentally cast a love spell on Jean.”

“Jean,” Levi repeated, pointing out the window at Jean who had his cheek pressed against the glass. “The kid you call horse face.”

“Ha. Yeah.”

“…And you cast a love spell on…him? I didn’t realize he was your type,” Levi said, now considering it.

“What?” Eren sputtered. “No! No you have the wrong idea. No definitely not. No! I’m not like that. Hahaha! I don’t like guys.”

Levi raised an eyebrow and pursed his lips.

“I just did it. You know. For fun. As a joke.”

“A joke,” Levi repeated Eren again, his voice dipping down a register. “You think what I do is a joke?”

When Levi was angry his voice grew quieter and Eren felt a chill pull in around him as if Levi’s glare were sucking out all of the heat from the room.

“No?” Eren sensed he’d made a misstep somewhere and tried to look anywhere but at Levi.

“You know what? I made a mistake. I thought maybe I could teach you. But you think this is a game. I take this very seriously.” Levi took a step forward and Eren balked. “We’re done. Sort out your own mess.”
Eren sighed and looked out the window. Jean had written a note on lined paper that read, “Do you want to watch a movie at my house?” and held it up anxiously for Eren to read.

<*>  

Levi didn’t talk to Eren the rest of his shift. When the time for closing came and Levi flipped the sign to closed, Eren waited eagerly as Levi set out the candle for the shop. Then Levi walked over to the back door and held it open.

“You can go,” Levi said, ushering Eren out the door.

“Levi…” Eren rolled his eyes.

He wasn’t really serious about this. Was he?

“You can get home just fine, right?” Levi asked.

Eren sighed and shouldered his backpack, making sure to stomp his feet as hard as possible when he left.

The next day Eren ran in for his shift, Jean on his heels. Levi kicked Jean out and remained firm in his decision.

“Please?” Eren cajoled. “You can’t just stop teaching me! We’ve only just started! I made a mistake! Please? Please help me?”

He must have asked Levi fifty different ways. But the answer was always the same.

“No,” said Levi, fingers curled around his tea.

“No,” said Levi, sorting through buttons.

“No!” shouted an exasperated Levi as he slammed the back door in his face.

Eren wasn’t to be deterred. On Wednesday, he brought Levi his tea.

“Oh...” Levi looked surprised but accepted the mug and took a long, deep sip. Levi had the same expression whenever he drank tea, the line between his brows smoothing out as he relaxed for a split second. Levi after tea was the best Levi to deal with in Eren’s opinion.

“Now that you’ve had your tea, have you changed your mind yet?” Eren asked.

Levi’s expression soured, looking as if he tasted curdled milk.

The following week, Eren picked up again. “Please?” he begged. “Please!”

“EREN!” Levi snapped, finally losing his patience and scaring a few of the customers. “Go do the… the recyclables or something. Anything.”

Meanwhile Jean’s pursuit of Eren had dialed up to eleven. He needed to be at the same urinal Eren used. He convinced Mr. Gin that Eren was his tutor and pushed their desks together. He kept bringing in cookies his mom had made—okay actually that was the best part of the whole ordeal, Eren loved Mrs. Kirstein’s cookies. He carried Eren’s books, he fetched Eren water, and worst of all he kept trying to set up a sleepover. Eren couldn’t stand Jean during class, how on earth was he going to tolerate staying a night at Jean’s house?
“I rented my three favorite movies last week for us to watch, they’re like super overdue but I told the guy at the video store that I need an extension and he’s cool so—”

“I have to go—“ Eren said running away.

“Jean, you’re talking a mile a minute,” Marco said laughing a little. “Maybe you should—“

“You’re not helping Marco!” Jean yelled at him.

Right. This had gone on long enough. Eren could tolerate Jean’s clingy behavior but he couldn’t have his spell hurting other people like Marco. He decided to up his tactics against Levi.

“Levi. Levi. Levi! All I need you to do is—“ Eren started for what must have been the fiftieth time this week.

“No,” Levi said simply.

“Levi you can’t just—“

“No,” Levi said, tapping Eren hard in the chest. “You don’t seem to get it. NO. No is a complete sentence. No is not an opening to a debate. No is not the start of haggling. You want spells? Let me tell you ‘No’ is the most powerful word you will ever learn. It’s one of first words children utter when they are beginning to speak. It has weight. It has power. It is the ultimate spell. Now young prince Eren, who has everything he could ever ask for, lots of friends, perfect teeth, Dad who offers to pay off his mistakes, whose biggest problem is that one of his friends wants to spend too much time with him, has probably never had a single person tell him no in his entire goddamn life so let me say it again: No. No I will not teach you spells. No I won’t teach you about magic ever again.”

And he didn’t.

<*/

Christa wouldn’t stop talking about how good looking Mr. Gin was.

“The ponytail,” Christa fawned.

“Yes!” agreed Hannah.

“Probably an internet predator, they all have ponytails,” Ymir grumbled.

“He’s dreamy,” Sasha agreed. “He asked me my favorite dessert recipe so he could make his fiancé a surprise treat.”

Christa sighed and all four girls looked to their right as if waiting for someone else to join in with them. Eren only blinked back.

“I don’t get why you guys are infatuated with him, he’s old,” Ymir groused, putting on her glasses to read over her English homework.

“Mikasa would have agreed with me,” Christa sighed, looking at Mikasa’s empty seat.

Mr. Gin stopped Eren after class.

“I hear you work at a knitting shop after school!” he said excitedly. “My fiancé loves to craft and I was looking for this very specific book. I asked at the book store and Ms. Wyse got very huffy and
refused to look it up or order it for me. Do you think you could help me find it? It’s a knitting book and the title is a little dicey—“

“Oh, Stitch n’ Bitch? Yeah we have that,” Eren said. “Come on down to Stitchcraft, we have a whole display.”

“Stitchcraft? That store still exists?” Mr. Gin blinked in surprise. “I think that’s the store my buddy’s mom owned. Did she sell it?”

“No. Levi’s still there. He’s my boss.”

At Eren’s words, Mr. Gin’s face split into a wide grin. “Levi!? That’s amazing! I was really hoping to connect with some of the guys. Do you mind if I walk down with you after school?”

Eren didn’t mind. Having Mr. Gin around might keep Jean’s chattering at a minimum. And it was nice listening to Mr. Gin talk about his high school days. He wasn’t so much older than Eren, Eren realized. That meant Levi wasn’t either. Huh. Levi in high school was hard to picture.

“Levi was kindof like…the leader of our little gang. We all hero worshipped him a little. He was only a grade older than me, but he was like a big brother, you know?”

“Perpetually sixty year old man,” Eren remarked dryly.

Mr. Gin laughed. “And we had this friend, Oluo, who was younger than us and he just, man he followed Levi around. If Levi bought a black faux leather duster then Oluo had to have one too—“

“Oluo’s still here,” Eren interrupted. “He works at the bar around on State.”

“Really? What about Gunter?” Mr. Gin asked excitedly.

“I don’t know who that is,” Eren said. “I just know Levi went to high school with Mike—“

“Yeah Mike is a grade or so older than Levi. I think Mike stuck his head in a toilet once. Big mistake. That was before I was in high school though, I just remember because people said Levi’s mom came down to the school. That’s how Coach Shadis lost his hair you know.” Mr. Ginn wiggled his fingers as if casting a spell. “Or rather—I should say, that’s the rumor.”

Eren blinked then shook himself out of it. “Oh and Petra! She’s—“

“Petra! I haven’t seen Petra in ages! I heard she was prom queen the year after I graduated.”

“She just got married,” Eren said, now feeling very proud to have all of this information at his disposal.

“No kidding! To who?”

“Oh…I don’t actually know his last name. But Davey? Something?”

“Davey Rummer?” Mr. Gin said with a note of disgust in his voice.

“You know him?”

“Yeah I know him,” Mr. Gin said darkly.

Eren didn’t know how to reply to that. Luckily they entered the store then.
“See?” Eren said pointing to the display of craft books. “Right here!”

“Thank you, Eren! She’s going to love this,” Mr. Gin said picking up the book.

“Eld,” Levi said, stopping in his tracks.

“Levi! Hi! Been a long time! What’re you doing here?” Mr. Gin’s wide grin contrasted heavily with Levi’s dark look.

“I work here,” Levi said waspishly as if it were obvious.

He took the book from Mr. Gin’s hands and scanned the barcode, then stuffed it into a bag.

“Yeah but…what about LSSU? What about the hockey scholarship?” Eld asked.

“Your total is $14.79, will that be all?” Levi asked curtly, his face stormy and pinched.

Mr. Gin’s smile slipped off his face. “Good to see you Levi,” he said quietly.

Eren followed Mr. Gin to the door. “Sorry,” he apologized. “He’s always like that.”

“It’s weird because…everything is the same but at the same time everything has changed,” Mr. Gin said running his tongue over his teeth. At Eren’s puzzled expression he clapped him on the shoulder, “You’ll get it when you go off to college.”

Eren watched him go.

“You didn’t have to be rude,” Eren said, rolling his eyes at Levi.

Levi clucked his tongue in response. He was in a foul mood the rest of the day, snapping at Eren when he didn’t catalogue the buttons just so or when he mixed up the zippers with the snaps. Eren couldn’t figure out what had crawled up his ass and died. After Levi criticized him for winding a skein wrong Eren mimed strangling him behind his back.

“You should be nice to me,” Eren finally said huffily. “I brought a customer to your store! I helped!”

“Do you want a commission off a purchase of fifteen bucks now?” Levi asked, rolling his eyes.

“Why won’t you teach me? You can’t just change your mind like that!” Eren switched into a whine.

“I thought I was very clear on what ‘No’ meant,” Levi said in a warning tone.

“I’ll—I’ll quit!” Eren threatened.

“Whatever,” Levi aid with a wave of his hand as if he were dismissing a tiresome valet.

“I mean it!”

“So do it.”

“If I go then you won’t have anybody!” Eren pointed out. “I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but you don’t have any friends! Petra was about it and you pushed her away because you were jealous of her husband!”
Levi only blinked at all of that, his jaw working like he was chewing over Eren’s words. “I like being alone.”

“No you don’t! No one does!” Eren said waving his arms. He had a point he was trying to make here. About how Levi needed his friendship and thus should continue to teach him spells. Or something like that. It wasn’t a well-reasoned argument.

“I really do. See—“ Levi took a step forward and Eren one back. “People only stick around when things are good. When sun shines out your ass. The second things go bad, they leave. They leave because they don’t like that you make them feel bad. And it won’t even be because of something you did. It’ll because something happened to you and it makes them uncomfortable, like your mother lying in a hospital bed. They’ll go to college and they’ll be ‘busy’ and then they’ll forget to include you in their plans or their hangouts. It’s amazing how busy people get when you need them. So then you’re left alone. Alone to pay for a funeral you can’t afford because you’re still paying hospital bills. And you have to learn to like yourself and you have to learn to like being alone because you’re the only person you can count on. I learned long ago to rely on myself first. So if you’re going to quit…I really don’t care.”

Eren felt his bottom lip start to wobble, but he couldn’t cry. He wouldn’t. So he grabbed his things and left. He nearly collided with Oluo on his way out.

“Front door,” Levi sighed, pointing as Oluo tracked slush in from the back.

<*> Mikasa wasn’t at school all week. Eren’s dad called to find out her whereabouts and they said the closest home they could place her in was in Rose City. She might not ever come back. He walked past the drinking fountain only to find Jessica Bollinger hiding in the stairwell off the auditorium crying. Dad said Mr. Woerman had to have a triple bypass. And Jean brought all of his favorite movies to show to Eren in the hopes that Eren might want to watch one with him (“I mean Requiem for a Dream is like…that soundtrack, you know?”). During class, Eren simply rested his head on the cool desk.

If Levi was surprised to see him at his next scheduled shift, he didn’t say. Eren knew it was delivery day and they were getting a new shipment, all of which needed to be tagged and stored so he forced himself to go anyway. He printed out the price tags and began taping them over brand’s own label (“Make sure you cover the website. We don’t want these idiots figuring out they can buy it themselves.”) and then carefully rearranged the displays. It felt good to work, to turn his brain off and just focus on storing things. It almost felt like he was putting away the bad thoughts with the back stock.

“You could…stay after…if you want,” Levi said. It was the first full sentence he’d spoken to Eren since Eren showed up.

“I think I’ll go home,” Eren said shuffling his feet.

Levi squinted at him. “If this kicked puppy bullshit is some new tactic of yours to get me to change my mind, it won’t work—“

“It’s not. I’ve been thinking about what you said and I…don’t think I’m a good witch. I’m not sure I should even be doing magic. All I’ve done is mess stuff up. I cast a luck spell and gave Mr. Woerman a heart attack, I tried to help Jessica Bollinger get out of her pageants with a spell and made her parents get divorced, I gave Mikasa that scarf and now she’s in a different school. And Jean is so, so annoying,” Eren sniffed as his voice cracked.
Levi sighed and sat down at the table next to Eren. “You didn’t make Jessica Bollinger’s parents get a divorce—the writing has been on that wall for years. Besides Mr. Bollinger has been schtupping a divorced paralegal over in Rose City for a year now.”

“Really?” Eren wrinkled his nose. “Ew.”

“And you didn’t give Mr. Woerman a heart attack, years of Big Macs and cigarettes did that. Okay?”

“Okay,” Eren sniffed.


“Mrs. Petrie had a stroke. When she was recovering her nephew moved in with them. He’s a creep. Mikasa had to lock her door every night. And then when they moved Mrs. Petrie out for treatment, he moved his creepy friends in and they just party every night. And CPS kept dropping off kids for temporary placement, but they—they wouldn’t do anything. Mikasa had to stay up late the night before a big game feeding a crying baby. They kept telling her to water down the formula. They’re so stupid. I hate them.”

“…Why didn’t you tell someone about this?”

“Because Mikasa asked me not to. She talked to CPS but they didn’t do anything. And because everyone already thinks I’m a fuck up. That I’m an angry loser. They would think I was making it up for attention. People think I made up the guy on the trail. I didn’t—”

“Never thought you did.”

“And I made Mikasa that scarf and now she’s not here. They took her out of school. She’s over at Rose City High. They’re such assholes and their football team sucks.”

“You made a scarf out of love, because you wanted to protect and keep her safe. And now she is.”

“Nothing ever works out the way I want it to,” Eren said into his knees.

“Ah well…that’s life.”

“No, you always get it to work out how you want.”

“If that were true I’d have buttloads of cash,” Levi snorted. “And I’d never have had to abandon my scholarship to come back to this podunk town.”

It never occurred to Eren that Levi was unhappy here.

Levi sighed and stood up. “You know those stupid mitten kits? You want to know what happens to them? Every year girls toss their mittens off the bridge hoping to find their soulmates. And every year people pick them up and you know where they take them? They bring them back to me. Look.”

He pulled open one of the lower drawers on the cabinets that Eren had never seen opened. Inside were dozens of left handed mittens.

“Do you know how the spell works? I tell them to knit the first one for themselves, knit their hopes, their dreams, their aspirations. It sounds like bullshit, but the first one is a spell for themselves first. To find happiness, to find who you are. The second is for happiness for a person
you haven’t met yet. Its purpose is to will someone to you. That’s what it’s supposed to do anyway.

“My mother wrote this spell because, god rest her soul, she believed in love. She continued to believe in all this romantic bullshit even though she fled across two different countries because she was so terrified of my father. So that’s it, Eren. Magic. Spells. They’re just a reflection of you and your intentions. It’s just you. This was my mother, this was all of her, just a bunch of single mittens. She believed in love, it just didn’t believe in her.

“You couldn’t predict what would happen to the Bollingers, you couldn’t predict what would happen to Mr. Woerman—I mean you didn’t want to kill him did you?”

“I—“ Eren squeaked. “Don’t think so?”

Levi exhaled through his nose. “But a spell like this? You thought it was cute to put a spell on your friend, to make him fall in love with you. You thought that was funny, to play with someone’s feelings like that. That was intentionally cruel. That’s who you are. So right it. Fix it. You cast the spell, only you can undo it.”

He looked around at the open drawer. “And I guess this is who I am. Selling broken love spells to teenage girls who don’t know any better and don’t know they deserve better.”

He sighed and shut it with some finality. He instead dug out the candle from the trunk and put it in the front window.

“I’ll give you a ride home after, okay?” Levi said patting Eren on the back.

<*>  

Eren napped upstairs on the futon, feeling sorry for himself. He didn’t want to listen to Levi’s customers and their problems tonight. He didn’t know how Levi did it. But something caught his ear.

“A vasectomy,” the woman downstairs whispered. She was crying and shaking.

Eren crept down the stairs to peer through the bars at her. It was the same woman who had been in before. He’d never paid much attention to her name. Christine? Christine something. Christine whose husband oversaw one of the large bulk food distributor centers. Christine who wanted a baby but for some reason couldn’t.

“I ran into his ex-wife—the crazy one with all the credit card problems. I don’t know why I mentioned it but I said something about us trying for a baby and she said, ‘Did he have his vasectomy reversed?’ She knew! His whole family knew! They knew I was trying and that he’d had this procedure and yet they said nothing! He let me think it was my fault! I packed a bag and left the house that night and I haven’t been back. I can’t believe I wasted two years with him. I need—I don’t know what I need. I need a way for him to feel as shitty as he made me feel. He made me feel like I was worthless. I want him to feel that way. I want him to suffer.”

Eren knew the routine. Levi didn’t curse people. He always found a way around it. But instead of telling her no way and offering a spell to help her move on—

“Alright. Let’s do it.”

“You will?” she asked, relief spreading across her face.
“Yes, but I will tell you, once I cast this, there is no going back from it. Do you agree?”

“Yes. Yes!” she nodded.

They shook on it.

He escorted her out of the building.

“Do what?” Eren asked tip toeing down the stairs.

Levi had a slight hop in his step as he extinguished the candle out front. “You’re in luck, Eren. We’re gonna curse someone.”

Chapter End Notes

My tumblr is perksofbeingawaifu.

:O

WILL JEAN EVER BE FREE OF EREN'S SPELL? WILL LEVI PERFORM THE CURSE? WILL WE EVER SEE MIKASA AGAIN? Leave a comment and/or kudos to find out!!!
Chapter 24

Chapter Summary

Levi and Eren curse someone.

Chapter Notes

My tumblr is perksofbeingawaifu.

SEASON 3 SOON!!! GET HYPE!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

White magic, Levi had said once, was not created. It was simply redirected energy. He sat Eren down with a box of crayons—which, at the time Eren had found offensive as he wasn’t a little kid, but still did it anyway—and several square pieces of paper. He folded the corners together, creating an X with the creases and then had Eren color each of the four sections a different color. Eren did so and Levi would then cut them and made them into little pinwheels.

“Four colors,” Levi held his fingers up. “Each one representing an element. Here, look. What color do you see?”

He blew gently on the pinwheel, looking sideways at Eren. Eren was distracted by Levi’s lips, the way they were both smiling and unsmiling and his eyes which had a spark in that flint grey.

“Oh, I don’t know, I don’t really see a specific color. It’s just kind of a blur,” Eren said squinting.

Levi huffed a laugh. “Seven points on your body,” he said, sticking one of the violet sale stickers on the top of Eren’s Tigers hat. “Each one representing a part of you, representing the energy there. So we have external forces—the elements—and then we have the internal—what comes from you.”

He stuck several more stickers on Eren, pausing at the last one. “Red, the base. Tailbone and groin.”

He handed it to Eren who stuck it on his fly with a giggle.

“Teenagers.” Levi rolled his eyes, so Eren stuck a sticker on his head just above his eyebrow.

“So what do these seven colors make?” Levi asked, slapping Eren’s hand away as he tried to attach another sticker.

Eren shrugged.

Levi sighed and got up (Eren used the opportunity to smack a sticker on his back pocket) returning with a paper plate. “Seven colors, go.”
Eren grumbled but did as he was told. “You know if you ever wanted to quit the shop you’d made a great kindergarten teacher.”

The noise Levi made was not amused. When Eren finished, Levi punctured the center of the plate with a pencil and then spun it.

“What color do you see?” Levi asked again.

Once again, Levi’s eyes were distracting as he spun the plate.

“I don’t…” Eren let out a frustrated sigh and then his eyes widened as realization struck. “White. White light.”

Levi nodded. Eren understood.

“You take this, the potential energy of the universe, and you channel it through your body and then it comes out of you. Out of your head, your fingertips, your breath, your nose. It shoots right up from the top of your head to the sky like a beacon. You know what I mean by potential energy? What is a match, but potential fire? What is an empty cup but simply waiting for water? What is string?” Levi asked, reaching behind him and plucking a skein of yarn from the display behind him. “What is this? What could this be?”

“Anything,” Eren said slowly. “It…could be anything.”

“Not bad,” Levi said and Eren’s chest fluttered with pride.

“Then what’s a curse?” Eren asked, wrinkling his nose.

“Black magic, dark magic.”

“That’s racist,” Eren said, cocking his head to the side.

“What?” Levi blinked, clearly not anticipating that response.

“I mean, you’re basically saying that things that are black are evil so…yeah. Racist.”

“No I’m—“ Levi took a moment. “If Light is the presence of all of these, of potential energy, of creation, then Dark magic is the opposite, the absence of light. The force of destruction.”

“Yeah, evil.”

“Evil? No. That energy itself isn’t inherently bad. It’s how the world spins, it’s…” Levi struggled. “It’s beautiful. I mean, for every time someone uses fire to stay warm, there’s a forest fire that wipes out homes and wildlife. There’s tornadoes, floods, earthquakes. That destruction is inherent, it’s not evil. I mean, volcanic ash is the most fertile soil on earth, right? But for you to cast that, then it will come back to you threefold. I don’t know about you, but I don’t want a natural disaster in my backyard.”

Levi didn’t even really appear to be talking to Eren, he simply went back to his spinning, talking down at his hands instead. He wasn’t always great with words, often jumping from one thought to the next, switching topics without warning. Eren wasn’t sure he followed what he was saying.

“It’s the ebb and flow of the universe. Light is the day and the sun, Dark is the night and the moon. Light is conscious thought, dark is unconscious thought—dreams! Light is growth—think of the apple orchards on the outskirts of town. Dark is the realm of the hunter. Would you call an owl evil
“for hunting a mouse?”

“Depends,” Eren said slowly. “If I was the mouse.”

Eren stared mournfully at the slightly crumpled pinwheel sticking out of the scrap yarn basket.

Levi may have said he would never teach Eren any magic ever again—and he didn’t. He stayed true to his word. But he didn’t stop Eren from listening in on his witching sessions. Or from leaving his little black book around. Levi wasn’t going to teach him and Eren wasn’t sure he wanted to practice anymore. The spells seemed to cause more problems than they solved. Still, he couldn’t help but be curious.

“What’s this?” Eren asked, picking it up.

“Every witch needs their book of shadows,” Levi said, pinning a display sweater to a mannequin.

“What’s a book of shadows?”

“Spell book.”

“Why do you have one?”

“So I can remember who I cast what spell for. I use it more like a ledger.”

Eren waited until Levi wasn’t looking and then thumbed through the pages.

“Most of these are just shawl patterns!” he protested.

“That’s because it’s my book of shadows,” Levi said, plucking it from Eren’s hands. “Did you check the trap?”

“Erm. No.”

After their customer had left, Levi hadn’t said anything more to Eren about the curse. He drove Eren home and it wasn’t mentioned. That is…until the next day when Levi handed Eren $50 from the tin box in the chest and told him to buy several live mouse traps from Mike’s hardware store next door.

“The nice ones,” he said vaguely.

“Do…do we have mice?” Eren asked.

“It’s a hundred year old building Eren, if we don’t have mice, we have bats. We have something.”

“Is this part of the spell? The curse?” Eren asked as Levi put a glob of peanut butter in each and set some outside by the bins and one in the basement and one behind the counter.

Levi didn’t answer him. Right. Of course he wouldn’t. He wasn’t going to teach Eren anything. And Eren wasn’t sure he wanted to learn. The few spells he had attempted were already so disastrous that he couldn’t handle something coming back to him threefold. One fold was enough, thank you very much.

Eren hovered anxiously around Levi, but Levi seemed content to sit by the fireplace and work on his latest shawl, making small notes in his little black book. Eren had no choice and after his
homework was finished, he pulled out his own knitting project.

At a quarter to six, they heard the telltale snap of the trap shutting closed. Levi’s eyes, which had been far and distant as he knit, suddenly flashed at Eren over the top of his mug. Eren looked back at him, mouth open and his heart pounding. Both slowly looked over to the trap by the door. Sure enough, there was a small brown field mouse, peanut butter still on its whiskers. Eren tripped over himself to race Levi to the trap. As Levi picked up the clear trap, the mouse tucked in to one corner, its small body shaking and its heart racing. Eren felt a pang of pity. And then a sudden horrible thought.

“Levi what are you going to do with the mouse?”

He still hadn’t answered that question, even as they shut the shop early.

“Levi,” Eren said hopping around the car and throwing his book bag in the backseat. “Levi, what are you going to do to the mouse?”

Levi set the trap in Eren’s hands as he put the car in gear.

“Wait…where are we going?” Eren asked.

Levi didn’t answer that either.

Spring had started its wet and rainy season and as Levi pulled off on the side of a very muddy road, Eren knew this was about the spell.

“Levi,” Eren pleaded. “What’re you going to do to the mouse?”

Levi handed Eren a metal bowl. Inside were several dried flowers and herbs. Eren didn’t know enough about plants to determine their nature. It all looked like potpourri to him.

“Spit,” Levi ordered.

Eren did so, barely missing Levi’s boots.

“Into the bowl, Eren,” Levi sighed, shaking it at him.

“Oh.”

The snow had started to melt and the ponds and runoffs were swollen with water. Levi stepped over to a small pond, boots squishing into the mud. He spat into the bowl as well and then emptied its contents on the bank of the pond.

“Eren,” Levi said, snapping his fingers. “Mouse.”

“Levi, please don’t hurt the mouse!” Eren begged covering his eyes.

There was a snap and Eren flinched then peered through his eyes to see the happy mouse racing free around the pond and into the field.

“Oh,” he said, relief flooding through him.

He followed the path of the mouse for as long as he could but the grass was too long and the mouse too small to disturb blades. His eyes followed the dirt path to the factory in the distance.

“What’s that building?” he asked, having only just noticed it.
Parked around it were several familiar semis. It was an ugly building, but so were most of the ones out here by the train tracks.

“All done, let’s go,” Levi said.

It was all so bizarre. And since Levi never spoke of it after that, Eren put the issue to rest in his mind.

Yet…the next day at school, he received a “VERY IMPORTANT BULLETIN” announcement in class to take home with him.

“Dear Parents and Students,

Due to an unforeseen issue with our supplier Shinganshina Food Delivery Services, we will be unable to serve hot lunch for the next week until this issue is resolved.”

It went on with several more paragraphs of what students should bring instead and Eren’s eyes glazed over and pocketed it, now looking forward to a week of Lunchables.

“Oh yeah, this was in the paper,” Grisha said as Eren handed him the bright yellow paper. “They failed a major health and safety check from the health department. They had to be shut down. They’re now looking into all their other branches. Apparently the place was just infested with mice.”

“Mice?” Eren asked around the cereal in his mouth, milk dripping down his chin.

“Yeah, mouse droppings all over the meat. Disgusting.”

Eren gulped, then found he couldn’t look at his Raisin Bran any longer.

Levi looked so smug as he read the paper.

“You know, they lost a million dollar contract,” Levi said, sipping his tea. “Quite the scandal. Turns out their manager was too busy carrying on an affair with his new secretary to pay attention to how the company was being run. May have also embezzled funds for their rendezvous.”

Eren rolled his eyes. He couldn’t enjoy the moment. He was too busy waiting for the other shoe to drop.

On his way to his shift, Jean stopped him, grabbing the handlebars on his bike.

“Jean, you’re going to make me late,” Eren protested.

He could bike to school and work now that the majority of the snow had melted.

“I was just wondering if you had any plans for your birthday?” Jean asked.

“Ummm, you know, it’s a good two weeks away, so I really hadn’t thought much about it. Probably nothing. Just gonna hang out with Dad. Maybe go visit Mikasa.”

He hopped back on his bike and swerved around Jean.

“Why are you doing this?” Jean asked, voice cracking and Eren stopped in surprise. “Why are you avoiding me? I just want you to like me! Why do you hate me?”

“Um,” Eren tried, but Jean rushed off in the other direction.
He felt miserable then. He pedaled slowly to his shift, carefully avoiding a puddle so he wouldn’t splash the woman in white standing on the bridge. She turned and smiled at him and he gave her a nod in response.

Levi and Eren had only just started their spring inventory count when Christine came storming in.

“Where is he?” she asked Eren who froze, pointing a manicured nail into his chest. “Where is that little snaggletooth midget?”

Levi stepped out in front of Eren.

“You bastard!” she shouted, pointing her finger at him. “Do you understand how you’ve ruined me?”

“…You said you wanted him to suffer. And I don’t know if you read the news, but—“ Levi tapped the paper. “I’ve ruined his business, his relationship with his side piece—you’re welcome by the way—and he’s looking at charges for embezzlement. I’m sorry, what more could you have wanted from me?”

“That was before I looked into a divorce lawyer who told me I could have made a shitload in alimony! If he’s in jail, he can’t make money and if he can’t make money then he can’t pay me!”

“You knew the terms going in,” Levi said, undeterred by her posturing. “You agreed to this.”

“Fuck you,” she spat. “You’ll be hearing from my lawyer.”

And like that she stormed out the door.

If the mood wasn’t miserable before that, it certainly was after. They abandoned any hope of spring inventory and instead sat staring at the clock.

“People suck,” Levi stated, cheek resting on his fist.

“Yeah,” Eren agreed miserably.

“Do I really have a snaggletooth?” Levi asked after two hours went by.

Eren didn’t answer that and Levi sighed.

The bell tinkled just before close and both Eren and Levi winced before turning to their late customer.

“Petra,” Levi said, surprise in his voice.

“Hi,” she said shyly.

Eren whipped his head around to greet her, but his words died when he saw her. Petra was walking with a cane, her other arm in a sling. She looked just as nervous to see them as they did her.

“I need help,” she said and Levi nodded in understanding. Then she clarified, “With my knitting. I’ve only ever crocheted before and now I just dropped a bunch of stitches and I don’t know how to get them back.”

“Okay,” Levi said.

“Okay,” Petra laughed and wiped at her eyes.
Watching them talk like nothing had happened, like they hadn’t fought just a month earlier, made something in Eren relax. He looked out the window and came to a decision.

There was only one way to break the love spell he had cast on Jean.

Chapter End Notes

My tumblr is perksofbeingawaifu.
Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

The love spell on Jean is broken! Grisha adopts Mikasa. Levi reconnects with old friends. Eren has a violent encounter.

Chapter Notes

RATING UPDATE! >: 3 for the masturbation. the ole rub and tug. choking the chicken.

Chapter tags/warnings: domestic violence, minor violence, masturbation, i feel like there's more here but i forgot.

WHAT UP FRIDAY IS MY BIRTHDAY! ENJOY THIS CHAPTER UPDATE SINCE I WON'T BE ABLE TO UPDATE ON MY ACTUAL BDAY!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“EREN!” Jean shouted, greeting Eren at the door of his house as if Eren hadn’t seen him barely an hour ago. “MOM, EREN IS HERE!”

He grabbed Eren’s wrist and pulled him upstairs. Eren barely had time to set down his sleeping bag before Mrs. Kirstein brought him cookies and milk.

“Thanks Mrs. Kirstein,” he said.

“Jeanbo here has been so excited to have you over Eren! It’s all he’s talked about!” she said, trying to smooth down a cowlick.

“Mom!” Jean protested and then shoved her out the door. “Okay! Jean and Eren’s awesome movie night of awesomeness! Let’s start with my favorite movie of all time—the 1999 classic by Paul Thomas Anderson—Magnolia!”

“What’s it about?” Eren asked.

“Oh well—it’s sortof—okay so there’s like lots of different plotlines—wait hold on—you know it’s just easier if you watch it?”

Eren agreed mostly because he didn’t want to have to listen to Jean’s prattle. Jean brought him popcorn and honestly he spent more time watching Eren watch the movie than enjoying it himself.

“Well?” Jean asked Eren eagerly as the credits played over to Aimee Mann’s Save Me. “What did you think?”
“Um, well,” Eren hesitated because he didn’t want to hurt Jean’s feelings. “I didn’t really get it?”

“What part?” Jean asked.

“All of it?” Eren said, wrinkling his nose.

“What?”

“Yeah like…Tom Cruise is like this asshole, and the crazy lady—”

“Julianne Moore,” Jean added automatically.

“Yeah she’s…is she supposed to be like related to him?”

“No so—ah! Okay let me start at the beginning!”

“And then like…what is up with the frogs falling from the sky? ‘This is a thing that happens.’ Okay, whatever,” Eren laughed.

Jean blinked.

“It was just really weird,” Eren said, shaking his head and getting ready to unfurl his sleeping bag.

“MOM!” Jean yelled suddenly. “EREN HAS TO GO HOME NOW!”

It wasn’t the first sleepover at Jean’s house Eren had been kicked out of, but somehow this felt like a victory. The love spell on Jean had finally broken. It hadn’t happened the way he expected, but it was a weight off his shoulders.

Eren shouldered his sleeping bag and walked down from Jean’s house. Jean lived only a few blocks from the downtown. Hoping that Levi might have decided to do a witching night, Eren walked there rather than try to walk the couple miles home in the dark. In the alley outside Levi’s shop there was a small line of regulars.

“Excuse me, I was first,” Jessica Bollinger’s mother told Eren in her usual rude tone.

“Heya Eren!”

“Hi Eugene,” Eren said, shifting his footing.

When Levi opened the door, he looked surprised to see Eren standing there.

“Can I stay at your place tonight?” Eren asked. “Jean kicked me out and I don’t want Dad to know. He always tells me to make more friends.”

Levi ruffled his hair and pushed him inside.

<*>  
The kid was shit at magic. He was shit at a lot of things come to think of it. Except he was pretty good with a toilet brush.

It had been a mistake to teach him anything. The problem wasn’t Eren’s spells—although giving a teacher a heart attack was worrying. It was that…Levi had been wrong to think Eren would think of it as anything other than a magic wand to fix all his problems. Levi had grown up on his grandfather’s lap or sitting next to his mother and Kenny as they cast. It was family. It was
tradition. Eren didn’t see it as the burden it could be. Eren would never understand because he hadn’t been immersed in it. He just thought it was a cool trick to show to his friends.

Still, the witching nights were better with Eren there. Someone to commiserate with him afterwards. Even if most of the time he fell asleep on the futon.

“You watched Magnolia and…that’s it?” Levi asked, unlocking the passenger door for him.

“I think the idea of someone he had a crush on not liking his favorite movie was too much for him,” Eren said. “I’m not even sure if he had a real crush on me anyway. Jean isn’t into guys. It was more like he wanted us to be best friends forever.”

“Go to the Claire’s and pick out matching necklaces?” Levi supplied.

“Exactly,” Eren laughed. “Can we watch a movie at your place?”

“Sure. As long as it’s not Magnolia.”

Eren laughed appreciatively.

When they got to Levi’s place, however, Eren was already so close to falling asleep, that Levi paused the movie and shake him awake.

“Hold on, at least let me pull out the daybed,” Levi prodded him.

But Eren simply snuggled up with the crochet afghan and Levi was forced to leave him. He placed a glass of water on the coffee table and hoped Eren would remember where the toilet was should he have to use it at 3AM.

Levi walked up the stairs to his own bathroom, brushed his teeth and turned in for the night. Except, unlike Eren, he couldn’t sleep. He stared at the ceiling. Insomnia was an old friend. Especially as of late. There were only two things that knocked him out: wine and a good old fashioned rub and tug.

He bit his lip and looked at the door. Was it creepy to whack one out with someone else in the house? Not that it had ever stopped him when Kenny lived in the house. Or mom. And he was always neat so it wasn’t like anyone knew.

Fuck it.

This was his house. And Eren was all the way downstairs. Still, just to be safe, Levi tiptoed out of bed and locked his bedroom door. There. Now he could reacquaint himself with…himself.

He cupped his length through his boxers. It had been too long since anyone had touched him down there and he hadn’t really enjoyed their company much anyway. He instead imagined someone else, but he couldn’t land on a face. It was just a sea of hands and mouths pulling at him, caressing him, unbuttoning his jeans, giving him goosebumps, stroking him hard and—

“Jesus Fucking Christ on a cracker—what the hell Eren!?” Levi shouted, flinging the covers over his lap and tucking a pillow between his legs. “What? What do you need? How did you even—“

The Eren by his bedside regarded Levi calmly before turning on the spot and walking out the second story window.

“Oh you’ve got to be fucking kidding me,” Levi gasped weakly.
The mood ruined, he pulled his jeans back up and stumbled down the stairs. There was Eren on the sofa. Fast asleep.

“Pervert,” Levi muttered, digging around in his coat pocket and pulling out his cigarettes.

He always hand-rolled his own cigs. One of the few things Kenny had taught him that he actually found useful. Better flavor.

He stepped outside, quietly sliding the glass door shut.

Sleeping Eren didn’t look like a pervert. In fact he looked almost angelic. If Levi didn’t know just how much obnoxious shit came out of the kid’s mouth he might find it endearing. Did Eren know about his walkabouts? Did he remember the things he saw? Or were they like dreams to him? So many questions.

And yet, it really wasn’t any of Levi’s business.

He lit the match and cupped his hand around it when he heard something smack the tin roof over the back porch and then land on the top step.

Levi paused and looked down.

Sitting there was a bright green frog.

Levi whipped his head around to look at the sky and up at his bedroom window but saw nothing.

He turned to look back at the frog. The frog looked back at him. Levi tilted his head. It considered him for a moment before taking off from Levi’s porch in favor of the stream in the woods.

The match burned his finger and Levi threw it and the cigarette into the coffee can he kept for butts.

“Fuck me,” he muttered, pinching the bridge of his nose.

<*>  

“Your room has its own bathroom—lucky. This switch is the heat light and this one is the fan. Don’t get them confused in the middle of the night because it’s super loud.”

“Right.” Mikasa nodded.

“Cool,” Eren said rubbing his nose.

He had put salt in all the corners of the room. And tucked a few bits of string knotted with protection spells. Not that he’d ever tell her that. Because he had kindof already told her that he was no longer practicing. And he wasn’t! Technically. But the sage and few other things he’d done that wasn’t spell casting! That was just common sense.

Grisha had stayed true to his word. He had cut back at work, except all of his new free time was spent at child care classes. He complained about them (“I’ve already raised a kid! It’s not that hard!”), but he still went. He was in constant contact with Mikasa’s social worker and they fast tracked his application once Mikasa expressed that she would want to live with them. The shortage of houses who wanted a teenager to stay with them also helped their case.

Jean came back from Spring Break with a new tan and an (obviously fake) story about how he got to third base with some girl he met on his cruise. Eren came back with Mikasa. Eren’s development
was met with far more enthusiasm.

Life at Stitchcraft was quiet through the spring. The most dramatic thing that happened was a letter from Christine that was printed on a legal letterhead about how they owed her the cost to fumigate her house, blaming Levi for a sudden silverfish infestation. They tossed it in the fireplace. On March 30th, Levi wordlessly handed Eren a cupcake on a paper plate for his birthday. Petra visited them often. She kept complaining about “the home” and their ridiculous curfew and Eren had no clue what any of that meant, but this was mostly directed at Levi so he only listened politely.

Nanaba came to visit to chat with Petra on these occasions and Mrs. Dawk made more frequent trips. Both Nanaba and Marie looked green around the gills and nauseous, Nanaba from the chemo and Marie from morning sickness. They’d come in and set their heads on the large table until Levi brought them tea—a different blend than what he usually prepared for himself—and then they would perk up.

Nanaba had a multitude of silk scarves she wore now to hide her bald head and Levi was showing her a new method of dyeing the fabric when Eren noticed a man with dark hair standing outside the shop, pacing with a cigarette in his mouth.

He tiptoed up to Levi, hovering until the shop owner noticed him.

“What?” Levi said in a break in the conversation with Nanaba.

“There’s a guy outside who keeps looking in here,” Eren whispered.

Levi looked around Eren, with that same piercing gaze he always wore, finding him through the warped glass immediately.

“Oh. That’s just Gunter.” Levi shrugged it off.

So that was Gunter. He had a far too serious face. When Gunter saw them looking at him, he jerked his chin in greeting. Levi responded in kind. Gunter stayed outside until close and then escorted Petra to his truck.

“See you in an hour,” he said to Levi who waved him off.

“What’s in an hour?” Eren asked, mopping the day’s spring mud off the floor.

“BOY’S NIGHT!” Oluo whooped from the back, tracking in more mud.

“FRONT DOOR!” Eren and Levi both shouted back.

Oluo pounded on the metal door in response.

“He’s going to make me regret this,” Levi grumbled.

As Eren tucked his jeans into his socks in preparation for the muddy bike ride back, Gunter pulled his truck back around, greeting Eld and Oluo.

“BOY’S NIGHT!” Oluo whooped again punching his fists on Eld’s back.

“Make him shut up or I’m not going,” Levi ordered.

“Ride safe, Eren!” Eld waved at him. “Wear a helmet!”

Levi hunched his shoulders looking grossly uncomfortable and Eren had to laugh as he rode into
“Okay so we’re going to—stop sign, Eren. Stop sign, Eren!” Grisha shouted and Eren came to a halting stop, making Mikasa and Armin lurch in the backseat.

Grisha had volunteered to take the three of them out for a practice drive. Eren had only one month until his learner’s permit expired and he hadn’t had nearly enough time behind the wheel. He had his driver’s test in a week. The tricky part was that Grisha absolutely refused to drive an automatic, leaving Eren to learn on a stick.

“The clutch, the—Eren the clutch,” Grisha said weakly as Eren cruised down the country roads.

“I’ve got it!” Eren said.

Or at least he did by the end of his turn.

“Okay switch,” Grisha said, looking relieved as Mikasa stepped behind the wheel. “What do you want to do Mikasa?”

“I need to practice parallel parking.”

Except her idea of practicing was to pull into the spot in front of Stitchcraft on the first try.

“Now you want to cut the wheel—oh, yes, like that—wow. Good job Mikasa!”

Eren scowled and stepped out of the car. Grisha did so too, giving Eren an unnecessary hug.

“Dad!” Eren tried to shrug him off.

“We’ll pick you up after your shift, okay?”

“Yeah,” Eren rolled his eyes.

Grisha turned back to the car. “Goddamn that is a good parking job. Look at this!”

“Whatever!” Eren shouted, pushing into Levi’s shop.

“How was driving?” Levi asked.

“It’s fine but Dad just fawns over how Mikasa does everything perfect—“

“I don’t care about that,” Levi cut him off with a wave of his hand. “Are you going to be able to take your driver’s test? Because I’m tired of driving you around.”

“I’ll pass it!” Eren shouted from the bathroom as he washed his hands.

“You better,” Levi mumbled. Then called back to Eren, “Do you want to practice with my car?”

Eren poked his head out and raised one of his eyebrows. “Would you actually let me?”

Levi hesitated. “Nevermind.”

Eren rolled his eyes. Levi was too protective of his ugly car, washing it often (or rather making Eren wash it) and checking the oil and tire pressure religiously.
Eren took several large broken down cardboard boxes and tossed them out behind the shop before heading in for more.

“Hey Levi? There’s something on your car!”

“Oh, just ignore it.”

Eren grabbed it out from under the window wipers. “Notice of parking violation…Levi this looks like a ticket! They say it’s against ordinances and you’re not supposed to park here because it’s a fire hazard.”

“Does it have a fine printed on it?”

Eren flipped it over. “No?”

“Then ignore it.”

Eren shrugged and tossed it in with the rest of the paper recyclables. He shouldered that bag and stepped outside to prettify the boxes. Levi hated them lying everywhere even though the truck was stopping by tomorrow morning. He sang along to his music as he did so and nearly missed the voice shouting at him.

“Hey kid!”

Eren stopped and unhooked one ear from his headphones. “Yeah—“

He didn’t have time to finish before the stranger grabbed the front of his hoodie and shoved him against the brick wall. Eren’s head struck the brick and his feet slipped on the cardboard boxes.

“Where’s Petra!?” the man asked as Eren struggled to right himself. “I know she’s been here! Where is she?”

“She’s not here!” Eren said, trying to free his hoodie from the man’s grip.

He slammed Eren again. “Where’s Petra?”

“LEVI!” Eren shouted.

Eren’s heart was pounding in his chest and his eyes were wide. He frantically scanned the empty alley, feet tripping over the boxes. There was no one. Not even Oluo. Where was that lump when you needed him!?

“Where is she?”

“LEVI!” he screamed.

“Quit calling for that little fuck, I’m asking you a question—“

He stopped as a shadow fell over him. Mike stood over him, all six foot five inches of him towering over both Eren and Davey Rummer. Davey released Eren’s hoodie.

“Fuck off,” Davey said turning around to face him. “This is none of your—“

Mike raised the nail gun he was holding and pressed it against the brick near Davey’s head and pulled the trigger. Both Eren and Davey jumped as the nail shot into the brick with ease. Davey’s eyes slowly trailed over to stare at the bolt. Mike let out a grunting exhale as he leaned over Davey.
Davey took that as his cue to run with his tail between his legs, scrambling over the cardboard boxes. Mike pulled Eren up with one large bicep and brushed him off.

"Thanks Mike," Levi said from the door way and Eren whipped his head around to look at him.

Mike nodded and then walked back to his shop’s backdoor where Nanaba was hovering anxiously. “It’s okay, go back inside,” he told his sister in a quiet voice.

“Yeah, he’s gone,” Levi said into the store phone. “I don’t know.”

He put the phone against his chest. “Are you okay? Do they need to send EMS?”

Eren felt his head and Levi made him bend down so he could look at the scrape.

“I think we’re good,” Levi said. “Send a car out.”

He hung up and then immediately grabbed a skein of yarn and a large hardback stitchionary and began winding it lengthwise.

“What…what are you doing?” Eren asked.

“Banishing spell,” Levi said, eyes blazing. “This has gone on long enough.”

He grabbed a scrap of spare yarn from the basket and began rolling it into a small ball. He slid the many strands of yarn off and slipped the ball at the top of the hank. Then he tied it off, snipping the yarn with scissors. He began winding another around the book’s width and then slotted that under the tied off ball. Eren started to get the picture. He was making a doll out of the yarn. Levi tied off its hands and the waist. Then he carefully separated the legs of the doll and tied off the feet. He pulled out thread, effortlessly threading the needle without even looking at it, and stitched a pair of eyes and a mouth. For his final act, he grabbed the jewelry wire and wrapped it around the foot of the doll, attaching the other end to the antique yarn swift and gave it a spin. The doll dangled upside-down and hung there twisting by the copper wire, its lopsided smile changing in the flickering light of the fireplace.

Eren never told anyone what Levi did, but he didn’t need to.

Davey Rummer never showed up for work at the car dealership. Davey Rummer’s family never heard from him after that day. Several of them tried stopping by Levi’s shop trying to get at Petra, but were met by Gunter standing guard. No one in town ever heard from him again. It was like he disappeared.

Good riddance.

Chapter End Notes

it's my birthday, leave me extra nice comments ;P

I'm sorry if you like Magnolia. I'm envisioning this version of Jean as a little movie obsessed. We all know that guy. Who thinks he's a movie buff. Who thinks just because he's watched one Polanski flick, he understands the mind of the auteur. I don't think Eren can stick his head that far up his ass so he doesn't really get stuff like that. Not that you need to stick your head up your ass to like Magnolia, but I digress. For the
record, I like it a lot. I didn't like it until all the frogs started falling from the sky. NOW THAT'S A MOVIE. WRITE YOURSELF INTO A CORNER? ADD FUCKING FROGS. FALLING FROM THE SKY. THIS IS A THING THAT HAPPENS?!?!?!?
“Guess who passed his driver’s test—oh yeah—what’s this? Is this…a driver’s license? Why yes it is? Who is this handsome man? Oh, that’s me!” Eren said waving the card in Levi’s face so fast that Levi couldn’t see the picture.

Levi seized Eren’s wrist and held it still. There was Eren, beaming with pride and excitement, chin forward and showing every single one of those pearly whites. Levi snorted.

“Cute. Now you just need a car so you can drive yourself around,” Levi said, releasing his hand.

He was feeling very restless today and anxious over what he needed to tell Eren. He looked over to where Petra stood, helping one of the biddies from the nursing home pick out the unique fabric the shop carried to make a quilt they were to auction for charity at the Kiwanis club. He sighed.

“Ugh, can’t you just be happy for me, Levi?” Eren groaned. “Just say ‘Congratulations, Eren!’”

“Congrats.”

“I swear if Jean gets a car before me I will die. He doesn’t even need one, he lives so close to the school. It is a long, long walk for me and that’s only because I take the shortcut by the community college—but the trail is totally flooded because of stupid spring. I hope Dad gets me a really hot ride. Like just something I can pull up in and be like, ‘Oh hey Jean. ‘Sup?’ You know?”

Eren backed up, nearly running into the woman from the church who was busy thanking Petra.

“Eren, we need to have a talk,” Levi said bluntly.

“What’s up?” Eren said, sitting down at the table eagerly.

Levi couldn’t meet his eyes or his energy.

“Um,” Levi started.
“Okay but like, if I get a car, I can drive you to work. Even though you’re actually like right across the lake. What if I took Dad’s boat to visit you in the summer? You’re right across the lake! We could go for a ride in the boat! I know this great spot for just cutting the motor and diving into the water. Dad doesn’t like me going alone, he makes me take Mikasa with me, but now that I have a driver’s license he has to let me go alone, right?”

“You’re fired,” Levi said weakly.

“What?” Eren asked, pulling back.

“Okay, good talk,” Levi said, getting back up, but Eren grabbed his arm.

“What do you mean?” Eren asked, his face pinched with hurt.

This was what Levi had been trying to avoid. He didn’t like seeing Eren’s face. If he could he would have done it over text. Or not at all. That would have been great.

“You’re a very good employee,” Levi said struggling with the words.

“Yeah, so don’t fire me!”

“Petra just…fits here. She really needs a job and I can’t afford to pay both of you.”

“But…” Eren started, his eyes already welling up.

Oh Christ on a cracker, this is why Levi hadn’t wanted to do this, but he also couldn’t keep cutting and cutting Eren’s hours until he eventually got the hint. Eren deserved better than that.

“I fit here,” Eren protested in a small voice.

“Eren do you know how to cut patterns and sew an outfit together?”

“No—but I—“

“Do you know how to block out a quilt?”

“No—“

“Do you know what ssk, yo, p7tog, and sskpo means?”

“Stupid s-stupid knit, y—why are you doing this?” Eren grumbled, crossing his arms across his chest. “So I don’t know much about this—“ He waved his arms. “Kind of stuff—does it really matter?”

“Well knowing about this stuff is the job, Eren.”

“I can learn! I’m a fast learner!”

“You are. But that’s not the issue.”

“Who is going to carry all those heavy boxes on shipment days?”

Levi hesitated on that. Petra was still very reliant on her cane, but going to physical therapy daily. She was stronger every day.

“I handled the boxes before you showed up, I can handle them again. Look, Eren,” Levi leaned
forward as Eren refused to face him, jaw sticking out, looking very upset. “You’re a very good employee. I’ll write you a reference letter. The reason I’m telling you this now is so you have plenty of time to get applications in before summer starts.”

“What if I stayed, you just didn’t pay me?”

“I’m pretty sure that’s illegal.”

“What if…you paid me with a spell!” Eren sat up suddenly alert.

Oh god, Eren and these ideas of his. If he ever met the devil in the crossroads he would argue and barter with him and walk away with the better deal. Stubborn little shit.

“Eren…” Levi protested, pinching his brow.

“I’ll work here—only once a week! And you…do a spell. A good one! A real one! Not the hokey-pokey.”

“What would this spell even be for?” Levi asked. He did like Eren working here. He was the only one willing to scrub the toilets properly. He’d bite.

“Coach said he’s looking for a few younger players to be on the varsity team. But there’s this wunderkind from the middle school—Colt Grice—who is going to be a freshman next year and everyone thinks Coach will pick him. You can’t have a freshman on the varsity team! That’s just, like, discrimination!”

“Eren, get to the point,” Levi said, tapping his foot impatiently.

“I want a spell to be on the varsity team!” Eren said.

Huh. That was doable. Eren working one day a week all summer would more than pay for it. Levi would come out of it with a profit.

“Sold,” Levi said, holding out his hand.

“YES!” Eren shouted, making the poor older woman nearly drop her purchased goods.

<*> The flurry of large projects and tests and essays overtook Eren and his friends. Before he knew it, Mikasa was driving him to the fancy tux rental place. He didn’t even know what it was until they stopped in front of it.

“What’s this?” he asked as she parked the car.

“You need a tux for prom,” Mikasa reminded him.

“I’m not going to prom,” Eren said, looking very confused.

Only upperclassmen were allowed to prom. Freshmen and sophomores were allowed to attend only if they had a date who was an upperclassmen. Reiner, a junior, had asked Christa to be his date. He claimed it was as friends, but Christa was easily the prettiest girl in school—prettier than most of the junior and senior girls. She accepted on the condition that Reiner find a friend to take Ymir. Poor Bert was a good friend.

“I’m taking you to prom,” Mikasa informed him. “I’m not going to have fun anyway if I can’t have
my best friend with me.”

Eren felt his face heat up and he hugged her.

They went to Eren’s house for photos as it had the largest yard. It was fun. They got dinner before the event at The Reiss Clubhouse that Christa’s father owned. Eren even got to slow dance with Annie. Sure, it was interrupted by Reiner crashing into them as the group got rowdy, but a dance is a dance.

After prom, Eren and Mikasa snuck out on Grisha’s boat, taking it out on the lake in their formal wear just to stare at the stars.

“Do you remember?” Mikasa asked. “The night it happened? What you said to me?”

Eren felt a chill wash over him and he flexed his hands, trying to warm his fingers. Eren spent a great deal of his time trying to forget that night. Sometimes it would creep into his dreams unbidden. Yet he always found himself right back there again.

Eren shifted uncomfortably, the pin from his boutonniere catching his chest. “No? I was out of it. Woke up in the hospital.”

“You told me not to be afraid.” Mikasa looked over at him.

“I don’t remember,” Eren repeated, shifting a little.

“I just want you to know,” she continued. “That I will always be there for you.”

She slipped her hand in his and gave a squeeze. Eren had always wanted a sibling. Sure, he had wanted a younger brother to play ball with but instead he got Mikasa.

“Mikasa,” he said, turning to face her. “You’re my sister.”

She smiled and buried her face in her scarf and they both stared up at the stars together.

Then Prom night was over and the last day of school snuck up on him.

“Dude, can you believe it,” Jean said, the moment the June air hit their faces. “We are officially upperclassmen.”

“Yeah,” Eren agreed.

“Here guys,” Sasha said, carrying several paper plates. “We made strawberry shortcake for home ec—oh I’m sorry Eren. I totally forgot.”

“It’s okay,” Eren said, passing on the dessert.

He gave Connie a lift up onto the brick wall and Sasha passed him a plate.

“Dude—“ Jean said, grabbing Eren’s shoulders. “We’re juniors!”

“Stop,” Eren said shaking him off, but even he couldn’t contain his excitement.

“We’re not technically juniors until the school year starts,” Armin pointed out with his plastic fork but no one heeded him.

“Marco, we’re Juniors,” Jean said, shaking Marco’s arm as well nearly causing him to drop his
dessert.

“Juniors,” Eren repeated in Marco’s other ear as Marco laughed.

“No longer will we be dumped on by the upperclassmen, we will no longer be the dumpees but the dumpers,” Jean proclaimed.

Connie let out a loud raspberry and squatted like he was on the toilet.

“Oh my god, they’re so disgusting,” Ymir said as she and Christa passed by the open window. Sasha ran after them, face full of her shortcake.

Connie immediately began scratching his pits and whooping like a monkey and swinging from the metal bars atop the brick wall with his newly healed leg.

“We’re going to go down to the breakwall!” Reiner boomed from the doorway.

“Shot—“ Jean started.

“Shotgun!” Connie shouted, leaping off the brick wall.

“Damnit,” Jean cursed. “We’re going to have to walk the entire way and by the time we get there they’re going to be done!”

“Orrrr…” Eren said, pulling his dad’s car keys from his pocket.

“Holy shit, no way,” Jean said. “Shot—“

“Shotgun!” Marco shouted as they took off running to the parking lot.

They got there before the rest of the group and without preamble, Eren stripped off his shirt and leapt from the break wall into the water. He barely had time to dodge out of the way before Connie came crashing on top of him, followed by Reiner with an impressive cannonball.

“Hold on, I need to get some stuff out of my pockets,” Jean said setting a box of matches down.

“What is wrong with you?” Armin asked but Jean’s response was to shove him into the water.

“Jean!” Armin surfaced coughing as Jean jumped in after him.

“Hey relax, I could save you if you drown, I’m a lifeguard now,” Jean informed him.

Not that he ever stopped telling them this. He kept bragging how he and Christa were going to make out on the lifeguard tower at the public beach the entire summer.

“How’s the water?” Sasha asked.

“Freezing!” Eren called back.

“Shrinkage,” Jean hissed in Eren’s ear, shoving him under the water, but stopped when Mikasa took off her shirt, opting to swim in just her sports bra and shorts.

Eren had a similar moment of quiet when Annie did the same.

“CHRISTA JOIN US!” Reiner called up at her.

“Like hell we’re going down there,” Ymir shouted back. “It’s freezing and—“
Christa shoved her.

“Christa!” Ymir cried in betrayal, climbing up on Bert’s back like a soaked cat.

“Ready?” Christa asked. “Move! Make room!”

She executed a perfect swan dive.

“TEN POINTS!” Connie cheered.

Christa was a surprisingly strong swimmer. Eren knew she was on the swim team when she wasn’t doing cheer, but his crawl looked pathetic compared to hers.

“Are you going to the party tonight, Eren?” she asked, seemingly at ease as Eren struggled to keep his head above water. “Reiner is driving us. His brothers are going to be there too. Said they’d bring beer. Lots of really cool people.”

Eren was vaguely familiar with Reiner’s older twin brothers. Both had been football gods at the school, but had graduated before he was a student. He’d met them before. He liked Marcel. Marcel complimented his spiral throw. Porco he didn’t like as much. Porco liked to pick on Reiner and called Eren “ladybug.” Or wait, was it the other way around? Was Marcel the rude one? He couldn’t remember.

“Yeah, I was going to head over after my shift,” he said teeth chattering.

“Cool,” she said, pulling away and into a backstroke.

“Eren do you need me to drive you?” Mikasa asked. “I could take the car and drop you off at work and pick you up.”

Mikasa had made plans to stay with Sasha that night and both were getting a ride from Ymir along with Christa.

“No, Dad said I get the car,” Eren rolled his eyes.

“Eren—” Mikasa started.

“I’ll be fine!”

The large clock tower bell at the waterfront chimed.

“Shit, I’m late! Bye!” Eren said, pulling himself up the ladder.

He sped off to the employee parking lot a few blocks over and then pulling a shirt over his soaking wet form he ran to Stitchcraft, only to pull up short.

Double parked in front of Stitchcraft, half on the sidewalk, was a mud splattered and battered Airstream camper. The summer sun glinted off the chrome top, making it look like a UFO in dire need of a wash. It stank as well, a mixture of acrid patchouli oil and cow dung. Levi would be furious if he saw it.

“Uh, excuse me?” Eren rapped on the door.

The owner inside was blaring music and likely didn’t hear him, ripping it open and stumbling onto the sidewalk polishing their glasses and squinting around at him.
“Uh, ma’am—sir—uh, um—“ Eren stammered hopping around them.

Eren couldn’t quite figure out who he was looking at. At first he thought they were wearing a skirt, but then he quickly discovered it was a pair of large pants that when stationary simply looked like a skirt. And they wore a tie dyed spaghetti strap top but their pits weren’t shaved and Eren noticed what looked almost like dreadlocks in their hair that was tied up with a clip and a bandana. And when they lifted their arms the wind blew the breezy top to the side and he could see a breast and nipple piercing.

“Um, you can’t park here!” Eren squeaked, looking away.

They coughed up a big loogie and spit on the sidewalk, still not noticing him. Oh god, they were dead. Levi was going to kill this person for spitting on the sidewalk in front of his store.

Putting their fingers in their mouth they let out an earsplitting whistle, then hollered, “LEVI!”

Eren heard a thunk and watched inside as Levi sprang up from his seat upstairs in the loft and then quickly ran down the spiral steps and out the door.

“Hanji!”

Chapter End Notes

HANJI! Next chapter: Levi asks Hanji about astral projection :O
Chapter 27

Chapter Summary

Eren passes up a big party to hang out with Hanji and Levi. Levi wears a cloak of stars.

Rhiannon//Fleetwood Mac

Chapter Notes

sorry it's been so long. in my defense, i have been very tired. and kept forgetting to post.

Fuck tumblr.
My pillowfort is shulkie.
My twitter is @shulkie12

Chapter Content Warnings: underage drinking (not Eren), apologies to Robert Frost, and I won't apologize for the Love Shack, you can't make me.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Hanji!” Levi greeted, panting and hanging off the door. He straightened and smoothed out his shirt. “Petra! Can you close tonight?”

Hanji cheered in delight and without warning him, pulled Levi into a tight embrace.

Eren waited for Levi to kick them, or perhaps put them in a headlock, but instead he patted them on the back.

“You’re late, I thought you were going to be here last month,” Levi said, already pulling his car keys out of his pocket.

“You…know this person?” Eren asked, poking his head around Hanji.

They both looked over, only just noticing him.

“Eren, this is Hanji—“

“His best friend!” Hanji crowed, throwing their arm around Hanji.

Levi didn’t deny it, but he did shrug off the arm.

“C’mon, I’ve got the goods,” Hanji said, disappearing into the trailer.

Levi followed. Eren lingered uncertain on the sidewalk.
“You can come in too, Eren!” Hanji reappeared, waving him in. “Any friend of Levi’s is a friend of mine.”

Inside the patchouli smell was even worse and they had mixed it with some pungent incense. Eren coughed and waved his hands. The entire trailer needed a whole can of air freshener and a vacuum.

Both Hanji and Levi had their backs to him as they examined a bag.

“Wow, you got the good stuff this time.”

“What is it?” Eren asked, suddenly feeling excluded and out of the loop. How come Levi had never mentioned a best friend before?

“Mushrooms,” Hanji said simply.

“Like…” Eren looked at the dreamcatcher above the bed, the bong by the sink, and the many tapestries lining the windows. “…Shrooms?”

He suddenly did not want to be in the trailer. Nor did he think Levi should be in here either. It was just waiting to be raided by the police.

“C’mere,” Levi motioned and Eren took a tentative step closer, curiosity overwhelming his desire to flee, nudging aside several glass bottles filled with suspicious looking substances with his foot.

Levi opened the bag under Eren’s nose and Eren peered down.

“Morels!” Eren said in surprise.

“Fresh too! I got them yesterday. I traded a CD and half my stash for that,” Hanji said, beaming.

“I guess dinner is on me then,” Levi said. “I’ll head home.”

“I’ll follow,” Hanji nodded.

They both looked at Eren.

“You coming too?” Hanji asked.

“I…uh…I shouldn’t,” Eren said. “I have a party I’m going to later!”

“A party!” Hanji chorused. “We’re gonna have our own party, aren’t we Levi?”

Eren decided he needed to know this person. “I mean, I could hang out for a bit. Unless Levi needs me at the shop?”

“No, you’re fired, remember?” Levi said. Then wrinkled his nose as water dripped from Eren’s hair. “Why are you all wet?”

Eren wiped at it with his just as soaked shirt. “Oh, sorry, last day of school! We jumped off the breakwall!”

“You were fired? Why did he fire you? How’s the water? What school?” Hanji asked in rapid succession.

“I—freezing. But you know, it’s such a hot day—“ And even hotter in the Airstream. “—so it’s nice.”
“Yeah it is, I went down to the breakwall earlier on my smoke break,” Levi said.

“You in college Eren?” Hanji asked.

“Ha, I wish, I’m in high school—wait you went down to the breakwall?” Eren asked Levi nervously.

“He was fired because I am no longer in need of his services, but he keeps showing up for shifts he doesn’t have,” Levi said, waving Eren off.

“Freshman? Do you go to Shigansina? I went to Rose.”

“No, I’m not a Freshman,” Eren scoffed as he put a hand to his chest. “As of today, I’m officially a Junior.”

Hanji and Levi exchanged a look, Hanji’s mouth twitching at Levi’s expression.

Sensing they were perhaps making fun of him, Eren shifted his footing, then blurted out, “I have a car! I mean, I have Dad’s car! So yeah, I can drive over, I mean, only for a bit because I have this big party to go to. Yeah, lots of my friends are gonna be there so…”

There it was, that look again!

“See you at the house,” Levi said, clapping Eren on the shoulder.

<*>  
“I love your mother’s record collection, Levi,” Hanji said, running their fingers through a box of records.

Eren had never paid that corner of the living room much attention. He figured it was just a bunch of antique stuff out for display, he never realized it served any functionality.

“Records? Everyone listens to mp3s now,” Eren scoffed.

“Yeah, but these are so…groovy,” Hanji said, picking one with a psychedelic cover. The music started up and Hanji hummed happily. “This is the good stuff.”

“Groovy,” Eren repeated to Levi.

Levi waved the paring knife at Eren in warning. He’d stopped by the butcher’s shop out on the outskirts of town and picked up some whitefish. He was busy mixing some kind of roux and frying the mushrooms in the pan. Eren’s mouth watered.

“Oi, be useful, go build a bonfire,” Levi pointed out the sliding glass doors.

Before when Eren had visited Levi’s backyard the garden was brown and decrepit. Now that it was on the eve of summer, everything was in full bloom. The tulips in the garden bed opened to the sun and the daffodils drooped heavily in the heat. Most impressive was the giant lilac tree stretching toward the sky, its branches laden with sweet smelling flowers. He snuck underneath it and listened to the hum of a fat bumblebee busying itself in pollen. As it neared dusk, the peepers sang their song out on the lake. Eren gave the branch a tug and found himself showered in tiny purple petals. He grinned and looked back at the house. He had a clear view into Levi’s living room and part of the kitchen from here. Hanji hopped up to sit on the countertop and was eagerly engaging Levi in conversation as Levi smacked their hand away from the pan. Levi’s eyes flickered to Eren briefly
and Eren grinned, only to have Levi look back at his cutting board.

It stung a little that Eren didn’t know anything about Levi, but Levi knew almost everything about him. He sighed and dug around Levi’s woodpile looking for some good logs and sticks for kindling. He snuck a look back at the window only to see Levi and Hanji’s backs to him. Well, he shouldn’t stick around too long. He did have the party to go to after all. He didn’t want to intrude on their time, they had so much to catch up on.

“My body is walking in space,” Hanji sang along with the grainy record, one of Levi’s rolled cigarettes pinched in the corner of their mouth. “Hmm hmm…”

When the song picked up, they danced in a tornado, nearly sweeping Levi’s carefully placed remotes off the coffee table.

“All the clouds are cumuloft, walking in space, oh my god your skin is soft, I love your face—” Hanji sang, arms contorted over their head as they stretched.

Eren had a few good sparks going so he squatted next to the pit in Levi’s backyard and blew on the embers.

“Man, fuck Bush!” Hanji shouted so loud it echoed across the lake. “Levi come out to California with me!”

Levi responded in his usual quiet voice, Eren didn’t hear what he said.

“Where are you from Hanji?” Eren asked, as he opened the sliding glass door.

“I went to Rose—which blows,” Hanji said blowing a raspberry.

“I know! Their football team sucks!” Eren said excitedly.

“All football sucks. Hypermasculine nonsense that leads to head injuries and domestic violence.”

“Our team doesn’t suck!” Eren stuck his chin out defensively. “Because I’m on it and I’m pretty good.”

Hanji sent Levi another one of those looks, but Levi instead tested his morels to hide his expression. Were they making fun of him?

“Where are you thinking of colleges, Eren?” Hanji asked, lying down on top of Levi’s coffee table facing the sloping ceiling.

“University of Michigan, like my dad. He went to med school there. Where do you go to school?”

“I’m studying bioengineering at UCLA.”

“That’s a really good school!” Eren said in surprise.

“Eh, for being this supposedly super liberal school, everything is so…restrictive. It’s lame. I’m taking a semester off.”

“That’s what you said last semester,” Levi pointed out.

“I can’t be expected to mess around with bullshit like credits when there are bigger things out there, Levi,” Hanji said. “At the moment, I’ve been out, traveling the states. Just living out in the middle of nowhere. No constraints of the material world. We don’t abide by the capitalist norms of
“Whatever we need, we barter.”

Eren didn’t understand a single thing Hanji said, but at least they were captivating to listen to. He looked at Levi for clarification, but Levi only shrugged.

“How do you pay for gas then?” Levi asked.

“Well, my parents—“ Hanji started, looking a bit sheepish.

“Here, dinner is ready, grab a plate,” Levi ordered.

Hanji stood up and grabbed a beer out of the fridge. Levi did too. Eren waited until Levi was out of the kitchen before doing the same, confidently popping the cap on the counter.

He sat down in the wooden chairs Levi had outside, looking at Levi with defiance as he did so holding his bottle. Levi went back into the house and set some odd smelling incense out on two tree logs, before plucking Eren’s drink out of his hands and slapping the back of his head.

“Ow,” Eren said rubbing it. He had to at least try, didn’t he?

Eren took two bites of his whitefish and stopped. “You’re a really good cook!” Eren said in wide eyed amazement before finishing the entire thing.

“Seconds, please!” both Eren and Hanji requested, plates extended towards Levi before Levi had even gotten halfway through his meal.

After a few beers, Hanji became giggly and Levi slouched lower in his chair.

[Mikasa:] we’re heading over now. are you done with work yet?

What time was it? To his surprise it was nearly nine.

[Eren:] wrapping some stuff up then i’ll be on my way.

He stashed his phone back in his pocket.

“Are you Levi’s girlfriend?” Eren blurted out. It had been bothering him ever since Levi invited Hanji over.

Levi snorted.

“Actually, Eren, I am nonbinary, so I prefer they/them pronouns.”

“What does that mean?” Eren looked around at Levi.

“It means I don’t fit on the gender binary. And while I am pansexual, I prefer Levi’s friendship,” Hanji said as though rehearsing a speech.

“Okay?” Eren said, not following but nodding all the same.

Hanji went on a long schpiel but Eren’s phone kept buzzing.

[Mikasa:] have you left yet?

“And like, what does gender even mean really?” Hanji continued. “I mean, the visitors must find humans and the idea of gender and gender roles completely baffling.”
“Sorry, the who?”

“The Visitors,” Hanji clarified as if that cleared up everything.

“Oh boy here we go,” Levi said into his bottle.

“Sorry. Who are The Visitors?”

“You don’t know? Northern Michigan is famous for them. Haven’t you ever seen the lights?”

“Jesus fucking Christ,” Levi grumbled.

“The lights?” Eren asked, now looking back and forth between Levi and Hanji.

“The lights! You know. The aliens.”

“Aliens,” Eren repeated, barely keeping the laughter from his voice as he looked over at Levi who looked as though he wanted no part of this conversation.

“You know it’s really common out here in the woods. Lost time. Skin walkers. Places like the woods, hotels, airports—they’re in-betweens. I mean think about it, you’re never in the woods to go to the woods. You’re only in the woods to get to somewhere else. A doorway. Those kinds of places are where the gateways between our world and theirs—“

“Theirs, meaning the aliens—” Eren just wanted to be clear that they were still talking about aliens—little green men UFO driving aliens.

“Well yes, but there are different dimensions you see.”

“Of course,” Eren agreed, trying to catch Levi’s eye but Levi was having none of it.

“To us, they may seem like aliens. They could be fae folk. Or…I don’t know! There’s so much out there! ‘The Woods are lovely dark and deep,’” Hanji quoted, humming into their beer bottle as they took a sip. Then, quietly and with a dead serious expression, “I had an encounter once.”

Levi finally met Eren’s eye and Eren knew that Levi had heard this story a million times over.

“I was in the woods. I ran out you see. I was with friends and…well they weren’t so friendly so I took off. I started running. I didn’t know where I was going and I saw this—this—creature. It appeared to me as a fox. But when I looked into its eyes, it looked back at me. And I knew. I knew that this wasn’t an animal, that this being had intelligence beyond a normal beast. It had this look. It wasn’t human, but something else. And it led me to something. It showed me.”

“Showed you what?” Eren asked, now captivated.

“It’s a secret. I can’t tell you. I can’t tell anyone. It’s not time yet,” Hanji said with a shrug and Eren’s shoulders sagged. “When I came out of the woods, however, I’d lost a full three hours.”

“Three hours?” Eren’s mouth dropped open.

“Three hours,” Hanji nodded seriously.

“What does it mean though?”

“No idea! I’ll know when it’s time. It’s my destiny, you see.”
That must be nice, Eren thought. To have a destiny. However, he couldn’t help but feel sad for Hanji. Holding out hope. They were so sincere that Eren wanted to believe them, but he couldn’t shake off the doubt he felt.

There was a few moments of silence as they contemplated Hanji’s story before Eren got out his phone and began to fiddle with it.

[Jean:] dude reiner’s brother brought the real shit. I’m so drunj

[Reiner:] SHOTS! EREN WE’RE DOING SHOTS!

[Eren:] driving over now!

When Eren came up from his phone Levi and Hanji were deep in some silly argument.

“I can—“ Levi was saying.

Despite the chill now that the sun had set, Levi’s cheeks were flushed. Maybe it was the fire. Maybe it was the beer. He looked different to Eren and Eren couldn’t tear his eyes away from him.

“No you can’t, it is scientifically impossible—“ Hanji countered.

Eren hadn’t paid attention to the start of their conversation and now tried to catch up.

“I can—“ Levi deadpanned. “I can remember the exact moment I was born. I can even recall—”

“You’re so full of it—you’re full of it—oh my god you’re so full of shit—“ Hanji talked over him. “Eren tell him he’s full of shit.”

Eren didn’t get a chance to say much of anything, he only sipped the flat coke he’d found in Levi’s fridge.

“I can recall—a tight squeeze—the worst pain imaginable—“

“Stop it—“ Hanji shook their head, kicking out at Levi’s chair.

“’It’s a boy!’—“

“I’m serious, I will come over there—“ Hanji threatened.

“Then someone pounding at the door—“

Hanji did get up and rained fists down on Levi, without much success, tipping over his chair. Hanji fell over then hopped up.

“Gotta piss!” they shouted, running inside.

“Same,” Levi grunted, righting his chair.

Eren hadn’t said much the entire night. He felt happy just to listen. To observe and not feel like he had to participate. His friends from school were all drinking and partying somewhere across the lake but this felt…intimate. And far more fun.

He stood up from the fire and the cool air slapped his face, following Levi inside.

“Hanji there’s only one beer left,” Levi called up. “Do you want it?”
There was a muffled yell from the upstairs bathroom and Levi set it aside and poured himself a glass of wine.

“I’m gonna get the worst shits tomorrow but I don’t care,” Levi told him, leaning against the wall as he took a sip, pressing the sweating beer bottle against his forehead.

Eren helped himself to water, awkwardly tapping his fingers on the glass. Levi watched him do so, studying him in a way that made Eren smile nervously.

Levi’s bangs fell into his eyes. “I need a haircut,” he commented more to himself than Eren, blowing at the strands.

“They’re—Hanji’s a girl—right?” Eren figured now was a good time to ask. “I don’t really have to do all this ‘they’ stuff do I?” He rolled his eyes to make his point.

“You do if you want us to be friends,” Levi said coolly.

“Oh, okay,” Eren backtracked quickly, focusing on his water glass.

He froze when he felt Levi’s fingers on his cheek.

“You’ve got ash on your face,” he said, brushing his thumb against Eren’s skin.

“I got a new job,” Eren blurted out.

“Yeah?” Levi asked, taking another sip.

“Yeah, you know the clubhouse? I’m gonna be a valet driver. They mainly want me at night and for parties and events. One of Marco’s cousins works in the kitchens so he got us a job. I’m like the only one of my friends who knows how to drive stick so…yeah.”

“That’s a really fancy place,” Levi said. “People who go there wipe their asses with money.”

“Yeah, so I should get some good tips. I have to wear a uniform though. I’ve no idea how to iron the shirt. It has pleats.”

“I’ll show you,” Levi nodded, finally dropping his hand from Eren’s face and patting his chest.

Eren reached up to brush the top of Levi’s knuckles but never got a chance before Levi turned away.

“Did you fall in?” Levi shouted up the stairs.

Hanji came down with their arms full of various garments.

“Oh, what did you do?” Levi complained. “You’re making a mess.”

“I don’t know why you hide these away, Levi,” Hanji whined. “These are gorgeous!”

They flung a couple of shawls over their arms.

“I’m trying to save them from moths,” Levi said, attempting to put them back away but instead Hanji flung one in his face.

“This one took my mother months to finish,” Levi said, unfolding it, fingers tripping over the small glass beads.
He stretched it out and over his arms. Hanji grabbed the beer and the bottle of wine and stumbled out, covered in lace.

[Mikasa:] are you here yet? I don’t see you.

[Eren:] parking

“I should head out—“ Eren started, but there was no one to speak to.

He looked outside the door. Hanji was busy performing a kind of fan dance in front of the flames with the shawls. Eren snorted.

Levi dragged over a boom box and Hanji put in a CD.

“The Love Shack, is a little old place where, we can get together!” Hanji shouted, throwing one of Levi’s woven blankets on the ground, dancing barefoot around the fire.

“This song is so old,” Eren laughed.


“It’s over ten years old,” Eren pointed out. Personally he thought the lead singer sounded a great deal like Levi’s attempts to sing, although he’d never say so aloud.

“Oh my god, I’m old,” Levi sighed.

“Levi come dance with me! I wanna see the beads! Eren! Come dance! Love Shack! Baby! Love Shack!”

Eren obliged. He normally didn’t dance. The only dancing he did was at Prom in a group with all of his friends and that was mostly them shoving one another into the center of the circle and whooping. But Hanji made Eren feel…less afraid. They made Eren feel bold. He didn’t feel silly dancing when there was Hanji being twice as ridiculous. Maybe that’s why Levi liked them. He could be himself.

“Bang bang bang on the door baby!” Hanji whooped as Eren leapt over the fire pit.

“You’re going to set both of yourselves on fire,” Levi shook his head.

“You’re what?” Eren yelled.

“Tin Roof! Rusted!” Hanji howled.

“Levi! Levi! Levi!” Hanji panted as the song finished and a different one started up. “You’re sparkling!”

“Oh,” Levi looked down at the huge shawl draped over his shoulders. “Yeah I guess I am.”

“Spin!” Hanji laughed.

Levi took a sip of wine and then climbed up on one of the tree stumps. He stretched out his arms and spun on the spot, twisting in the firelight over and over again, the beads glinting. And Eren thought how wonderful it would be, to capture that moment in his mind forever, to etch into his memory the small smile on Levi’s face, the blush on his cheeks, and the way he held his arms out and spun a night sky complete with stars.
“Whoopsie going down!” Levi said, twisting his ankle on the stump.

Eren caught him before he hurt himself and they collapsed on the woven blanket.

“Fuck,” Levi grumbled, tangled up on Eren. “Too much wine, I’m all dizzy.”

He flopped onto his back and wiped the sweat off his brow. Eren turned on his side to look at Levi’s profile reflected in the moonlight.

“Oh Goddess Mother!” Hanji shouted. “We thank you for this beautiful moon! We thank you—“

“They are going to wake up the entire goddamn lake,” Levi said, arm flung over his eyes.

He peered at Eren before turning on his side to face him. Not knowing what to say, Eren reached out a hand to touch the fine fibers of the shawl, pulling it up around Levi’s shoulder.

“How did your eyes get so green?” Levi asked, his own darting back and forth between Eren’s.

Eren didn’t have an answer for that. Thankfully, he was spared by Hanji collapsing onto the blanket.

“Levi,” they whispered hotly into Levi’s ear.

Eren waved his hand in his face because Hanji’s breath was that bad.

“What? Get off,” Levi ordered, attempting to shake them off his shoulder.

“I might be drunk.”

“Yeah, no shit, Sherlock,” Levi shook them off.

“That’s Mars,” Hanji pointed at a particularly bright star. “Right there.”

“Really?” Levi asked, rolling over to look.

Eren watched their hands pointing up at the sky following the embers skyward and his eyes felt heavy as he slipped out into that dark curtain, Levi spinning burned into his eyelids.

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“I don’t know how he can just pass out anywhere,” Levi complained, Eren’s head heavy on his shawl. “I once watched him fall asleep standing up. I could never do that.”

“Insomnia still bad?” Hanji asked knowingly.

Levi pursed his lips around his cigarette and passed it over to Hanji.

“Ah.” Hanji nodded.

“Hey, what do you know about…out of body experiences?” Levi asked, scratching at his ear.

“Like from a near death experience?” Hanji asked. “I mean, there’s lots of theories. One is just, you know, neurons misfiring as the body loses oxygen.”

“No, I mean, is it possible to do it without being aware of it? Or do you have to do it on purpose?”

The ground was killing his back so he sat up and his shawl slipped off.
“You mean…are you talking about astral projection?”

“Maybe?” Levi tried not to look back at Hanji, but felt them scoot closer.

“Why are you interested in astral projection? Is it because of the sleep paralysis?” Their voice was sympathetic.

“No,” Levi shook his head. It wasn’t a complete lie.

Hanji knew him better to think they could drag it out of him.

“Well, astral projection has always been a part of shamanism. It can take a person years to train their body to astral project. You don’t want to leave the body unguarded when it’s so vulnerable. I remember reading about a silver thread that connects the soul to the body. Some people have a longer thread than others that allows them to travel. When we die, the thread is severed. You need to be very careful when projecting yourself though.”

“Why is that?” Levi asked quickly.

“You might get lost and never find your way back.”

Levi frowned.

“'And miles to go before I sleep,'” Hanji said in contemplation then hummed.

Levi roused Eren long enough to drag him to the sofa inside. Hanji stumbled in, carrying the blankets and flopped on the floor. Eren curled up on the couch and Levi started unfolding a blanket to place over him.

“…at the door,” Eren mumbled in his sleep.

Hanji giggled. “He’s still singing the song,” they laughed and pointed, stretching out on Levi’s many blankets like it was some sort of a nest.

Levi froze, rising up on tiptoe to look at Eren’s sleeping face. He could feel the gaze of someone’s eyes at his back.

“There’s someone at the door…” Eren repeated.

Levi threw the blanket over his head.

Chapter End Notes

LOVE SHACK BABY LOVE SHACK.

Hmmm, nice to get some Hanji insight to Eren's...walkabout problem...hm hm hm

...and don't worry there are no aliens in this fic. OR ARE THERE?

(there aren't)

YO CHECK OUT MY NEW CHRISTMAS ERERI FIC!
Chapter 28

Chapter Summary

Eren suffers the fallout of lying to his friends to hang with Levi and Hanji instead. The whole town mourns one of their own. Eren comes to a startling revelation.

Chapter Notes

Thank you everyone who supported me during my rough patch here. Things are better but still a little shaky. Thank you to everyone who left sweet comments and sent me messages, you are angels.

TW: Minors Drinking Alcohol, Drinking While Driving, Minor Character Death (nothing gruesome but there is a funeral).

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Eren woke up to the summer morning light, his face pressed against Levi’s clothed stomach. He couldn’t figure out what woke him up at first, but eventually the buzzing in his pocket became impossible to ignore.

“Hello?” he asked, yawning, leaning back into Levi’s lap.

“Where the fuck are you!?” Grisha shouted into the phone.

“Um—“ he started.

“Eren we have been calling and calling you? Do you have any idea how worried we’ve been? Your friends have been looking for you! Where are you?”

“Work—um—at Levi’s house. We came over and watched a movie and I guess I fell asleep—“

“Oh god, I think I’m going to be sick,” said Hanji from the floor.

“Not on my carpet!” Levi said, jumping up and pushing Hanji to the bathroom.

Eren covered the receiver, hoping Grisha didn’t hear them.

“—You told Mikasa you were on your way over to the party! People saw you there! Jesus, Eren they were about ready to start trawling the lake!”

“…Why?”
“Just… stay there, okay?”

“I have the car—“

“Stay there!”

Eren had never been luckier to miss a senior party. He got most of the story from Armin.

There had been no shortage of booze. Everyone was wasted, including Armin (“I had one cup of jungle juice and I felt so sick. Never again.”). Someone had the bright idea to car surf out on the tractor trails by the host’s house (said Connie). Or someone was driving kids home (said Sasha). Or they were going for another booze run (said Jean). Eren heard many different versions. This was the one part they all agreed on: Marcel, Porco, Reiner, Bertholdt, Annie, and Marco all piled into Reiner’s mother’s suburban. The car veered off the main road, hit a tree, and crashed. Marcel was in the driver’s seat but wasn’t wearing his seatbelt and was thrown from the car. He died at the scene.

When the police inevitably showed up to break up the party following the crash, there was a panic.

“Has anyone seen Eren?” Mikasa had asked as the party goers fled the house, brushing past her.

“He said he was here.”

Eren’s whereabouts when questioned were, “I heard he was with Connie!” but Connie had heard he was with Sasha, Sasha had thought he was with Armin because where else would he have been? Drunk and upset over the news, everyone suddenly realized not a single soul knew where Eren was. Eren’s lie of a text to Mikasa that he was in his car and on his way was repeated and a game of telephone started. First, people thought he had been in the car and was the one who died. Then the rumor spread of a second car accident which Eren had apparently been set on fire. Eren’s supposed decapitation and death became more and more violent with every reiteration and an upset Mikasa called Grisha sobbing.

Grisha made it over and it became apparent no one had actually seen Eren. Save one.

“Yeah, he was over at the edge of the docks,” Colt (who was the only incoming freshman at the party) pointed down the hill to the water’s edge. “Just hanging out by the water.”

So then everyone was certain Eren had gotten drunk and accidentally drowned. A few people had gotten boats out and toured the lake quickly looking for any sign of him. The Sheriff’s office had people suiting up to dive and look for his body, before Jean asked where Eren’s car was.

After thirty texts and over twenty-five calls, Eren finally woke up.

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It’s an odd feeling going to a funeral for someone you barely knew. Eren wore his dad’s black suitcoat and tried to look grim and serious, but felt his eyes glaze over when friends and family started in on stories of Marcel’s life. Eren pretended to be sad, but really he was just bored. He mostly stuck close to his friends. The entire football team from the past several years had gone to support Reiner and his family.

“It was really scary,” Mikasa said quietly as they all hung out under the willow tree near the church. “We honestly thought you’d died.”

“Yeah,” Armin said, examining a bug on the bark.
“I almost went with them,” Jean said then pursed his mouth in a thin line. “That could have been me.”

They watched Christa crying in the distance while Ymir comforted her.

“You wouldn’t get in a car and drive while drunk, I hope,” Armin muttered.

“We were all drunk, it was hard to find anyone who was sober,” Connie said, attempting to climb the willow tree.

“We’re lucky the police didn’t ticket all of us,” Sasha pointed out.

“Shits fucked up,” Jean said.

“Yeah,” Annie agreed from the other side of the tree.

Reiner survived the accident with a broken nose and Annie had such terrible whiplash she was still wearing a neck brace. She scratched underneath it and fumbled for her cigarettes. When she saw Eren was watching she sighed and tucked the pack back into her purse.

Jean muttered something to Marco.

“I told you,” Marco snapped at him. “I don’t want to talk about it.”

“I wasn’t asking, I was just—“

Bert put a hand on Jean’s shoulder as Marco walked away to kick at a rock. Eren had never seen Marco like that before and didn’t know what to make of it. It was all still so raw. They all straightened up when Reiner approached.

“Hey,” Eren said sympathetically as Reiner clapped his hand. “I’m really sorry, dude.”

“Thanks for coming.”

“How’s your mom?”

“Ehhh, I can never tell with her,” Reiner shrugged. “It just sucks.”

They all nodded in understanding.

Eren hadn’t been able to go to his mother’s funeral because he was still in the hospital, but he went to the short service they held for Mikasa’s parents. He looked over at her and tugged on her scarf to pull her out of whatever reverie she was in. This was bringing back bad memories for both of them.

“I mean I’ve been there,” Eren said. “So…”

He didn’t really know what advice he could give to Reiner. A sibling was different than a parent. Still he offered his support.

“Thanks. It’s just…I wish I had done something, you know? To stop him getting behind the wheel,” Reiner said, swinging his arms back and forth.

“Jesus,” Annie muttered under her breath, grabbing a cigarette and walking away from the group.

“What’s her deal?” Jean asked.
“It’s fine,” Reiner said as Bert looked on uncomfortably. “We all went through something traumatic together, let her go.”

Marco chewed on his cheek angrily before following after Annie.

“Jaeger! Kirstein!” Coach Shadis barked.

Out of instinct, both Eren and Jean hopped to attention. “Yes Coach!” they chorused.

“We need drivers for the procession to the cemetery,” Shadis jerked his head and tossed Eren keys.

“On it, Coach,” Eren set off in a jog toward the cars.

After the ceremony, Eren went to hand the keys back to Shadis, but Shadis stopped him and Jean.

“What’re you up to this summer, Eren?” he asked.

“Sir?” Eren looked over at Jean who looked just as lost as he was. Why would Shadis care about what they did during the summer?

“You coming to football camp?”

Eren was fairly sure camp was a prerequisite to playing on the team and definitely mandatory if he wanted to be on the varsity team.

“Of course, Coach,” Eren said, sending another look at Jean.

“You got a job?”

“Yeah, I’m a valet for the clubhouse. And I still have a few shifts at the shop with Levi.”

“He treating you alright?”

“Levi? Yeah he’s nice.”

Shadis snorted. “I’ve never heard anyone call Levi nice. He was always a persnickety little shit, even when in school.”

Eren didn’t know if he was supposed to laugh so he only cracked a half smile and looked sideways at Jean.

“I’m lifeguarding at the public beach,” Jean blurted out. “It took hours of training to get my certification.”

“Have you thought of what position you want on the team, Eren?” Shadis asked.


Eren hoped that was a good enough answer. Jean pinched his arm and Eren elbowed him. Reiner had been the JV quarterback. If he was on the varsity team, then the JV team still needed a quarterback. Eren didn’t want to seem as if he were angling for a specific spot. He didn’t care if he spent all of junior year on the bench so long as it was for the varsity team.

“I mean, I’ve been training every day. Levi lets me use his weights every morning, as long as I wipe everything down.”
And he had. He started his mornings with a jog, chasing after Mikasa as she left him in her dust. If he had enough time, he’d drive over to Levi’s house to use his weights.

“Me too!” Jean interjected.

Eren didn’t think that was the most accurate statement. Jean had come on a run once with Eren, Armin, and Mikasa but spent the entire time trying to show off his sprinting only to get exhausted and collapse a mile from the house. Eren had to bring the car around to get him.

Shadis squinted his wrinkly face at Eren and nodded. Then, out of nowhere, “Just stay away from that magic crap of Levi’s and his mother’s.”

“Oh I don’t really—“

“She was one hell of a woman,” Coach Shadis said, eyes misting over.

Eren had no idea what that meant.

“Did I ever tell you how I lost my hair?” Shadis asked contemplatively.

“…Sir?”

<> On their way back to the church, Jean was oddly quiet. A silent Jean was just as obnoxious as a braying Jean and finally Eren couldn’t take it anymore.

“What?” Eren stopped and rolled his eyes.

“You know what that was, right?” Jean asked.

“No?”

“He’s grooming you.”

Eren blanched. “For what?”

“For leadership.”

Eren looked at Jean as if he’d grown a second head. “Huh?”

“You know what this means don’t you?” Jean asked growing excited.

Eren shook his head.

“We’re gonna be varsity!”

Eren took a while to catch up with his train of thought. “We’re gonna be varsity!”

They shoved at each other excitedly. Then it was Eren’s turn for quiet contemplation.

“Well then why wouldn’t he just come out and say it?” Eren asked.

“You know Shadis has his secret ranking book. He wants us to prove we’re worth it. That we’ve got what it takes.”

“Well I’m going to earn that spot!” Eren said, picking up his pace.
“Not if I do first,” Jean said, walking briskly next to him.

Eren set out into a little skip step and Jean broke out into a jog. Eren picked up his feet in his dress shoes and Jean tore off after him. They both made it back to the rest of the group sweating and panting with scuffed shoes.

“I win,” Eren gasped.

“Bullshit.” Jean held a stitch in his side.

“Really? Even at a funeral?” Ymir muttered to Christa.

“Look it’s that little Grice shit,” Jean jerked his head over to where Colt was standing with his parents and toddler brother.

Colt either heard Jean or saw the ugly looks being sent his way and his ears turned bright pink.

He started over towards them to which Jean rolled his eyes and turned his back to him.

Before he even had a chance to open his mouth, Jean spat, “Liar says what?”

“Jean,” Armin chided. “None of us knew where Eren was, we all thought he was at the party.”

“You can forget about ever making varsity if you’re just going to lie for attention,” Jean told a visibly shaken Colt.

“Jean, knock it off,” Eren said. Eren had decided he was going to be one of those cool upperclassmen like Reiner who wasn’t a complete dick to freshman. “It’s okay. We all make mistakes.”

“I didn’t make a mistake!” Colt insisted.

Eren was taken aback by his outburst.

“I saw you. You were there!” Colt pleaded with Eren.

“It’s okay,” Eren said slowly, fixing a concerned expression on his face. “We’ve only met once. You just got me confused with someone else.”

“I saw you!” At everyone’s uncomfortable silence, Colt lowered his voice, speaking only to Eren, “You were on the water.”

Eren felt the smile slip off his face and an uncomfortable tightness in his chest. He had the worst feeling as if he’d forgotten something important. He felt his heart pounding, a loud beating sound that drowned out all else.

Colt’s parents called him over and Eren startled out of his spell. Eren watched him go until Mikasa put a hand on his shoulder.

“Let’s go home, okay?” she said.

“Yeah,” Eren said, shaking it off.

<*>  

On shipment day, Eren walked in to find Stitchcraft in an explosion of red, white, and blue. Levi
had never been that patriotic. Eren walked around the glittering display with his mouth open. In the thick of it, he found a focused Petra, neatly arranging skeins of yarn in the flag’s colors.

“Levi said I could take over decorating duties!” she said, stepping up on a ladder to hang sparkly streamers from the spiral staircase.

She hopped down to take a sip of iced tea. Levi never decorated. Things had already changed so much since Eren had been “fired.”

“Is Levi your boyfriend?” Eren asked suddenly.

Petra laughed so hard she snorted ice tea out of her nose. When she finished, Eren still staring at her intently she finally answered.

“Uh. No.”

“Why not?” Eren asked.

At Eren’s too serious expression, Petra’s eyebrows shot up. Eren didn’t get it. Levi was a little surly, sure. And maybe he was too short. But he was still very attractive. The people Levi kept close by him were all great people, but others had to know that the shop owner was all bark and no bite. Eren had mistakenly assumed Petra had left her husband for Levi. If Hanji wasn’t Levi’s girlfriend and Petra wasn’t Levi’s girlfriend, then who was?

“I…” Petra pulled a face. Instead of answering Eren, she took him by the shoulders and turned him around to face Levi chatting with someone.

The air conditioning had been out at work for some time now. While the shop was freezing September through May, it was blisteringly hot from June to late August. They’d taken to propping the door open with a rock, which Levi hated (“You’ll let in skeeters.”).

“I also noticed you have a bit of water damage here,” the AC tech said, tapping his foot on the wood floor by the bathroom door.

“Yeah, there was an accident,” Levi said, rolling his eyes in Eren’s direction.

“Well I can tell there was some repair work here, it’s actually really good.”

“That was me,” Levi said quickly.

“I should have guessed,” the tech said, in an “aw shucks” kind of voice.

Eren wrinkled his nose.

Levi leaned his head back against the wall, hips cocked forward to watch the tech work. What on earth was he doing? What was he doing with his voice just now?

“If you want, I can come back off the clock and do some repair work for you,” the tech said, leaning over Levi to grab one of his tools.

“I think I have free time this week,” Levi said, sweeping his hand through his hair.

“Uh. Levi!” Eren cleared his throat. “I need to talk to you!”

Levi narrowed his eyes at Eren but made no motion to move so Eren went and tugged on his arm pulling him up the stairs.
“I’ll be right back, I just need a word with my employee,” Levi said, shaking free of Eren’s grasp. “What?”

“You should be careful,” Eren said, still trying to divert Levi’s attention from the muscular AC tech. “You don’t want people getting the wrong idea.”

“Wrong idea?” Levi whipped his head around to admire the hunky AC tech who was now unzipping the front of his coveralls.

“You know. You don’t want them thinking you’re…” Eren didn’t know how to complete that sentence.

Levi’s head snapped back to Eren and Eren’s voice hitched.

“…Gay?” Levi supplied with a raised eyebrow.

“Yeah,” Eren said, relieved Levi was the one to say it.

“Well I’ve got news for you Eren. I am gay.” At Eren’s baffled expression, his voice dropped into that deadly tone, “That’s not a problem, is it?”

“I…no. Nope!” Eren shook his head.

Eren must have looked just as confused as he felt because Levi rolled his eyes again. “What?”

“I guess I just thought that was a rumor. Like Coach Shadis’ hair,” Eren said. He was learning a lot today.


“Uh, nothing. Um, I have to talk to you about something.” Eren picked at his nails nervously. “I’ve been thinking…”

He waited for the usual Levi snark that accompanied this, flinching slightly, but there was none. He was too busy eyeing the tech and Eren had to step in front of him to block the line of sight.

“When I first wanted to be a witch, I thought it could make my life better. I thought it could make life easier. And it didn’t. Kindof did the opposite really. It didn’t make things simpler, it made them more complicated. And then, I look at you and…you work hard.”

Levi looked as if no one had ever told him that before or at least ever acknowledged it. “I do,” he said quietly.

“I mean you work really hard. That’s how you make beautiful things. It’s not a spell. It’s practice. It’s millions of stitches. Its hours of cleaning. And hundreds of broken teacup handles—“

“Okay, you don’t need to rub it in,” Levi waved him off, still sensitive about his pottery skills.

“My point is, those aren’t spells. That’s just you. You aren’t casting a spell, you are the spell. Levi, you’re magic! And I think I am too. I think everyone is, even if they don’t know it yet. I’m going to get that spot on varsity. But I need to do it by myself. I need to earn it.”

A small smile spread across Levi’s face as Eren spoke.

“I can’t take a spell from you. If that means I can’t work here anymore, then…that’s what has to happen. I know you can’t really afford to have two employees, but I was hoping we could be
friends outside of work? You probably don’t want an obnoxious teenager hanging out with you, but I really like hanging out with you. You’re cool.”

“You’re cool too,” Levi said, ruffling Eren’s hair.

“Yeah?” Eren perked his head up.

“Yeah.”

Eren stood there beaming like an idiot. He knew he probably should stop but he couldn’t help it.

“Now get out of here. I need to get back to work,” Levi said, patting his cheek.

Eren took off.

Summer went by in a blur. He woke up when it was still cool and would go for a run with Jean. Then he’d head over to Levi’s house before the shop opened and do a few reps. Then he’d run home, shower, and be at the Clubhouse for the lunch crowd. He’d stay there until the restaurant closed and then summer nights were spent on the beach around bonfires or out in the field by the old Braus farmhouse. On his day’s off, he’d go over to Levi’s house and do yard work. Levi would pay him with a homecooked meal and they’d watch a movie. Or, on some of those days, he’d take the boat out with Mikasa and Armin to his favorite diving spot and they’d cut into the water seeing who could make it to the sandy bottom first. He felt his body growing stronger and he felt a bit of that anger he’d carried around since mom died ebb and fade, like he’d etched it onto the sand and the waves washed it away.

He stopped going to the witching nights with Levi. Levi wasn’t teaching him and Eren found himself letting go of that part of his life. And as he released his connection to the craft, he felt his connection with Mikasa grow. Eren had always wanted a little sibling. A little brother to throw a ball around with. Instead he got Mikasa. And with her, suddenly the house felt like a real home again.

Then came football camp. Eren could barely hear Coach Shadis as he had them line up. He started calling names. Eren watched as one by one all of the seniors were called up. He and Jean fidgeted. Reiner gave them a thumbs up. Eren nudged Jean and Jean nudged him back.

They made varsity.

Chapter End Notes

Hey, Levi walked down to the pier in the chapter before last, you had to know someone was going to die or at least come close to death. Drinking while driving is bad yall.

DID COLT SEE EREN???:O

There will be a mini timeskip after this. One year! SEE YOU ON THE FLIP SIDE! (There will be a large timeskip after that too so hold out for that).

Montage theme song: Summertime Dream//Gordon Lightfoot
Chapter 29

Chapter Summary

Flash forward a year! Eren's senior year of high school starts out on a high note! Levi's sleeping problems return.

Chapter Notes

MINI TIME SKIP! This aint the big one, but you'll have a pretty clear idea when that is. I just couldn't find it in me to write any of Eren's junior year. He was BUSY OKAY.

A note on Eren/Christa in this fic: Eren/Levi and Christa/Ymir are endgame, just remember that before getting salty. Levi and Eren are both allowed to have previous relationships before coming together. Plus, I need Christa for plot reasons. Eren is in high school and still figuring his feelings out. Levi is grown and knows what he wants. Give them time. LET IT BUILD ORGANICALLY.

TW: some in depth sleep paralysis at the beginning. idk if any of yall have experienced sleep paralysis but it is no bueno my friends.

other tw: uhh, can't thing of anything else?

edit: also it's my bday on sat ;P

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Fall 2004.

Rap rap rap.

The noise was close, right behind his head as if someone were knocking on Levi’s headboard. He woke. And immediately he knew something was wrong. His arms locked at his sides, his feet stiff. He realized in horror that he wasn’t actually awake. He was somewhere in between. Trapped in the realm between wakefulness and sleep.

“Not again,” he thought with grit teeth.

This was what he got for sleeping on his back again.

He’d always had this problem, ever since he was a little child. His mind would wake but his body would remain heavy, weighed down with sleep. The specialist called it “sleep paralysis.” And that’s what it felt like. Like a Bond villain injected him with a poison dart and was about to send him down a sawmill line and he couldn’t move. It was being tied to the tracks with a train coming. From the outside it must have looked comical. A sleeping body lying stiff as a corpse. But inside he was screaming. Dread poured over him, creeping up like a thousand little spiders.
He hadn’t had an incident in so long. It was the main reason for his insomnia. Hard to fall asleep when you know you might wake up to tall shadow men looming over your bed. They were just hypnopompic hallucinations caused by his REM sleep being interrupted, but they felt so real. He was able to handle most things life threw his way. He’d gone through times of no food and no money, fought off bullies and thieves. There wasn’t much that scared him. But…these nights…he couldn’t fight them, they were beyond him. He used to wake up his mother screaming from one of these experiences.

“Grandpa keeps looking at me when I sleep,” Levi confessed to her one night.

“Little mouse, Poppy is gone, you know that,” she said stroking his hair.

“No, he’s not, he’s right there.”

She had smiled, a thin, wan gesture. But the next night she moved his grandfather’s chair out of the room and added a drop of lavender oil to his pillow.

At least this time he didn’t have his eyes open fully. They were cracked only slightly. He couldn’t turn his head to look, but from between his eyelashes he could see water begin to pool under the door.

No. Not again.

_Wiggle your toes, wiggle your toes, wiggle your toes._

He could feel gentle waves lapping at his feet, then the frigid water began climbing up his limbs. When it reached his chest it snatched his breath away, icy fingers choking him. He could hear his own teeth chattering.

_Wiggle your toes, wiggle your toes, wiggle your toes._

He reminded himself it wasn’t real. There was no water, there was no face in the water breathing heavily in his ear, each exhale a roar of surf—

_Wiggle your toes, wiggle your toes—_

It was up to his mouth, threatening to suffocate him, he took fast and shallow breaths on the verge of hyperventilating.

Fuck it. Wiggling his toes wasn’t working.

“HELP!” he screamed out, but of course didn’t make a single sound.

It was useless. He was going to die here.

But he didn’t.

Instead, he watched a hand reach down to him, glowing with moonlight. _Eren_. He hovered above Levi, looking him over curiously as Levi’s mind rang out in distress. The hand dipped and then disappeared into Levi’s chest. There was a strange sensation like a tug at his navel as Levi snapped awake.

Gasping, he lunged forward, having broken the bindings of the paralysis. The first few rays of light were visible over the lake and he let out a sigh of relief. The kid was nowhere to be found.

Eren, huh? Who would have thought his walkabouts were good for anything. Levi got up and, still
in his boxers, walked downstairs to grab his cigarettes from his coat and then sat out in the cool September air contemplating the now yellow sky.

He hadn’t seen Eren in a long time. Nearly six weeks now. That was to be expected. The kid had football camp (which he talked about incessantly) and had just dropped Mikasa off at college. It had been nearly a year since Eren had officially quit the shop. Levi still called him in for shifts during the holidays but Eren’s school schedule made it nearly impossible. He should have started his senior year already.

He put it out of his mind but when he got to work, he froze. Petra had taken her new duties as shop decorator to extremes. She had festooned their shop front window with garlands of the school colors and written in washable marker “GO TITANS!” on the window. Levi’s lip curled.

“You’re late boss!” she chirped, moving a box of product off the floor.

“Yeah I didn’t sleep well,” Levi said, turning on the spot. “What’s with all this?”

“Homecoming game today!”

Oh that again. Great. It had been two years since Eren had broken all of his pottery and one year since Jean had convinced poor Colt to steal Levi’s broomstick. He hadn’t made it across the bridge, choosing to hand off the broom before Sannes tried to tackle him. Eren had to go person to person on the team to get Levi’s broom back. Some seniors had grabbed it and took it around the stadium like a trophy until Eren tried to fight them. Eren returned the broom back to Levi’s mantle with a black eye and a torn jersey.

Junior year was the busiest Eren had ever been. Or at least that’s what he told Levi. Between visiting colleges, AP classes, and football, he barely had time to text Levi, let alone visit him. Not that Levi minded. He preferred not to listen to Eren describe the differences between SATs and ACTs, or how stressed he was over his next exam—not when Levi was buying ramen in bulk so he could afford his electric bill.

Eren invited him to Mikasa’s graduation party, but Levi worked all weekend. He did send a practical gift—a tool box.

Levi looked around at the crowd gathering for the parade and dragged his ass upstairs to the loft. He needed to work on payroll—even if it was just for himself and Petra. The hospital had forgiven most of his debt for his mother’s end of life treatments but student loans and car payments still had him stretched thin and the store was perpetually in the red. Levi gave it two years before he would be forced to close. Of course, that’s what he’d said a year ago and they were still going strong. Petra’s idea to add weekly sewing, knitting, and crochet classes had really taken off. Eren even came to a few.

The marching band started up tuning somewhere down the street. Levi massaged his temples. He could feel a migraine blooming. Then the noise began moving up the street and the people outside began to cheer.

The door to the shop opened, filling the interior with the deafening roar of the brass section.

Petra greeted their new customer and then let out a sharp cry. That was all it took to jolt Levi from his stupor. He jerked away from his desk and ran down the stairs, only to slow halfway down when he saw the reason.

“Ahh! Eren!” Petra continued to shriek. “You look so handsome! Look at you! All dressed up!”
“Ha, yeah,” Eren said sheepishly, brushing down his vest. “I’m on the homecoming court.”

“Do you think you’re going to win?” Petra teased.

“No,” Eren admitted with a snort. “I’m surprised I was even nominated. Marco is a shoo-in though. Everyone loves Marco. Even I voted for him.”

“I was Prom Queen back in my day,” Petra said fondly, smoothing a flyaway in Eren’s lightly gelled hair. “Not that it means much. Everyone has already picked their favorites for Homecoming and Snowcoming and by Prom they crown whoever is left over.”

She fixed his boutonniere pin.

“Thanks,” said Eren. “Hi Levi!”

He waved as Levi padded slowly up to him. Eren was even tanner than last year. He’d given up on valet driving and had gotten a job spray cleaning rich men’s sailing boats. His skin was a dark rich color, his smile wider than Levi remembered and his eyes were still that bright green. He looked so relaxed talking to Petra and then tensed when he found Levi watching them. He grinned nervously as if he were afraid Levi wouldn’t approve of his tux. Levi looked over the shoulders, checking the fit, then snapped his fingers motioning for Eren to give him the tie.

“Your knots are always too large, it’s sloppy,” Levi said, fixing it for him. At least it wasn’t that hideous clip on tie he’d gotten last year.

“I—uh—thanks. I have to change out of this and back into my football uniform for the game. Are you coming?”

“Can’t. Shop has class on Friday nights, you know this,” Levi said, patting the tie.

“Oh. That’s okay,” Eren said with a shrug.

The Homecoming Court float passed by the window.

“Oh the girls all look so beautiful,” Petra said with a wistful sigh. “What I wouldn’t give to be that age again.”

“My girlfriend is on the Homecoming Court,” Eren bragged. “Everyone says she’s going to be crowned Queen.”

“Oh which one is she?” Petra squinted as the girls on the parade float practiced their best Princess Diana wave.

Christa saw Eren and motioned for him to rejoin the group.

“Christa,” Eren said, tanned skin growing red.

What a shocker, Levi thought.

“Girlfriend,” Petra said, looking very interested in this tiny bit of gossip. “Now what do you and your girlfriend get up to? Go on any fun dates? What does she like?”

“Oh,” said Eren, scrunching up his face as if he’d never thought of it. “She just kindof likes whatever I like.” He gave a shrug.

Petra and Levi shared a look. To spare Eren any more humiliation, Levi left her side and walked
over to the fireplace.

“Okay well you two have fun and be safe tonight,” Petra said swinging her arms. “I can’t believe our Eren has himself a little girlfriend.”

Eren flushed under the attention. He rubbed at his nose and followed Levi.

“I feel like I haven’t seen you in forever,” Eren said by way of greeting, rubbing his neck, face still red from Petra’s teasing. “What have you been up to?”

“Same thing I’m always up to, Eren. Trying to stay afloat in this economy our president has ruined,” Levi said, dusting the mantle.

“Ha,” Eren said, fidgeting a little. “Hey, I had a dream about you last night!”

“Gross,” Levi said, flicking a pill bug onto the floor and ignoring the pumping in his chest.

“Yeah. It was weird.” Eren put his arm up on the mantle, brushing soot off the frame housing Levi’s mother’s picture.

He’d grown another inch or so. How annoying.

“Yeah, how so?” he asked, pretending not to be interested.

“You were on the bridge and I was out on the pier. Then you waved. I stepped off the pier. And then I just started walking. What do you think it means?”

“Dunno, ask Freud,” Levi said, shaking the dusting cloth out.

“Hah. Yeah. We should have another movie night,” Eren suggested, picking a bit of lint off of Levi’s shoulder.

Levi leaned up and picked up the broom to dust underneath it.

“Y’know, before it gets too busy again. I feel like I barely saw you since I quit.”

“You were fired,” Levi reminded him.

“You’re right. I miss working here.” He looked at Levi with those stupid big green eyes, a smile spreading across his tan face.

“Here,” Levi said, holding the broom out to him. “Take it.”

Eren held it in his upturned palms with some reverence looking at Levi in confusion.

“I’d rather you take it than some snot nosed freshman come in and break shit,” Levi explained, with a shrug.

Eren looked down at it and then back up at Levi, eyes looking waterier than usual.

“I don’t know why no one ever thinks to ask permission,” Levi said, not making eye contact because Eren looked about ready to burst into tears.

Still Eren stayed.

“Go!” Levi pointed at the door.
Eren snapped out of his spell.

“GO!” Levi insisted and Eren ripped open the door and burst into a sprint.

The crowd exploded as Eren held the broom aloft over his head. Petra raced out the door to see his progress. Levi didn’t need to. He leaned on the glass door listening to every cheer and whoop. And when they continued to scream he rested the back of his head, the cool glass reverberating against him and let a smile creep across his face.

Eren made it over the bridge.

<*> They crowned Marco and Christa Homecoming King and Queen at halftime. The Titans went on to beat Rose City 42-6, Eren scoring two of the touchdowns. The next day was the dance and after that several parties but Eren promised Christa he would get Ymir home before 1AM so he dropped her off and then he pulled off at a scenic stop by the lake and he had his first kiss.

It was awkward and clumsy but Christa smelled nice and looked pretty in her dress. He tried very hard to ignore his hard on and after making out for a good half hour, he walked her up to the Reiss estate and bid her good night with a brief hug.

The moment he got back in the car, he debated going to the other parties. He meant to go to Floch’s bash, but found himself steering back towards Stitchcraft. If he was right, Levi might still be doing a witching hour.

But he got there and the shop was dark, no candle out front. He texted Levi.

[Eren:] just got done with the dance. you home?

He got no response so he parked and got out of the car, pressing his nose against the glass.

Nothing. The downtown was eerily empty at night. Still flushed from the dance and his first kiss, he walked around aimlessly, waiting for that text from Levi. He made it all the way to the church parking lot, wondering if street hockey practice had started yet. There was only one car in the entire lot and it was Levi’s and Levi was in it. Eren held up his hand to wave but stopped when he realized Levi was in the passenger’s seat and a man Eren had never seen before was in the driver’s. They were facing each other and talking. Levi had this odd look to him Eren had a hard time placing. He looked like a cat stretching out over furniture. Relaxed. The kind of look he gave Eren sometimes when they’d pause the movie they were watching to make popcorn. Eren lowered his hand, content to watch Levi from afar. The stranger leaned forward and tucked an errant strand of Levi’s inky hair behind his ear. Eren felt his smile slowly slip off his face. And then Levi smiled. He actually smiled. Eren’s brow furrowed. The man continued stroking Levi’s cheek before pulling his head down to his lap.

Eren’s brain cried out. He did it before he even knew what he was doing. He seized the largest rock he could find and hurled it at Levi’s windshield before racing back to his car. He didn’t stop to see if it made contact, although he heard it. He drove home, fingers white knuckled on the steering wheel and sucking down heaving breaths the entire time.

Chapter End Notes
Eren...what's this?? feelings?? oh dear.

Eren: oh boy oh boy i just had my first real kiss i can't wait to tell my totally platonic friend Levi all about it!
also Eren: [shocked pikachu face]

Here we thought Eren had beat some of his old habits, like how he handles his anger. Welp.

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